

## Studying Dr Faustus from Renaissance Perspective

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### Abstract

The French term Renaissance means in general any rebirth or reawakening. It specifically means the rebirth of the mind and the rebirth of the human potentials once had remained latent in man. The Renaissance was a cultural movement that profoundly affected European intellectual life in the early modern period. Its influence was felt in literature, philosophy, art, music and other aspects of intellectual enquiry. Huge thirst for knowledge, power and authority through transgression, rise of individualism, humanism, revolt against church orthodoxy and appreciation for art and beauty are the basic components that form renaissance. The factors that brought forth the rebirth of human mind and potentials are the revival of the classical learning, interest in Greco-Roman culture, the geographical discovery, Arab science and navigation, the rebellion against the medieval religious dogmas and so on.

**Keywords:** Renaissance, knowledge, power, individualism, humanism

The present article studies and analyses *Dr Faustus* from the Renaissance perspective. *The Prince* by Machiavelli, the great political thinker and statesman of Italy profoundly influenced the spirit of Renaissance. Machiavelli opines that end justifies the means and it encouraged the man of the age to disregard all ethical and traditional principles in order to

achieve the end by any means, fair or foul. He also details how an effective ruler should behave. He abandoned the moralistic approach of how a ruler should behave as a good Christian and instead embraced a practical guide to holding power. A ruler should be fierce as a lion and cunning as a fox. Petrarch has been described as the first humanist and the first modern scholar. Noted as a poet he was crowned as a poet laureate in Rome in the year 1341. In many ways the attitude of renaissance was first seen in his writings. Erasmus was an astonishingly erudite priest who benefited from both the traditional scholastic education of the late-medieval church and the new humanistic style that emerged from the Renaissance. Some of his works included *In Praise Of Folly* a satirical attack on corruption within church and *the Handbook of the Christian Soldier* which deemphasized the importance of the sacraments. The three great painters who contributed to the Renaissance are Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael whose works are *Mona Lisa*(1517),*David*(1504) and *the School of Athens*(1511) respectively.

Marlowe himself is the product of the renaissance. He is the first champion of English renaissance. He drank the spirit of the renaissance and his great works reveal the main traits and temper of the Renaissance. We in this respect can mention his great tragedies ,*Tamburlaine* ,*Dr Faustus* ,*the Jew of Malta* and *Edward II*. All his great tragedies are tremendously dominated by Renaissance viz, the limitless ambition and the Machiavellian policy or the fulfillment of the ambition by any means fair or foul. This is why the conscience or the qualms of conscience, moral convention and the religious sanctions can never thwart the Marlovian heroes from striving to gain their objective. Harry Levin says, `all of Marlowe`s major characters are willfully and aggressively competitive-overreachers.` *Tamburlaine* is the story of a Scythian shepherd who dreams of world conquest and achieves his aspiration magnificently. He is the most cruel despot with his craze for boundless power defies all authority on earth and heaven.

We`ll lead you to the stately tent of war,

Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine,

Threatening the world with high astounding terms,

And scrouging kingdoms with his conquering sword.

Barabas dominated by a senseless lust for gold throws the morality to the wind and commits the most ruthless crime to obtain his end. Barabas the Mediterranean money-lender with his avaricious dreams of wealth foreshadows Shakespeare's Shylock. Dedicated to the spirit of Machiavelli the play opens a new phase in Marlowe's work. It is a picture of the Elizabethan world of policy in which men are unscrupulous and cruel in power and sometimes heroic in defeat. Young Mortimer in Edward II grows an illicit relation intemperate lust for power. Theme of homosexuality between the king Edward and Gaveston which is completely intolerable to Young Mortimer functions as a hubris that ultimately brings the destruction of the king. On the other side Mortimer who is previously patriotic gradually sheds his patriotic veer for the irresponsibility of the king and develops himself into a Machiavellian hero, making an illicit affair with the queen Isabella. In him we notice the same ambition, the same overreaching power and the same passion for individualism which we observe both in *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew Of Malta*.

*Dr Faustus* is a tragedy of renaissance. He is mad for limitless knowledge and power, a craving for sensual pleasure of life, a defying spirit of atheism, love for beauty and a spirit of revolt against any dogma. In the first monologue he discusses the merits and demerits of all the important branches of knowledge. He has acquired and mastered thoroughly all the branches of knowledge. But he is not satisfied with all these traditional knowledge. He discards logic

,philosophy, medicine, law, theology because he thinks all these branches limited in scope and appeal.

Philosophy is odious and obscure,

Both law and physic are for petty wits,

Divinity is the basest of the three,

Unpleasant, harsh, contemptible and vile

ˆTis magic, magic that hath ravished me.

He through authority over necromancy can derive great pleasure and become omnipotent in this world. The magic power can bring everything lying between the two poles of the earth , the winds and clouds and other forces of nature under his command. He takes a magician as a mighty God.

All things that move between the quiet poles  
Shall be at my command; emperors and kings  
Are but obeyed in their several provinces  
Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds;  
But his dominion that exceeds in this ,  
Stretcheth as far as the mind of man;  
A sound magician is a mighty God

The good angel makes Faustus cautious against transgression and blasphemy

O Faustus lay that damned book aside  
And gaze not on it ,lest it tempt thy soul  
And heap gods envy wrath upon thy head  
Read read the scriptures- that is blasphemy.

George Santayana says, ` Marlowe is a martyr to everything that the Renaissance valued power ,curious knowledge ,enterprise ,wealth and beauty` .Not only Dr Faustus`s unsatiable thirst for knowledge represents the spirit of renaissance but his choice of magic art which shows him as a Machiavellian hero. According to Machiavelli to have power is all but not what means to have power. Objective is main here means is minor matter ,Dr Faustus wants to obtain authority through magic which is forbidden in Christianity. He defies the boundary

sanctioned by Christianity and thus discards God proudly. Not only that he also makes a bond with the devil and sells his soul to it.

Say he surrenders up to him his soul  
 So he will spare him four and twenty years  
 Letting him live in all voluptuousness  
 Having thee ever to attend on me  
 To give me whatsoever I shall ask,  
 To tell me whatsoever I demand,

Dr Faustus denies all ethics and principles and makes a tremendous revolt against Christianity.

Dr Faustus also stretches his imagination as far as the mind of a man goes. Had he many souls as the stars he would give all to Mephistophilis. By him he would be the great emperor of the world, he would make a bridge through the moving air he would pass the ocean with a band of men he would join the hills that bind the African shore and join it to Spain. Dr Faustus is also a votary of boundless imagination. The eight days travel in the sky is highly romantic also. The chorus tells us that Faustus learns the secrets of astronomy, the clouds the planets the stars the Tropic zones and the quarters of the sky. Before arriving Rome he sees the stately town of Treves visits Naples the golden tomb of Virgil the city of Venice and Padua. Mephistophilis describes to him the city of Rome which stands on the seven hills, with Timber running through it. He also describes a castle within whose walls is a huge store of weapons of war. This description seems to inspire Coleridge in his *Kubla Khan*.

Love of beauty and sensual pleasure is a feature of renaissance. Dr Faustus tells Mephistophiles that he cant live without a wife. He requests him to get most beautiful German maid as his wife. His longing for Helen the peerless dame of Greece heaven in her lips his kisses to her , destruction for Troy for Helen expose his supreme love of beauty and yearning for

sensual pleasure. This lyrical passage illustrates wonderfully the renaissance features of love ,beauty and romance.

Was this face that launched a thousands ships

And burnt the topless towers of Illium?

Sweet Helen make me immortal with a kiss,

Her lips such forth my soul; see where it flies,

Come Helen come, give me my soul again,

Here will I dwell for heaven is in these lips

And all is dross that is not Helena.

A.C. Swinburne says,` in the vision of Helen, the intense perception of loveliness gives actual sublimity to the sweetness and radiance of mere beauty in the passionate and spontaneous selection of words which are the most choice and perfect.`

The medieval world placed God at the centre of existence and shunted aside man and the natural world. Individualism means life is importance to one and his first priority. This is why in the medieval era people have no knowledge , no study etc. They move back from all basic things. Superstitious belief make people fool. Renaissance puts new emphasis on the individualism. Because of his individual desire Faustus makes a contract for knowledge and authority. His desire according to Renaissance is to transgress the limitation of humanity and rise to greater achievements and heights. Faustus rebels against the limitations of medieval knowledge and the restrictions put upon the mankind decreeing that he must name his individual place in the universe without challenging it. Besides the early days believe that society is everything. Individual desire and place did not mean anything before society. But during

renaissance these things get first priority and in this way individualism rose. Clarence Green says, 'Tragedy of Faustus that of extreme individualist who can have no God but himself.'

Theocracy of the medieval period was transformed into homocentric. The emphasis was shifted from God to man. Man was no longer viewed as a puny creature, utterly helpless against the forces of nature. Medievalism considers spiritual life is more than worldly life but during Renaissance people considers the value of worldly life. This known human concept is priority first than religious concept. In *Dr Faustus* we saw that he sold his soul to Lucifer in exchange of twenty four years of constant service from Mephistophilis .By giving value earthly life he supported Renaissance period.

When the man who has transgresses against the natural laws of the universe is justifiably punished which we find in *Dr Faustus*,

Till Swollen with cunning of a self conceit,

His waxen wings did mount above his reach.

And melting heaven conspired his overthrow;

For falling to a devilish exercise,

After getting power Faustus is going against human boundary and got proper punishment. Here we can remember moral from Icarus-Faustus is gone; Regard his hellish fall, whose mindful fortune may exhort the wise. Armed with his new power and attended by Mephistophilis, Faustus begins to travel, he goes to the Pope's court in Rome, makes himself invisible and plays a series of tricks. He disrupts the Pope's banquet by stealing food and boxing with Pope's ears. In the medieval period church is all to man. Faustus' satire of the church and pope is a direction to Renaissance.

## Conclusion

Dr Faustus` challenge to the power of God when he brings Alexander and his paramour by magic art ,his taking the description of hell as mere trifle and old wife`s tale and his activity at the Pope`s palace all smack of Renaissance. So Dr Faustus can be credited as the very incarnation of the genius of Renaissance.

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