

# Dualities in Christopher Marlowe's the Tragical History of Doctor Faustus and Morality Plays

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**Dualities in Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*  
and Morality Plays**

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## **Abstract**

This paper is an attempt to see dualism through the pen of Christopher Marlowe and his work *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* and in the last chapter compare the moral resolution in *Doctor Faustus* to morality plays, with focus on *Everyman*. The core problematic revolves around moral and philosophical questions that are underscored in the play. Still the essential difference is Marlowe's artistic portrayal of duality within era he worked in and his duality: of blasphemy and orthodoxy.

Keywords: Godly, earthly, knowledge, ignorance, science, religion, good, evil, determination, free will

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## Introduction

The theme of this paper is duality of moral and philosophical questions in the literary work of Christopher Marlowe *The Tragical History of the Life and the Death of Doctor Faustus* and morality plays. Duality in the sense that one form can be seen through two instances or that there are two opposite occurrences brought up in the play. As with all authors, especially with the mysterious aura that follows Christopher Marlowe's life, some parts of his works are open to debate. Him not being the sole author to the complete work of *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* is one of the unresolved possibilities that leave trace even today.

Duality lies not only with works which can be interpreted through the lens of the author and reader, but also within the era which was a clash of two the worlds: old one based on Aristotle and Plato and the new one highlighted with Copernicus' discoveries. The basis for this paper will be the play *Doctor Faustus*<sup>1</sup> and his author Christopher Marlowe with a brief comparison with idea of morality plays. Why morality plays and *Doctor Faustus* together? Because they share the same tradition, Marlowe was building his play around the problematic structure of morality plays. He reverts the process of salvation to damnation, making a different, stronger impact than morality plays. Before the final comparison to morality plays, several philosophical and moral questions will be analyzed. Although *Doctor Faustus* has an abundance of dualities which can be extracted from the play, only significant themes related to religious, moral and intellectual problematic are exemplified in the paper.

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<sup>1</sup> Shortened version of the title "The Tragic History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus", will be used here on after.

## 1. Christopher Marlowe as an artist and heretic

Christopher Marlowe remains to be a lesser-known contemporary of Shakespeare. Although on mentions of *Doctor Faustus* one's mind flies first to Goethe's work, Marlowe was the predecessor that formed the authentic idea. The protagonist Faustus is based on real Dr Johann Georg Faust, a German magician from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

On Marlowe's life there is much to be said as many have voiced their opinion regarding what they think is true for Marlowe. Veiled under the cloak of secrecy, from Marlowe's life one could deduce several conclusions. Most of his works were well received, but the chronological order of them is not determined definitely to this day. *Tamburlaine the Great*, *The Jew of Malta*, *The Massacre at Paris*, *Dido*, *Queen of Carthage*, *Edward the Second* - to name just a few. Marlowe's most famous dramatic plays are *Tamburlaine the Great* and *Doctor Faustus* which are primarily focused on God.

For analysis of his works, it is crucial to distinguish between his art and his life. Nonetheless, the two are connected. Whereas his audience and contemporaries surely exaggerated his heterodoxy, circumstantial evidence is still found in his literary output.

As pointed out by J.B. Steane in *The Complete Plays* one view that was predominant in earlier years and was undisputed until recent times, is that the image of Christopher Marlowe was as said by many unanimously: "a rebel, an atheist, a fiery soul whose works expressed his own headily exuberance, aspirations and despairs." (Steane 1988: 9). But this new image of Marlowe is of a more serious, objective, ironist deeply concerned with sufferings and evil who could bring forth new forms and modes of expression into drama.

As Marlowe was considered an atheist, these plays are viewed as his criticism of religion. But what can be concluded, from the modern standpoint, is that an atheist of the Elizabethan era was considered to reject the practices of the church and orthodox beliefs.

*Tamburlaine the Great* is predominantly anti-Christian and *Doctor Faustus* is predominantly Christian. (Steane 1988: 22) Opposites but came from the same author, same pen. *Tamburlaine the Great* and *Doctor Faustus* are complementary plays to some degree in the sense that in their basis they are religious and philosophical, where man is in relation to his creator and with everything else that was created. They are both directed at a single person that is placed in a

large-world setting. Opposite of these two works are *The Jew of Malta* and *Edward the Second* where men are smaller and the world is narrower and no world beyond this is considered.

It summarizes to Marlowe's ability in exploring various aspects of morality, human nature and setting ground for questioning, for self-judgment of his characters. (Steane 1988: 26-27)

“Just as his hero seeks the unattainable, Marlowe attempts in art the impossible: namely to translate into specific human terms and effective theatre his amorphous, rhapsodic idea of man's transcendent potentialities.... Marlowe's fascination with supernatural is very much the expression of a unique temperament. For Marlowe, the dream of transcendent or supernatural power has momentous intellectual seriousness; it is his unique “philosophical” contribution to the Renaissance theorizing about power which in Machiavelli and Bacon takes a more pragmatic term.” (Ornstein 1968: 1379-1380)

Marlowe remains one of the controversial and compelling authors to interpret precisely because of his artistic pursuit and his heterodoxy. His need for the creation of a world where he discards norms in an attempt to demonstrate the possibilities that transcend canon resonates with authors and readers today.

## 2. Philosophy of man and the Renaissance world picture

Renaissance in Britain came to full flower in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, shaped by continental Renaissance which had its origin in Italy in 1300. It was born out of weakening of the Roman Christian Catholic influence and reawakening of interest in Greek and Latin texts by philosophers such as Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca.

Humanistic movement placed emphasis on education and as follows a large number of schools and universities were opened. Primary fields of study were philosophy, history, drama, and poetry. Consequently Britain flourished with rapid increase in the number of “grammar schools”. That meant that students were obliged to speak and read Latin during school hours. Almost every great author from that time: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Spenser, Bacon had received humanistic education. That could be greatly observed in their works. Courtier-poets such as Sir Thomas Wyatt, Sir Phillip Sidney, and Edmund Spenser transformed Italian verse into rich flexible English verse (Dickson 2017). It was a time where blind faith and influence of religion were left behind and new ways of thinking were incorporated into society. It was a man-centred era where the supreme value was placed on the cognitive functions and reason.

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I from 1558 to 1603 was Elizabethan era. To this day Elizabethan era remains as the golden age of Britain’s history. The explanation of the mind-set of the Elizabethans’ is best shown in Shakespeare’s quote from Hamlet:

*“What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason!  
how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how  
express and admirable! in action how like an angel!  
in apprehension how like a god! (Tillyard 1972: 1)*

This represents, as Tillyard describes: “It shows Shakespeare placing a man in the traditional cosmic setting between the angels and the beasts. It was what theologians had been saying for centuries.” (Tillyard 1972: 1)

Concerning the view of the world, it was just a simplified version from the medieval picture, it was theocentric<sup>2</sup>. The inherited picture of the world was of the ordered universe in hierarchies but influenced by man’s sin and the hope for redemption. But even though that image survived

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<sup>2</sup> View of the world in the Middle Ages was derived from Plato, Old Testament, invented by the Jews of Alexandria and vivified by the new religion of Christ. (Tillyard 1972: 12)



recent research shows that educated Elizabethans had the textbook of Copernican astronomy, but were not inclined to use it in the reluctance of disrupting the old order. The Elizabethan age brought forward quite an abundance of various new things that made life in that era exciting, but remained noble and leaned on the backbone of Middle Ages. (Tillyard 1972:12-16)

### **3. *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus: Faustus the overreacher***

*The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* is a play written by Christopher Marlowe that survives in two versions (Quarto): one published in 1604, ten years after Marlowe's death, and the other in 1616. There are quite a few differences in the texts: the later text (B) is longer containing more lines, namely 2121 as compared to the first one (A)<sup>3</sup> of 1517. The second text also has some of the scenes that are not present in the first edition. Since publishing, general shared thought was that the added scenes were not written by Marlowe himself, and since the first edition was published earlier, it must have been the original that was intended for reading. But since then some scholars challenged that view and it is still up to debate whether the first edition is just a shortened version perhaps used on a tour. Nevertheless, there are places where the second edition is visibly inferior to the first. (*The Complete Plays* 1988: 261)

*Doctor Faustus* right in the Chorus commences with the premonition of his downfall. Marlowe's initiates the audience into the origin of Faustus' great aspirations. Those aspirations do not come from the battle outcries or victories, nor from a love that is a powerful muse to many authors and poets, nor does it lie with the political power in court with all that court deceits bring. They are born from knowledge.

Faustus was born in a little town in Rhodes in Germany, from where he went to Wittenberg to master his scholarly yearnings. So gifted he was that he acquired the title of doctor. And right then when he thought he had it all, he was the master of all that he desired:

*"Excelling all; and sweetly can dispute*

*In th' heavenly matters of theology"* (*The Complete Plays* 1988: 265)

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<sup>3</sup> Later in the Science vs. religion chapter will be mentioned under „A“ and „B“ texts.

Faustus wanted more than he could have, he wanted to go beyond his boundaries, beyond boundaries for any man. And just like Icarus, reaching too high, too close to the sun ensues melting of the wax resulting in downfall. That is a punishment he was willing to take for fulfilling his desires.

*“he surfeits upon cursed necromancy.*

*Nothing so sweet as magic to him*

*Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss.” (The Complete Plays 1988: 265)*

The Chorus sets the stage for the underlying message of the play. The Chorus also calls for rebuking the aspirations that cannot be attained and that lead to self-destruction. Chorus, in the beginning, is vastly in opposition to the ending. As Ornstein indicates between the initial scene and last scene:

“In Marlowe’s play, as in his source, the hero’s defiant, blasphemous choice of black magic is a splendid beginning; his final moments of dread and despair are a powerful conclusion. Greatly portrayed, Faustus’ spiritual struggles – his waverings between exhilaration and despondency, stoic resolution and despair – might have provided an essential core of psychological and moral action between first and the last acts. But though Marlowe portrays superbly his hero on the heights of the aspiration and in the depths of despair, he does not trace the path which leads Faustus from one extreme to the other.” (Ornstein 1968: 1378-1379)

Marlowe was not interested in the psychological side of the process that leads Faustus to his inevitable decline, but he did display an amazingly rich and gradual decline to ignorance, foolishness and at the end tragic damnation of the soul. He uses quite commonly accepted symbols for “good and bad decisions” in the forms of the Good and Bad Angel at his side. In these aspects, we see that Marlowe was fascinated with the issues of metaphysics. Metaphysics’ definition is coined from Aristotle, all his writings “after the *Physics*” have been named *Metaphysics*. The question of possibilities after physical perishes is the core problematic for many philosophers and authors, predominantly for Marlowe.

Renaissance humanists inherited from medieval predecessors that the philosophy is principally concerned with inevitability of death. But Marlowe intensifies the core question of philosophy: why men must die? As with Greek mythology and Icarus’ flight, it is not passions of the heart

that lead to damnation, but the questionings of the mind, the “Promethean impulse.” (Ornstein 1968: 1382-1383).

In Greek times, the universal order is set there by divine force and any form of self-indulgence, selfish nature is bound to go against the altruistic and selfless nature that is required for a moral life. Marlowe does not argue against that. In *Tamburlaine*, the jubilation from the first part fades to the second part demonstrating that great aspirations are inexorable. So is with Faustus where he is relinquishing his studies in pursuit of what cannot be attained. His fame was already there, but he did not yet conquer death.

Faustus depicts a self-absorbed, conceited character where his aspirations for otherworldly make him selfish, thus his expectation for salvation seems undesirable. He commences as a character that makes it most difficult to sympathize with, but as Ornstein quite cleverly remarks:

“...he gains in damnation humility, compassion, and sympathy for fellow human beings which he did not before possess.... It is only because Faustus seems so much more gracious in the fifth act than in the first that the reason for his damnation must be argued out. (Ornstein 1968: 1383)

#### 4. Dualities in *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*

##### 4.1. Earthly vs. Godly

The guiding line Marlowe is concerned with is the dichotomy between the earthly and the Godly. A clear line is drawn between the two, but with the progression of the play, this line blurs, as Faustus becomes a demon/ damned spirit himself. Marlowe incorporates canonical duality of having two “places”. One is earth and all that encompasses, all material things barren of their otherworldly features.

The other “place” is not so much as a physical component but rather a link to the spiritual world. It embodies Heaven and Hell. Two main components, of the world Marlowe describes, are entwined, which is in accord with orthodox beliefs of his time. Both Heaven and Hell feed with the souls of humans that are placed on the Earth’s surface.

*“Hell.... Under the heavens....*

*Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed*

*In one self place. But where we are is hell,*

*And where hell is there must we ever be.*

*And to be short, when all the world dissolves*

*And every creature shall be purified*

*All places shall be hell that is not heaven.” (The Complete Plays 1988: 282-283)*

Marlowe brings forward a few human characters as well as spiritual. He portrays otherworldly spirits’ skills of demonstrating themselves in the physical form. They can be part of and influence the order of things in the world. Such is the case with Lucifer and Mephostophilis who can call forth demons and illusions, even provide a voyage outside the Earth’s boundaries. Otherworldly characters are the carriers of the messages as well as mediators of actions. They are directly or indirectly affecting the main character. But they too have their limits in the material world. They cannot act upon without permission.

Furthermore, the main difference is that spiritual beings last forever while mortals remain tied to restricted life span. The consequences of actions made in one's existence are echoed in the afterlife. It can be exemplified by Faustus discarding the bliss of immortality for 24 years of immense possibilities that transformed into ignorance and fallacy.

Human characters attempt to break through this division of two worlds and achieve the otherworldly competence for numerous advantages in their world. That division is broken by Faustus when he calls upon Lucifer. Faustus desires escaping the earthly boundaries, boundaries of being a man out of flesh and blood. But that transgression is forbidden and everyone who seeks to break it is bound to pay the price.

Marlowe introduces human characters as their significance lies in depicting frailty and folly of the world. Faustus' human companions Wagner and Robin illustrate the opposite comedic spinoff to Faustus - Mephostophilis dynamic. Their interaction displays a similar outline to Faustus, with Robin being the servant to Wagner as is Mephostophilis servant to Faustus.

*“Villain, call me Master Wagner, and see that you walk attentively and let your right every always be diametrically fixed upon my left heel.” (The Complete Plays 1988: 278)*

Marlowe ridicules human desire for the ruling. The fundamental principle upon which the Church and the State operate is based on the hierarchy. He is reinforcing the comedic image by typifying hypocrisies inside the Church and Empire. Making Faustus protagonist in foul and childish play on the Pope Adrian and Emperor Charles V proves his deviation from the orthodox doctrine.

*“FAUSTUS: Sntaches the glass.*

*POPE: My wine gone too? Ye lubbers, look about*

*And find the man that doth this villainy,*

*Or by our sanctitude you all shall die.” (The Complete Plays 1988: 302)*

The Pope indulging in the sin of gluttony casts a truly paradoxical image on the mind-set that prevails inside the Church of that era. Marlowe critiques the superficial image that Church exudes. He is mocking, devaluing conventional set of order. The earthlings are reduced to gimmicks and ridiculousness exhibited from the lowest circlet of social chain to the highest, from lowly servants to the Emperor and Pope.

#### **4.2. Knowledge vs. ignorance**

As the Chorus sets the stage for Faustus' decline, it introduces the readers with the enviable success of his scholarly pursuits. It is his selfish pursuit of wanting more than the world has to offer, more than is possible for a man to know, that leads Faustus to the book of necromancy. Frustrated with the inability to make more than is possible for a man, frustrated with the end that provides the human body as well as the mind, Faustus yearns for the forbidden.

*“The end of physics is our body's health,*

*Why Faustus, hast thou not attained that end?....*

*Yet art thou still but Faustus and a man*

*Couldst thou makes men live eternally*

*Or being dead, raise them to life again,*

*Then this profession was to be esteemed.*

*Physics, farewell. Where is Justinian?.....*

*Such is the subject of the institute*

*And universal body of the law.*

*This study fits a mercenary drudge,*

*Who aims at nothing but external trash,*

*Too servile and illiberal for me....*

*Divinity, adieu! These necromantic books are heavenly.”* (Okerlund 1977: 266-267)

Faustus dives to the dark side calling forth Mephostophilis and making blood contract in exchange for absolute knowledge and immense abilities. With this contract, Faustus can ask Mephostophilis all the questions that tormented his mind: where are Hell and Heaven? He can ask for books about spells and incantations, that he may raise spirits as he will. Even the books about planets and characters that he can gain insight into the cosmic order. He was granted all but one question answered: who made the world? Even in that dominion, not everything is permitted to him because it goes against the kingdom of Lucifer.

Marlowe is portraying Faustus as a successful but irreverent scholar, an overreacher whose knowledge could not satisfy his inclinations for the absolute. But upon being given access to the possibilities unknown to man, even for a limited amount of time, the tragedy is that Faustus doesn't accomplish the grand design of the world he intended to create. Through the progression of the play, he is demoting himself to the character of a fool. Playing trickery on a Pope and mere clowns/commoners just to show his omnipotence, he is at the same time devaluing all the reasons he wanted to gain that knowledge for in the first place.

*“FAUSTUS: What, is he gone? Farewell he. Faustus has his leg again, and the horse-courser, I take it, a bottle of hay for his labour. Well, this trick shall cost him forty dollars more.” (The Complete Plays 1988: 320)*

Marlowe characterizes Faustus as genius but in his need for knowledge he starts to rationalize against logic.

“He, in fact, abrogates his intellectual powers and begins to rationalize his desire by abusing both language and sequent act – logic, the phenomena which constitute man's intellectual being. That abuse of intellect results in diminution of the character which comic scenes expose, for the clownish buffoon into which the scholar turns by the middle of the play reflects represents the stature most representative of his intellectual being.” (Okerlund 1977: 260)

Okerlund also indicates how Faustus in his desire for great intellectual prowess begins distorting syllogistic reasoning. He incorporates into his reasoning only parts that serve his purpose, renouncing the rest, as if not existing. Reasoning syllogistically is the prime intellectual machinery to resolve questions. That intellectual apparatus elevates humans from the rest of creatures, and by that principle, one man is superior to other in terms of his reasoning powers surpassing the others.’ (Okerlund 1977: 263-264)

In various ways does Faustus also distort the laws of logic as well as reason. But all of that leads to his intellectual decline. Unlike Rafe and Dick, as well as the rest of the comedic aspects of the play remaining fools in their intellectual reasoning, Faustus serves as their counterpart. But throughout the span of 24 years, Faustus becomes their equal, if not lesser than them, for allowing himself to become a pursuer of silly mischiefs on other's account.

### 4.3. Science vs. religion

“The play’s prologue sets up the duality of Faustus as both explorer and quintessential overreacher.” (Sugar 2009: 142) Intellectual explorer denoting yearning to progress further than his former learnings have let him and overreacher in a negative context. Overreacher alludes to the grasping for what cannot be attained, in Faustus case, going outside the Christian framework, religious orthodox limits. Marlowe intentionally placed Faustus’ in Wittenberg as Wittenberg has been linked to the emergence of the new astronomical ideas. He is combining new Copernican astronomy with old Ptolemaic universe that was still core learning in Elizabethan times. In order to gain knowledge of the world, not provided to him in books, Faustus asks Mephostophilis a series of questions:

*“Speak are there many spheres above the moon?*

*Are all the celestial bodies but one globe,*

*As is the substance of this centric earth?” (The Complete Plays 1988: 286)*

Faustus insinuates the idea of Ptolemaic universe with Earth at its center and sphere circling around it. But in the next passage, Faustus is angered with Mephostophilis’ answer where he does not refute his claims. Faustus is persistent in his intention to ascertain the hidden truth thus asks Mephostophilis:

*“Resolve me this one question. Why are not conjunction, oppositons, aspects, eclipses, all at one time, but in some years we have more, in some less?” (The Complete Plays 1988: 287)*

But Mephostophilis answers with an empty response:

*“Per inaequalem motum, respect totius – by unequal movement in respect to the whole” (The Complete Plays 1988: 287)*

This question about retrograde motion could only be later explained through Copernicus theory and could be dismissed as an illusion. This shows how Mephostophilis cannot answer this question in the confines of the traditional cosmology and Faustus recognizes that. (Sugar 2009: 143-145) Mephostophilis also has limits that he cannot pass, to go against his Kingdom, Kingdom of Lucifer. Particularly when he has to answer a famous question about the creation of the world.



Indicating that answering these questions is opposed to the cosmology and the worldview accepted at that time, simultaneously contradicting both kingdoms: Hell and Heaven. But upon describing Faustus' cosmic voyage in the Chorus, Marlowe in the B text stays true to the world as seen by the prior learnings, he sees *Primum Mobile* – the first sphere that by Aristotle's view set other spheres in motion. (Sugar 2009: 146). B text confirms with Faustus own eyes the accepted view of the world of that time. Aristotle remains, as in the first scene where Faustus reads his *Analytiks*, the ground or basis upon which one builds knowledge and view of the world. Aristotle was a foundation for philosophy and cosmology. *Prior Analytiks* marks the invention of logic as a formal discipline, "in that the work contains the first virtually complete system of logical interference, sometimes called syllogistic." (Audi 1999: 46)

Observing that Marlowe in his writings indicates the change of the outlook on accepted worldview signifies him as a rebel. There are differences in the A and B quarto and nuances that lead to different conclusions, with B being more conservative. Marlowe nevertheless stays within the general idea that follows Christian tradition: renouncing Scriptures leads to damnation. The heterodoxy in Elizabethan time was about discarding the practices of the Church. Marlowe still remains author with unorthodox vision, but Faustus's tragedy nevertheless places him within the confines of religion. Faustus does reject theology right from the beginning, but the play as a whole actually confirms deep-set theological views on sin, redemption, salvation, freedom of the human choice.

Although the play is constructed around the religious theme on a human's sin and salvation/damnation, Marlowe is consistently using pagan elements of the classical mythology. His use of the images and references to the old divinities is a play on the devilish side, of the seductive side Lucifer entraps Faustus with. Mythology is illustrated as distortion of reality and Scriptures that lead men to downfall. Marlowe knows that demonology and witchcraft is the last remaining home of the old gods.

"Christian and pagan elements are both vividly present, but in a form of deep mutual antagonism.... And in the first suggestive speech, Faustus identifies himself with Night and makes an imaginative flight into the dark heaven of astrologers "longing to view Orion's drizzling look" (McAlindon 1966: 218).

As McAlindon describes corresponds perfectly within this dual version of seeing the universe and stars from scientific view to religious. The powerful star Orion is not a star that is accidentally placed there in the middle of the black Night, but what is commonly known as the

“stellar divinity and Christian demon”. Together with the blackness of the night and the bright burning of the star Marlowe creates distinct imagery. The bright burning star is an obvious representation of the fallen angel that was once the most radiant star at God’s side. This powerfully visual scene is the depiction of “*Principes Orientis*” the bright Lucifer whom “*God threw...from the face of Heaven*” to become “*Chief lord and regent of the perpetual night*” was a religious version of that brilliant star who was at once herald of the morning (Venus) and night (Hesper). “(McAlindon 1966: 218)

Marlowe is interlacing the old and new, old view of the world merged with new discoveries that were brought by Copernicus. But Marlowe never explicitly declares the falsehood of one or the other. He places the subtle but powerful indications of the shift that has started to take place inside scholarly circles as it has begun to spread even further. He also merges the tradition of Christian, religious background mixed with paganism and astrology. He combines these four spheres of breaking the old traditions and incorporating new principles through the depiction of cosmos.

#### **4.4 Good vs. evil**

One of the frequently used and often disputed themes in history of literature, one which represents the duality found in most Renaissance dramas: good versus evil. The theme has persisted from medieval times when mystery plays, morality plays, liturgical dramas were popular forms of theatrical discourse. It was based on Bible - related subjects. Orthodox belief is centered around division to God – Almighty and source of good, and Lucifer- the fallen angel that defied God. Marlowe, like most authors, incorporates mythology into his plays, but he associates it with devilish side.

Faustus’ sin begins with the wilful act of discarding wisdom acquired from theology and immersing himself in necromancy. Necromancy and magic rendered as tools of creating devilish exercise or shattering conventional doctrine, as an iconoclast was one of Marlowe’s descriptions. McAlindon in his *Classical Mythology and Christian Tradition in Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus* provides detailed elaboration of mythological apparitions in the play. He demonstrates the seduction and illusion that old mythology bestows.

“The gods of pagans were celebrated in largely fictitious and immoral fables and plays which delude the mind by working on the senses, whereas the God is revealed in a set

of writings which are entirely historical and edifying. This distinction is frequently stated or suggested in *Doctor Faustus* in connection both with the written word and show or play” (McAlindon 1966: 219)

Commencing the play, Faustus’ is appalled by Mephostophilis ugly appearance. Marlowe alludes to the truth of evil which only by illusion can be acceptable.

*“I charge thee to return and change thy shape.*

*Thou art too ugly to attend on me.”* (The Complete Plays 1988:273)

Because Faustus asks for the appearance of a friar, once again the image of Marlowe as iconoclast is put forward. Play of illusion and deception is a play that involves Faustus as a main protagonist and Mephostophilis as the perpetrator. The best demonstrator to Faustus’ blurred vision is the depiction of the Seven Deadly Sins.

*“BELZEBUB: We are come from hell in person to show thee some pastime*

*Sit down and thou shalt behold the seven deadly sins appear to thee in their own proper shape and likeness.*

*FAUSTUS: That sight will be as pleasant to me as Paradise was to Adam the first day of his creation.”* (The Complete Plays 1988: 288)

Russell and Clare Goldfarb notice that Faustus compares himself to Adam which is ironic considering that Faustus is watching a play of the Seven Deadly Sins before his eyes, while Adam was looking at perfect creation of paradise. The first sin ever committed in the Biblical realm is tied to the deception of Lucifer.

“After original sin, man’s nature and his destiny were irrevocably changed. Knowing good and evil, he forfeited the paradise of innocence and entered the world of mortal experience, from which only grace might redeem him” (Ornstein 1968: 1383)

Marlowe’s vision of God is through power, as a deity of power. Ornstein describes that Marlowe’s Faustus includes a misconceived conception of God. Marlowe is portraying God as an absent figure, which is omnipotent but does not work similarly as do the apparitions of Lucifer and Mephostophilis. God pardons the submissive ones, Old Man, but cannot relieve Faustus. At the beginning, this charity of Sacrifice is in opposition to Faustus’ self-absorption but at the end of the play is stands against unpitying wrath of God.

Marlowe ends the play with imagery of fire:

“FAUSTUS: *I’ll burn my books! Ah, Mephostophilis!*” (*The Complete Plays* 1988: 338)

Fire represents a powerful symbol of destroying witchcraft and purification. Faustus compares himself to Paris and the burning of Troy. The significance of fire in tragedies is relinquishing the past, turning the past to ashes. Also, a depiction of Hell is in flames, as a tool of torment for the absence of God. For McAlindon it signifies discarding old gods and old mythology on the grounds that it is founded only on illusions and seduction.

#### **4.5 Determinism vs. free will**

The last theme is the philosophical topic of determinism and the freedom of will. Since Renaissance brought back or was returning to Greek philosophers, it flourished as a revival of Platonism but with a new flare of Humanism that placed man not anymore in the center of the universe.

The opening scene introduces Faustus as a man aware of the limitations body and mind provide to him, so he forms a deal for omnipotence in return for his soul. The debate continues between his knowledge and the action he takes. He wilfully forsakes Scriptures and seizes possession of necromancy. It is important to see that Faustus’ rejection of theology is self-inflicted, but upon renouncing the name of God, he is entrapped in a veil of promises made by Mephostohilis and Lucifer.

*“This word ‘damnation’ terrifies not me*

*For I confound hell in Elysium.*

*My ghost be with old philosophers.”*(*The Complete Plays* 1988: 274).

Old philosophers who did not believe in punishment after death. Plato believed that in meeting death he will know the answers he was searching for. Even though Mephostophilis describes the agony and horror of being deprived of Heaven, Faustus is still solely and blindly listening to his words of self-deception. He is imagining himself as a demi-god, being equal to supreme God: “*What God can hurt thee Faustus?*” (*The Complete Plays* 1988: 279)

Vasiliuskas analyses *akrasia*- “the state of tending to act against one’s better judgment – a concept Aristotle identified as un-tragic and whose very existence Socrates denied, became indispensable to English Renaissance tragedy.” (Vasiliuskas 2016: 221) English Renaissance writers used it as principal causation of tragic doings. The main protagonists commence their journey through the wilful and knowing act to temptation. Faustus evil comes in a shape of behaviour, succumbing to greed or lust for knowledge building the misconception that redemption is easily accessible.

Vasiliuskas clarifies that “The tragic culmination occurs as the suspense whether the protagonist will change his life resolves in favour of his irredeemability. The choice that seems at first to involve only temporary lapse proves to be permanent.” (Vasiliuskas 2016: 221)

The question of free will and determinism has always been linked to fatalism. Especially in ancient times where fate was given to the disposal of gods. The famous example of Oedipus and his tragic outcome outlines inevitability and inescapability. Religion draws the sense of man’s future being predetermined since the first sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden.

Similarly Faustus calls his fate predetermined, after the cardinal sin of rejecting the Scriptures. “Faustus claims that his doom was sealed by his blasphemous defiance of God. Theology denies his claim on the ground that no trespass has irrevocable consequences and no human act is beyond divine pardon.” (Ornstein 1968: 1383)

Faustus receives numerous signals to abandon his intention and revert to the righteous path. Signs of the Good Angel and blood coagulation appear as the most prominent ones. Faustus, in his blindness, discards them. He is persistent in his intention of being demi-god, he solemnly calls his heart blackened and hardened, and that he cannot reverse the process he has begun. He is infatuated with the image of becoming the co-creator of the reality, that he neglects virtuous life. Pinning for constructing an ideal world, a parallel world he is desperate to break the limitations set upon him. He acts irreverently but is misguided in his intentions. In freeing Faustus, Marlowe entraps him into servitude.

The underlying message is that through his own will Faustus’ redemption is unfulfilled. He was given warnings before and during the duration of 24 years of the contract. Unrelenting in his own vision of divinity and distorted apprehension of the Scriptures, the idea of sin and salvation he becomes the author of his downfall.

## 5. Legacy of morality plays in comparison to *Doctor Faustus*

“In England, the last great age of popular theatre were the late Middle Ages. As well as mystery plays, morality plays enjoyed great popularity from 1400 to 1600. These moralities centred on the individual life of a Christian portrayed as a generalized type figure such as “Mankind” or “Everyman”, and emphasized his fall from grace, his death, and eventual salvation through the intercession of divine figure.” (Wertz 1969: 438)

A morality play is a singular form of drama and as Craig mentions that it must have been a distinctive invention because they have this distinctive technical feature: lacks personal and inward struggle. The protagonist is not individual but represents humanity. Along his life-path, he is met by various abstract vices who represent temptation. True morality plays came into existence because of the man’s need for salvation. Morality plays’ basis came from portraying humanity as a hero.

Earliest plays are allegories and universal and did not need to be composed of the same set of scenes and issues. Historians of the drama have sometimes mistakenly thought that any drama that had allegoric figures in it was a morality play. Except allegorical figures were not an uncommon feature in the medieval era. The pivotal difference lies in the allegorical figure of mankind that works out his only possible salvation. Morality plays do not rest on French or other discovered originals, as might have been previously thought.

“If the French stage produced full scope moralities dealing with man and his salvation, they no longer exist. The Dutch field too presents nothing significant. Dutch moralities were written on set subjects for prizes, apparently in answer to proposed questions, such as, What is the greatest mystery (service) which God has brought forth for the happiness of man? In Germany there is nothing significant of the original concept.”(Craig 1950: 69)

Oppositely there is an abundance of morality plays in English. The morality appears to have fitted English temperament. Morality plays served as an example to the masses, they were tools for confirming the orthodox beliefs. They originated from sermons and it was the core idea of Corpus Christi plays.

Marlowe drew inspiration from these features of medieval plays. *Doctor Faustus* displays palpable morality play elements: The Good and Bad Angel, Seven Deadly Sins and rivalry for Faustus' soul, even though it lacks repentance and salvation. In *Faustus*, morality play becomes a romantic tragedy. (Craig 1950: 69-72)

Out of the morality plays, *Everyman* is the nearest in theme framework to *Doctor Faustus*. In *Everyman*, the main hero is directly, by his own deeds, saved from downfall. It shapes opposite counterpart to Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Other morality plays' protagonists were saved by divine intervention, however, in *Everyman* mankind is saved by his Good Deeds. If the divine intervention was incorporated in *Doctor Faustus*' case, would it not convert the play from tragedy to morality play: by providing a full cycle of sin, repentance, and salvation by the grace of God.

Everyman's progress begins when his unreflective and misdirected will is challenged and he must admit that he was negligent and strayed too far in materialistic pleasure. Initially, he is opposed to acknowledge his wrongdoing.

“EVERYMAN: *Full unready I am such reckoning to give.*

*I know thee not: what messenger art though?”* (Rhys 2006)

Upon being denied companionship by Fellowship, Kindred and Goods he turns to Good Deed. The rejection brings self-loathing and realization of the blame.

“*Then of myself I am ashamed,*

*And so am I worthy to be blamed.”* (Rhys 2006)

Speaking with Goods his self-reflection begins. He now understands the limitations of what he relied on in the past. Summarizing the past deeds and actions, granting them theological perspective, Everyman is painfully aware of the peril of hell. He is in possession of knowledge that precedes his prior insight. The final step includes the unification of knowing the sinful deeds and doing the right thing. As going to Good Deeds leads Everyman through the process of confession, penance, restitution, and union with the Almighty. (Muson 1985: 253-254).

“EVERYMAN: *In the name of the Holy Trinity,  
My body sore punished shall be:  
Take this body for the sin of the flesh;  
Also thou delightest to go gay and fresh,  
And in the way of damnation thou did me bring;  
Therefore suffer now strokes and punishing.  
Now of penance I will wade the water clear,  
To save me from purgatory, that sharp fire.*” (Rhys 2006)

Muson artistically describes human’s purpose: it is joining together knowing with doing in the act of dying that leads to the completeness of the repentance cycle. It is not enough to only be awfully aware of the sin, mortality, damnation or repentance, but to act wilfully in the direction of the desired outcome. Self-awareness is the first step, nonetheless, the following step is equally if not more important. It is in this duality, this division that Faustus’ character is encountering its stumbling stone. Faustus’ is aware of the consequences of the sin, of the transgression, but in the crucial moments, he cannot act upon it. Out of fear for his own body

*“the devil threatened to tear me in pieces if I named God;*

*to fetch my own body and soul if I once gave ear to divinity” (The Complete Plays 1988: 334)*

Faustus dismisses the obvious truth. His soul was already sold, he had nothing more to lose. In writing Faustus, Marlowe expresses pessimism about man’s fate tied to religion. Straying from the conventional ending of morality plays his message resonates about freeing the protagonist from Christian doctrines.



## Conclusion

Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* has an abundance of dualities incorporated into play. Starting from his own life that was a mystery and veiled with secrecy, which is why the interpretation of his works can be read from different perspectives. *Doctor Faustus* remains the work which is deemed blasphemous and a confirmation of his orthodoxy. Certainly, Marlowe remains unconventional, whether it was just a criticism of the religious doctrine or exposed atheism. He successfully combines the old, mythological foundation with Christian beliefs, displaying a range of dualities from science to the issue of free will. The play emphasizes possibilities of transcendence for humans, whether just in literary form or as an awakening of audiences' minds. The conclusion remains ambiguous, open to debate. Morality plays provide counterpart in moral resolution of man's fate and tragic consequences. Marlowe converted tradition of morality plays to his own version of artistic salvation. Before being portrayed as a sceptic or man of unfailing faith, he was foremost an artist with a vision.

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