
UNIT 1 CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE AND THE ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit helps you to understand the Elizabethan drama of which Christopher Marlowe is one of the chief representatives. The focus in this unit is on the distinctive growth of Elizabethan comedy and tragedy. An attempt is made to show how tragedy effectively reflects the cultural aspirations and the keen intellectual sensitivity of the Elizabethans.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Christopher Marlowe is the originator of the mature English tragedy. Between the playwrights who preceded him like Thomas Kyd and those who succeeded him like

1.13 SUMMING UP : THE MODERNITY OF ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDY

What the Elizabethans have done in formulating a tragic method and vision is the definition of a modern scientific temper and attitude to life that began with the Renaissance and extends itself to contemporary times. Hieronimo, Tamburlaine, Dr. Faustus, Hamlet, King Lear, Othello and Macbeth, if we are to forget their Elizabethan lineage, are striking dramatic approximations of the states of mind modern man struggles to cope with, as restlessly as the Elizabethan protagonists attempted to do. In the age of nuclear technology, we are still beset with a Tamburlaine and the Faustian problem of reconciling infinite human potential with situational possibilities. In the realm of personal relations, we err as tragically as Lear, Hamlet or Othello. The story of man has remained unchanged for the last several centuries. Man succeeds eminently with his given potentialities but fails far more easily than he succeeds. The tragedy of the contemporary man is strikingly Elizabethan and, particularly, Marlovian. As Harry Levin would say we "cannot but discern" our "culture hero in the ancient myth of Icarus (and) in Marlowe's tragedy of the scientific libertine who gained control over nature while losing control of himself."⁶

1.14 REFERENCES

1. Harry Levin "Marlowe Today" *Drama Review* 8, 4, 1963-64, pp.22-23.
2. F.P. Wilson. *The English Drama 1485-1585*. Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1969. Pp.126-127.
3. Aristotle quoted in translation from poetics in Collier's Encyclopaedia.
4. T.B. Tomlinson. *A Study of Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 1964. pp.3-4.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.11-12.
6. Harry Levin. *The Overreacher: The Study of Christopher Marlowe*. Boston: Beacon Press 1952, p.134.

1.15 KEY WORDS

Reformation

A religious movement in the sixteenth century Europe for the reformation of the doctrines and institutions of the Christian Church led by Martin Luther (1483-1546). The Reformation laid primacy on the individual faith to the exclusion of sacramental action. It held that the scripture, the word of God, speaks directly to the conscience of the Christian without the intermediary of the Church authority.

Renaissance

A complex of literary and artistic movements stimulated by the study of classical literature and art during the fourteenth and fifteenth century in Europe. Historical self-consciousness, reform of Christian society through classical education, liberation of the human mind from superstition and error were some of the important features of the Renaissance movement. The movement synchronizes with the growing prosperity of the European nations. More than anything else, Renaissance championed the worth of the human individual.

Despair in God, and trust in Belzebub:
Now go not backward: no, Faustus, be resolute:
Why waver'st thou? O, something soundeth in mine ears,
'Abjure this magic, turn to God again!
Ay and Faustus will turn to God again.
To God? He loves thee not;
The god thou serv'st is thine own appetite...
Wherein is fix'd the love of Belzebub:
To him I'll build an altar and a church,
And offer lukewarm blood of new born babes⁶ (II, i, 1-15)

Faustus has damned himself through his egocentric indulgences and is beyond repair. The incorrigible state makes Faustus despair in God, a despair that makes him continue his self-indulgence for which the king of devils provides the fascination and the means. Obviously, despair is not totally the resulting state of his self-indulgences but has rather shaped his self pursuits. Faustus' state of mind transcends his mental frame and is, possibly, rooted in his particular religious persuasion. The new protestant faith of the Elizabethans experiences a chasm between God and his worshippers, having repudiated the intermediary role of the Holy Roman Church and its order of the saints, rituals and other processes of salvation. In the sceptical mood about the Catholic Church's religious practices, a faith in God and His Justness came to be intertwined with a certain despair in God. Despair reflects a fear of God and the want of a satisfying or self-fulfilling experience of Him. Faustus's despair and his refusal to believe in his salvation, as the orthodox church would ordain him, leading to the kind of blasphemy he makes, is closely associated, as critics like C. Lily, B. Cambell and C.L. Barber view, with the protestant "casuistry". The protestants looked upon conscience as a more effective way, than the prescribed rituals, of reaching God. Marlowe does not champion the protestant's individual path to God, but uses blasphemy in the Faust legend for dramatising heroic possibilities of the Renaissance inspired aspirations. Significantly, Faustus does not express faithlessness in God. He wants to be like Him, and, as despair sets in, he only feels that God would not love him and wonders whether He could harm him after he has deserted Him for the company of Mephostophilis.

As despair leads to the self-indulgent belief that divine providence as well as the divine wrath cannot reach him, Faustus signs the pact with the devil giving away his soul in return for his services.

However, Faustus' pact with the devil is as self-indulgent as his rejection of divinity, both being subject to human vacillation. As Faustus fluctuates between despair and repentance, so does he flee from the devil, and surrender to the devil alternately renewing his contact with the devil after every bout of repentance. The pattern of self-willed despair and damnation becomes so intense and pervasive that in a given moment, he feels despairingly damned and also, self-assuredly, defiant of divinity. His "blood congeals" when he signs the pact and feels his arm inscribed with a divine warning - "Homofuge", Man flee, but there is the self-assurance that his senses have deceived him and, even if he were not deceived, he would not flee from the pact.

If divinity is unsatisfying and, thus frustrating, so is the devil unable to answer or give every thing he asks for. If he could retain his faith in God in spite of despairing and rejecting Him, he would stick to the devil for whatever it could give him for there is no alternative to God and the devil; he is born and bred in the realm of God but has chosen to live defiantly and voluptuously in the realm of the devil.

The morality structure of the play minus the morality kind of a submissive hero but one with an individualistic conceit builds up the tragedy of Faustus. It is not totally Faustus' sinful conceit that gives the particular kind of tragic agony to the play. In his conceit, Faustus looks askance at God and convential Christianity as to why they seek the abject surrender of man and thus degrade him particularly when man is made in the image of God and craves to be like Him on the earth: "Be thou on earth as Jove

2.13 REFERENCES

1. Douglas Cole. *Suffering and Evil in the plays of Christopher Marlowe*. New Jersey, Princeton University. 1962. P.24.
2. Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, Madras. Mac Millan, 1975, p.5.
3. *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.
4. Bartlett Giamatti "Marlowe: The art of Illusion". *The Yale Review* 61: 1971-72, p.538.
5. Phoebe S. Spinard. "The Dilettante's Lie in *Doctor Faustus*" *Texas Studies in Literature & Language* 24,3,1982. Pp.243-44.
6. Christopher Marlowe. *Doctor Faustus*, Act II Scene I 1-15.
7. Nicholas Brooke. "The Moral tragedy of *Dr. Faustus*". *Critics on Marlowe*. ed. Judith O'Neill London George Allen & Unwin, 1969. p.100.
8. *Ibid.*, p.104.
9. Christopher Marlowe. *Doctor Faustus*, p.22.
10. *Ibid.*, p.23.
11. *Ibid.* These lines are quoted by Leo Kirschbaum from 1616 version of *Doctor Faustus* edited by W. W. Gred (Leo Kirschbaum "Doctor Faustus: A Reconsideration" *Critics on Marlowe* Judith O'Neill ed. London. George Allen Unwin. 1969.
12. Christopher Marlowe. *Doctor Faustus*, pp.48-49.
13. *Ibid.*, p.47.
14. *Ibid.*, p.51.
15. J.P. Bröckbank. "The Damnation of Faustus" *Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays. Twentieth Century Views*. ed. Clifford Leech New Jersey: Prentice Hall 1964. P.116.
16. Kenneth L. Golden "Myth, Psychology and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*" *College Literature* 12,3,1985, pp.203-4.
17. *Ibid.*

2.14 KEY WORDS

1. **Casuistry:** Derived from Latin casus meaning case, the word pertains to the application of moral principles, largely in theology, to singular cases of conscience. The protestant focus on individual conscience in deciding religious matters as against the authority of the church in such matters has brought the phrase, protestant casuistry into popular case. Since moral or religious law is always abstract, hence the need for casuistry. Even early

Christianity depended on casuistry for solving the individual religious problems of the people. St. Paul used casuistry at great length in his first epistle to the Corinthians to define the moral law on the eating of sacrificial meat, on work and virginity etc.

2. **Farce:** Latin *Farsa* from *farciare*, to stuff viands. Originally an interlude between the parts of a serious play, farce as a form of comedy presents a boisterous action. Rarely an independent play, even a good comedy like Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Twelfth Night* are difficult to imagine without the element of farce that abounds in these plays.
3. **Icarus:** Son of Daedalus in Greek mythology. Daedalus, along with his son, Icarus, having incurred the wrath of King Minos, for their cunning activities flee by fastening wings to their bodies. Rather overambitious, Icarus flies very near the sun. His waxen wings melt under the heat of the Sun and Icarus falls into the sea. Since then, Icarus becomes a synonym for an overreacher.
4. **Necromancy:** Derived from the Greek *nekros*, a dead body, necromancy is the art of divining the future by consuming up the spirits of the dead and questioning them. Though the practice had been in vogue right from the times of ancient Greece, it was only in the middle ages, that it acquired an anti-religious character and came to be viewed very seriously by the Christian Church.
5. **Neurosis:** Dissociation of personality due to the existence of complexes. When complexes become incompatible with the conscious part of the personality, the dissociation of personality takes place creating a personality split with the incompatible complexes seeking an indirect expression. In the modern world, one does not suffer from a conflict of conscious compulsions but from neurosis, the human personality seeking an indirect or vicarious expression of multivalent feelings. The term was made popular by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, psychologists in the early part of the 20th century who are responsible for the science of mental health called psychoanalysis.
6. **Skepticism:** A critical attitude in philosophy that ranges from refusing to admit the possibility of knowledge to subjecting every claim of knowledge to strict proof. The third century Greek philosopher, Sextus Empiricus, Rene Descartes in the seventeenth century and Bertrand Russell in the 20th century championed skepticism. Over the centuries, skepticism or skeptical attitude is instrumental in checking all extravagant claims to knowledge.
7. **Slapstick:** Knock about comedy. Slapdash methods. Originally a slapstick was a wand made of two flat pieces of wood with a handle. It was used by the harlequin in a pantomime. When he struck one of his companions, the slapstick made a loud report.

2.15 QUESTIONS

Questions

1. Discuss *Doctor Faustus* as a play in the English Morality Tradition.
2. Discuss *Doctor Faustus* as an Aristotelean tragedy.
3. Discuss how *Doctor Faustus* illustrates English protestianism.

4. Critically examine how *Doctor Faustus* attempts to depart from a comedy of evil to become a tragedy of human heroism.
5. Examine Marlowe's intellectual and dramatic achievement in *Doctor Faustus*.
6. Examine *Doctor Faustus* as a tragedy of Neurosis and relate it to the predicament of contemporary man.

2.16 ANNOTATIONS

Annotate the following passages with reference to the context.

- a. Are not thy bills hung up as monuments,
Whereby whole cities have escap'd the Plague,
And thousand desperate maladies been eased?
- b. Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man.
- c. The Emperor shall not live but my leave,
Nor any potentate of Germany
- d. Away with such vain fancies, and despair:
Despair in God, and trust in Belzebub.
- e. The god thou serv'st is thine own appetite,
Wherein is fixed the love of Belzebub.
- f. Homo, fuge: whither should I fly?
- g. If unto God, he'll throw me down to hell.
My senses are deceive'd here's nothing writ:-
- h. Tush, these are trifles and mere old wives tales.
- i. Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just:
There's none but I have interest in the same.

2.17 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. C.L. Barber. "The form of Faustus' fortunes good and bad" *Drama Review*, 8.4, 1963-64. Pp.92-100. Discussion of Faustus' revolt in terms of Calvinist protestianism.
2. Golden L. Kenneth. "Myth, Psychology and *Doctor Faustus*" *College Literature* 12,3, 1985, pp.202-10. Discussion of Unconscious split personality and Neurosis.
3. Clifford, Leech. *Marlowe: A Collection of Essays: Twentieth Century views*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1964. Along with an introduction by Clifford Leech, there are essays by T.S. Eliot, Una Ellis Fermor on Marlowe, and essays by JP Brockband and W.W. Grag on the damnation of Faustus, besides the critical essays by the critics on the other plays of Marlowe.
4. Judith, O'Neill. *Critics on Marlowe*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969. The book presents a survey of the significant criticism on Christopher Marlowe from the Elizabethan times to the contemporary times.