

DEVIL'S PACT IN CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

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Abstract

This paper aims at critical study of Devil and his pact with Dr. Faustus in Christopher Marlowe's play *Dr. Faustus*. This play invites questions about magic, witchcraft, and pacts with the devil in its detailed aspects. Devil was very much of a reality for Elizabethan and contemporary audiences alike. Marlowe in *Dr. Faustus* concentrates on dichotomy between the earthly and Godly. Necromancy and magic rendered as weapons to create devilish exercise or shattering conventional doctrine. Satan uses necromancy as his primary tool. He creates temptations through his agents. Marlowe as an Elizabethan writer utilizes morality motifs in his Play which raises debates about Devil and his role in *Dr. Faustus*.

Body:

Critics have always raised questions about *Dr. Faustus*'s exact date, text, date, variety of reformation concerns, they have argued about the references to hell, spirit etc. The range of debates included concerns about the genre of the play as tragedy or morality or quasi-morality, satire or allegory.

Dr. Faustus is a morality text which invites questions about magic, witchcraft, and pacts with the devil in its detailed aspects. According to J.W. Smeed "most men of the 16th century, Catholic and Protestant, Educated and uneducated, believed that an alliance or pact with the devil was possible, that the devil and those in league with him had the power to transform themselves into all manners of shapes and to plague men through magic"*1. Devil was very much a reality for Elizabethan and contemporary audiences alike.

Critics like Harry Levin* 2. tried to investigate Marlowe's inferno being genuine or symbolic. Cole, too, sees in the play "little stress on ...hell as a lurid place of grotesque physical tortures, and much stress on the spiritual loss and suffering."*3.

Before making a deal with devil, Faustus binds his soul to Lucifer talking about his right to dispose of it as he wishes. This goes against the Christian doctrine which emphasizes the soul's transitory state, dwelling temporarily in man's body and desiring to be reunited with God its maker. As Ian Watt said, "even a century after, Marlowe, the immortality of damned souls was a dangerous doctrine to contest, so that notable

...dissenters from orthodoxy on this point such as John Locke and Isaac Newton didn't express their opinions openly''⁴. The soul has been considered hostage by many medieval scholars who say that God and Devil both have interests that are superior to those of the person in whom soul resides. Bluestone says Faustus 's relation to his soul is paradoxical his soul is his own and not his own at once.⁵

The deal which Marlowe's Faustus makes with Mephistopheles:-

Go bear these tidings to great Lucifer:

Seeing Faustus hath incurred eternal death
 By desperate thoughts against Jove's deity,
 Say he surrenders unto him his soul
 So he will spare him four and twenty Years.

[Act 1. scene 3. lines 86-90].

At this point Faustus asks nothing in return because he knows he is already damned, and thus he is in no position to make demands. But he asks anyways, and Mephistopheles being generous surprisingly gives in.

The agreement with the devil contains the following clauses:-

First, that Faustus may be a spirit in form and/ substance.
 Secondly, that Mephistopheles shall be his servant /and be by him
 commanded. Thirdly, that Mephistopheles shall do for him /and bring him
 whatsoever. Fourthly, that he shall be in his chamber or
 house/invisible. Lastly, that he shall appear to the said John Faustus /at
 all times in what form or shape Soever he/please.:

I, John Faustus of Wittenberg, Doctor, by these / presents, do give both body and soul to Lucifer/ Prince of the East, and his minister Mephistopheles, and furthermore grant unto them that, /four and twenty years being expired, and these /articles above written being inviolate, full power/to fetch or carry the said John Faustus, body and soul, flesh, blood or goods, into their habitation/ whosoever. By me John Faustus [Act 2, scene 1. 97-117]

After both parties decide to perform their parts, the agreement is read aloud by Faustus, then delivered and accepted by Mephistopheles.

Critics believe that is a fraudulent broken promise on part of Mephistopheles. A.L. French discusses the first condition of the agreement that Faustus may be a spirit in form and substance being not fulfilled then it is indicative of Faustus being cheated which makes him crassly stupid. So if Faustus's soul remains human, could heavenly counsel or any of the events of the rest of the play mean anything.

Another view could be that once the bargain is struck, Mephistopheles does perform the first article, despite the confusing connotation of the word "spirit". Deeper reading reveals the catch word "may". Faustus *may* be a spirit in appearance and essence whereas the other four clauses use the auxiliary verb "shall" which is mandatory. So not until the second scene in Act 3 that Faustus becomes invisible and punches the Pope. Thus Faustus permanently becomes a spirit at the play's close but the delay is not because Mephistopheles has cheated Faustus. Had Faustus decided to quit, therefore, the devil would not have been denied his due, whether Faustus enjoined Mephistopheles from completing his performance or whether Faustus repented. Repentance trumps any contract even one written in blood. After all only Christ's blood has power over human souls. While the Faustus of the EFB Promised "that he would be an enemy to all Christian people" and that he "would deny his Christian belief", Marlowe's Faustus made no such promises although his renewed submission indicates his willingness to include them.

Marlowe in *Dr. Faustus* concentrates on the dichotomy between the earthly and Godly. A clear demarcation is there between the two but with the progression of the play, this blurs, as Faustus metamorphoses into demon/damned spirit himself. 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 human beings,

“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 the entire world dissolves

And every creature shall be purified

All places shall be hell that is not heaven”.

[The Complete Plays, 1988, 282-283]

Marlowe depicts otherworldly spirit skills of demonstrating themselves in the physical form. They can be participant and have an impact upon the order of things in the world. Such is the case with Lucifer and Mephistopheles who can call forth demons and illusions, even provide a voyage outside the earth's boundaries.

Satan uses necromancy as his primary tool. He creates temptations through his agents. Satan's representative Mephistopheles appears in front of Faustus when he conjures for the first time. Faustus meanwhile considers “a sound magician is a demigod”. The use of figurative language shows the concealed desire of Satan which is complete capture of human soul to his service. Mephistopheles talks about nature of Lucifer saying he is the “arch-regent and commander of all spirits” and was an angel once “most loved by God” who was kicked out of heaven and became “prince of devils” by “aspiring pride and insolence”. Faustus is although scared of damnation, however, offers a deal for twenty four years of ultimate power and promises to surrender his soul to Lucifer. Faustus's high expectations from Lucifer have been explained below :-

“Had I as many souls as there be stars, /I'd give them all for Mephistopheles

/By him I will be great emperor of the world/and make a bridge through the moving air

/to pass the ocean with a band of men./I'll join the hills that bind the Afric shore

/and make that country continent to Spain,/and both contributory to my crown./The Emperor shall not live but by my leave, /Nor any potentate in Germany.”

In Christianity, every demon counted among the pantheon of hell is in some regard a perverted version of God from pagan religions, the story being that they participated with Lucifer in rebellion against the God almighty and were forever thrown out of heaven. Naming the devils in Christianity helped early Christians to relate to them and made their cautionary tales more approachable, giving them grotesque and frightful personalities perhaps only underscored by the horrible destiny awaiting the unfaithful. Yet Marlowe did not show the frightening version.. Mephistopheles, in majority of the play is hardly terrifying and his simple costume on stage would have been quite known to the audience. He is not stereotypical character but a complex character in his own way, one that also shows humanism in Renaissance theatre. In Mephistopheles, we have a devil that does not fit any traditional depictions so that audience may relate and sympathize while he clarifies his stand of coming to seek only Faustus's soul indicative of latter's impending damnation.

After being summoned by Faustus, the servant of devil Mephistopheles announces that his real master is Lucifer, to which Faustus asks, did he not charge thee to appear to me?” and

the devil replies,” No, I come now hither of mine own accord” [Act 1 scene 3 lines 44-45]. This exchange is very relevant to the entire context of this weird relationship. How are we to interpret Mephistopheles’s appearance before Faustus? We may think that Faustus truly ordered him to appear, or, as the following lines indicate, Mephistopheles can sense Faustus’s shaking faith and insatiable lust for knowledge and power across space and time—a vampire to blood. Mephistopheles then explains, “For when we hear one rack the name of God, /abjure the Scriptures and his savior Christ. /we fly in hope to get his glorious soul, /Nor will we come unless he uses such means /whereby he is in danger to be damned” [Act 1 scene 3 lines 48-53]. Faustus’s incantations are not important: Mephistopheles has not come to help Faustus on a mission to master the black arts, but he has come to harvest a crop. This angle shows Faustus’s failure to repent because his damnation is already destined despite his actions. Faustus asks about the number of devils escorting Lucifer, and Mephistopheles replies they are “unhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer, /conspired against our God with Lucifer, /and are forever damned with Lucifer” [Act 1, scene 3, lines 72-74]. This is one of those lines which reveal the real pathos of Mephistopheles. He has gone through the plight of being damned and he is pleading here with Faustus indirectly asking him to repent, to recognize the error of his ways. This also reflects the nature of servitude in *Doctor Faustus*. Mephistopheles is enchained to Lucifer, duty bound to obey him. He fell from heaven with Lucifer, is forever cut off from God’s grace, and now almost as punishment, is damned to serve as a slave to Lucifer; Mephistopheles’s own emotions and feelings can never translate into actions. Lucifer has a set target to expand his empire which in turn the motto of Mephistopheles.

Mephistopheles can also be considered a Sympathetic antagonist and an antihero. Faustus’s curiosity about hell explains the viewpoint of Marlowe and Renaissance theorists. Mephistopheles’s reply is one of the unique descriptions of hell in literature. He says, “why this is hell, nor I am out of it. /Think’st thou that I, who saw the face of God /and tasted the eternal joys of heaven, /am not tormented with ten thousand hells /in being deprived of everlasting bliss? /O Faustus leave these frivolous demands, /which strike a terror to my fainting soul”. [Act 1 scene 3 lines 78-84]. Marlowe brilliantly depicts the pain of Mephistopheles of having experienced “the eternal joys of heaven” and yet forever “deprived of everlasting bliss”. Somehow one starts feeling sympathy for the demonic, evil figure. Mephistopheles’s character is multidimensional: he can experience pain as well as dreadful enough to cause it to others. Thus one can say he is human in this regard. Marlowe is so clever in making the Elizabethan audience empathize with the devil for whom the church doctrine advocates complete avoidance. Moreover Marlowe presents a distinct perception of hell being a state of mind rather than a physical place—a burning pit. Separation from God is itself a hellish existence, a point of Christian doctrine which would be all too familiar to an audience in Elizabethan England.

The end of the play brings the chorus back to the stage lamenting Faustus’s tragic demise warning the audience to “regard his hellish fall”, one can see the entire deceitful plot laid bare. One can always wonder if Mephistopheles, or his each and every dialogue was to carry out Lucifer’s designs to enlarge his kingdom. For the agents of hell it was a good bargain getting one arrogant, damned soul for just the simple cost of Mephistopheles spending twenty-four years entertaining Faustus’s ridiculous fantasies. It was a lopsided deal to say the least, to conquer man’s soul at such a fire-sale price. Yet Mephistopheles is an expert agent to execute Faustus’s damnation all being disguised as a kind friar. In a way it looks like Mephistopheles successfully utilizes the weapon of sympathy, using his emotional state to provoke Faustus and blind him to a much darker sinister plot at hand. Mephistopheles turns out to be more dangerous than Lucifer.

here as audience sympathy is laid to waste .By the end of Act five ,as a horrifying spectacle invades the stage ,the audience could be forgiven for thinking that some happy ending awaited Faustus instead it was a trick of pathos played by Mephistopheles all along. Thus it proves to be tremendous confidence trick played on Faustus and the audience making *Dr. Faustus* an, ambiguous cautionary tale.

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