



# A study of the themes in "Dr. Faustus," a play by Christopher Marlowe

VIKRAM RATHORE

Assistant Professor at Sangam University Bhilwar (RAJ)

## Abstract

This study examines the numerous themes of a play 'Dr. Faustus'. Despite being Shakespeare's forerunner, Christopher Marlowe made significant contributions to English play in its early years. This research is an attempt to examine the light of themes found in the Dr. Faustus play. This research will aid in a better understanding of the numerous topics in these plays. It examines the internal conflict of the character and his doomed pursuit of knowledge and power that ultimately leads to his downfall. The paper analyzes the themes of ambition, temptation, and damnation, and it highlights the play's relevance to contemporary society, especially about the dangers of unchecked ambition and the consequences of making deals with the devil. Christopher Marlowe's play "Doctor Faustus" is a classic example of the tragic hero who, in his unquenchable thirst for knowledge and power, ends up succumbing to his own weaknesses and flaws. The central character, Dr. Faustus, is a brilliant scholar who becomes dissatisfied with his human limitations and longs for supernatural powers. In his arrogance, he makes a pact with the devil, exchanging his soul for unlimited knowledge and power. The play explores the complexities of human nature, showcasing the internal struggles of the character as he grapples with the consequences of his choices.

## Introduction:

One of the most famous pre-Shakespearian playwrights is Christopher Marlowe, who was a prominent member of the "University Wits." He was born in February 1564 at Canterbury's Parish Church, St. George the Martyr. In the middle of the 1550s, Marlowe's father 'John Marlowe', a migrant laborer, settled in Canterbury, a cathedral city. Out of nine children Marlowe was the second. Marlowe started his official schooling when he memorized his catechism at the age of seven. Being the son of a tradesman, Marlowe had left school at the age of eight. He then attended grammar school and started studying Latin. He was awarded a scholarship in 1579 when he was fifteen years old, to study at Canterbury's famed King's school which was on the way from Dover to London, a major metropolis, at the time. And then in December, 1580, he, at the age of seventeen, arrived at Corpus Christi College,

Cambridge., one of the oldest colleges in the University. Marlowe matriculated in March, 1581. He completed his BA in 1584. In 1587, Marlowe achieved an M.A.

Marlowe made the decision to write for the newly built London theaters somewhere in the second half of 1587; he was maybe the first recent university grad to have had professional contact with the adult actors and establish a long-lasting relationship. Blank verse was Marlowe's actual contribution to English play.

He got married to Katherine Arthur, a Dover resident. They also had a daughter called Mary before having Christopher, who was baptized on February 26, 1564, barely two months before Shakespeare.

Marlowe was one of the dramatists among a group of educationists known as 'University Wits', who wrote dramas. By 6 1587, Marlowe had already made a name for himself among the London Dramatists.

The Theme of time

The Theme of desire

The Theme of ambition,

The Theme of temptation

The Theme of consequences of our actions.

The Theme of Sin

The Theme of Redemption

The Theme of Damnation

"Doctor Faustus" is a play that continues to captivate audience's centuries after its creation by Christopher Marlowe in the late 16th century. The play tells the story of Dr. Faustus, a highly ambitious scholar and magician who makes a deal with the devil for knowledge and power beyond human limits. Dr. Faustus becomes increasingly engrossed in his newfound abilities, but as time passes, he realizes the true cost of his bargain, leading to his ultimate demise. The play raises important questions about the human condition, such as the nature of ambition, the role of temptation in our lives, and the consequences of our actions. In exploring these themes, "Doctor Faustus" continues to resonate with contemporary audiences, making it an enduring literary classic.

Through a detailed examination of Dr. Faustus's character and actions, this research paper seeks to provide insights into the play's themes and significance. The paper also discusses the various adaptations and interpretations of the play over the years and considers the reasons behind its ongoing popularity. Ultimately, the research aims to shed light on why "Doctor Faustus" remains a fascinating and relevant work of literature to this day. Christopher Marlowe's play, Dr. Faustus, has been the subject of much literary analysis and critical debate. The play centers on Faustus, a scholar who makes a deal with the devil in exchange for knowledge and power. Faustus is a complex character, with his motivations and actions prompting discussions about morality, free will, and the consequences of one's actions. In this research paper, we will analyze Dr. Faustus as a tragic hero and examine the themes that Marlowe explores throughout the play.

**Keywords;** Dr. Faustus, Tragic Hero, Marlowe, Theme of play, motivation, Knowledge, Christian Doctrine.

### **The Tragic Hero**

Dr. Faustus fits the classical definition of a tragic hero. According to Aristotle, a tragic hero is a character who possesses a fatal flaw, usually hubris that leads to their downfall. Faustus' fatal flaw is his excessive ambition and pride. He is a scholar who is dissatisfied with his life and wishes to have more power and knowledge. He believes that he can achieve this by making a deal with the devil and selling his soul. This decision ultimately leads to his downfall, as he becomes consumed by his own pride and loses sight of what is truly important in life.

However, Faustus is not simply a one-dimensional character. He is a complex figure who is both sympathetic and unlikeable. His motivations and actions are informed by his sense of inadequacy and desire for intellectual achievement. He seeks knowledge, not for its own sake, but as a means to gain power, wealth, and prestige. His desire for these things leads him to make the fateful decision to sell his soul to the devil. While Faustus is certainly consumed by his pride and ambition, his motivations are arguably more nuanced than simply being a portrait of unchecked greed.

### **The Characters and their Motivations**

Marlowe's play features a diverse cast of characters, each with their own motivations and desires. Faustus is, of course, the central figure of the play. However, several other characters play key roles in the story, including Mephistopheles, the devil who serves as Faustus' servant and mentor, and Wagner, Faustus' loyal and devoted student.

Mephistopheles' motivations are intriguing, as he is a devil who is bound to serve Faustus as part of their deal. He appears to be initially motivated by the opportunity to corrupt Faustus, but as the play progresses, he also seems to develop a degree of affection for the scholar.

Wagner, on the other hand, is a more straightforward character. He is Faustus' loyal and devoted student who looks up to his mentor and strives to emulate him. His story arc is one of disillusionment, as he realizes that his mentor's pursuit of knowledge has led him down a destructive path.

### **The Themes**

Marlowe explores a range of themes in Dr. Faustus, many of which are still relevant today. One of the most prominent themes in the play is the idea that knowledge and power come at a steep price. Faustus is willing to sacrifice everything in order to gain knowledge and power, but he fails to realize that this pursuit will ultimately

lead to his damnation. This theme is still relevant today, as many people are willing to sacrifice their morals and ethics in pursuit of success or power.

Another theme that Marlowe explores in the play is the conflict between good and evil. Faustus is constantly torn between his desire for knowledge and power and his conscience, which warns him against the consequences of his actions. This conflict is represented throughout the play by the recurring motif of the angels and devils that appear to Faustus, trying to sway him to one side or the other. This motif suggests that the choices we make in life are not just personal but also have broader implications for the world around us.

Furthermore, Marlowe also explores the idea of the Christian doctrine of predestination in Dr. Faustus. The concept of predestination is the idea that one's fate is predetermined by God, and that no amount of human effort can change it. This idea is central to the play, as it underscores the tragic nature of Faustus' story. Ultimately, his fate is sealed from the moment he makes a deal with the devil, and he is unable to change the course of his life. This theme raises questions about free will and the role of religion in shaping our lives.

### **Conclusion**

Christopher Marlowe's Dr. Faustus is a classic example of a tragic hero story. Faustus embodies the classical definition of a tragic hero, possessing a fatal flaw that leads to his downfall. However, the play is also notable for the themes that Marlowe explores throughout, including the consequences of excessive ambition, the conflict between good and evil, and the influence of religion on our lives. These themes are still relevant today, as people continue to struggle with questions of morality, ethics, and the pursuit of success. Dr. Faustus remains a timeless and cautionary tale, reminding us of the dangers of making deals with the devil, both literally and metaphorically.

### **References:**

Evans, Benjamin Ifor, and Bergonzi, Bernard. A Short History of English Literature. United Kingdom, Penguin Books, 1976.

Dr. Faustus Marlow's Play