

Block

3

MARLOWE: DOCTOR FAUSTUS

Block Introduction

UNIT 1

Marlowe: Life and Works

UNIT 2

Textual Analysis

UNIT 3

Themes

UNIT 4

Critical Perspectives/ Re-tellings

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Block Introduction

Block 3: Christopher Marlowe: *Dr. Faustus*

This block is comprehensively focused on the great play *Dr. Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe. The play offers a view of the ideological scene that prevailed in the sixteenth century England. It was a scene of serious doubt and sharp questioning. In it, intellect and knowledge stood on one side and faith stood on the other. The two violently clashed. The question posed by the playwright was whether faith was a pure and positive entity or it was accompanied by the workings of Mephistopheles, a fallen angel and one whose mission was to misguide and distract from the virtuous path that believers may have adopted. Marlowe visualized his hero Dr. Faustus standing on the crossroads. As we know, the play's ending was tragic. More, it was extremely violent. This block connects such an action with the times when the play was written in the early fifteen nineties (first performed in 1592). The discussion goes beyond the text to the life and broader concerns of the playwright. Since the text is sharply dramatic with different points of view presented in no uncertain terms, it evoked controversies and debates in its own time and later. It was observed that the play was deeply irreligious and it gave credence to atheism. The accusation took help from the sympathy that the audience might have for the sufferings of the great scholar Dr. Faustus—was he not the villain hero? The discussion also engages with the aesthetic aspect of literature and highlights significantly the use of blank verse.

UNIT 1 MARLOWE: LIFE AND WORKS

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Christopher Marlowe: His Life
- 1.3 The Social Context
- 1.4 The Turning Point
- 1.5 Renaissance and its impact on Elizabethan Theatre
- 1.6 Works of Christopher Marlowe
 - 1.6.1 *Tamburlaine The Great*
 - 1.6.2 *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*
 - 1.6.3 *The Jew of Malta*
 - 1.6.4 *The Massacre at Paris*
 - 1.6.5 *Edward The Second*
 - 1.6.6 *Dido, Queen of Carthage*
- 1.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8 Keywords
- 1.9 Questions
- 1.10 Suggested Readings

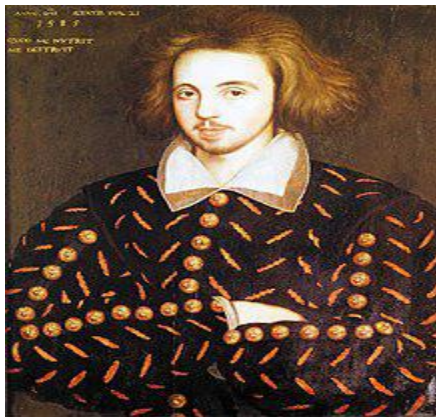
1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you understand Marlowe the man and the playwright. It will also provide to you a glimpse into the Renaissance movement and the growth of Elizabethan Drama. A brief summary of all the plays by Marlowe will develop in students a better understanding of the dramatic vision of Marlowe.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Before we proceed to understand in detail the drama before Marlowe and other notions of the Elizabethan society, let us have a word about Marlowe, the great intellectual and free-spirited playwright of his times. The Elizabethan age in the history of English literature is unique in the sense that one finds an unprecedented literary activity in England at the time. More precisely, drama as a literary genre flourished immensely with Shakespeare being its most eloquent spokesperson. Marlowe is undoubtedly the greatest of Shakespeare's predecessors in drama.

1.2 CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE: HIS LIFE



Christopher Marlowe
(source: en.wikipedia.org)

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593), poet and playwright, was the son of John and Catherine Marlowe. He was born in Canterbury in 1564. His father was a shoemaker. Given the fact that his father was a man of humble means and meagre resources, Christopher's achieving higher education was most improbable. However, the child Christopher had a sharp intellect and a deep interest for reading and knowing. He received his early education at The King's School, Canterbury. The sheer spark of brilliance won him an Archbishop Parker Scholarship and led him to Corpus Christi College in the University of Cambridge. This Scholarship was sponsored by a group of charitable Elizabethans who funded the boys' coming from poor families; the purpose was to foster talent in poor boys. In 1584, Marlowe graduated as Bachelor of Arts. The Parker Scholarship was awarded for three years and could be extended for another three years on condition that the student would certify to undertake the Holy orders. Marlowe was not the one to miss this opportunity. He fulfilled this condition and his scholarship was extended for the next three years.

Soon, Marlowe's aspirations took wings and he started taking liberties with those placed high in society. His long absences from Cambridge gave the university enough reasons to demand an explanation from him and to threaten to withhold his degree of Masters of Arts in 1587. But by this time Marlowe had built up connections to withstand pressure from the authorities.

The college record book holds an account of his frequent absences and his anarchic ways. He managed to carry a letter of recommendations from the authorities which explained the reason for his absences from the university saying: "Marlowe had done her Majestic good service, and deserved to be rewarded for his faithful dealings." (Quoted in Gill, Roma. Ed. "Introduction." *Christopher Marlowe: Dr Faustus*. London: A&C Black Publishers Ltd, 2004, p.1) Obviously, there was something fishy in this "good service". It definitely raises certain doubts about Marlowe's motives. His becoming a secret agent substantiates these doubts.

Marlowe left for London with an M.A. degree in his hands. He travelled abroad in the capacity of a secret agent. He settled in London in 1586 and joined the Lord Admiral's Company of players to become an actor. This was the time when he tried his hand at writing plays and switched over to the career of a dramatist. Marlowe wrote memorable plays, heralding powerful English tragic drama which proved to be path-breaking. But as destiny would have it, Marlowe had a very short span of life to live. On 30th May, 1593, he was stabbed to death in an inn at Deptford by a shady secret service agent Ingram Frizar. He died barely at the age of 29 years. Yet his brilliant and outstanding contribution in the short span of five years makes him an unforgettable and a most loved of the Elizabethan playwrights. It will not be inappropriate to give him the credit for ushering the powerful English tragic drama, so much evolved in form and content that came to be considered one of the chief achievements of English literature. History has always held in high esteem the path breakers, pioneers and cult-makers and Marlowe was the one who actually changed the entire course of English tragic drama. Though Marlowe died very young, yet he left about half a dozen tragedies that remain unmatched till today. These are: *Tamburlaine (1587)*, *Doctor Faustus (1586)*, *The Jew of Malta (1589)*, *Edward II (1591)*, *The Massacre at Paris (1592)* and *Dido, Queen of Carthage (1593)*.

1.3 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

Enriched with vast biblical and classical scholarship, a rebellious spirit and a very fine poetic imagination, Marlowe marks the end of the adolescent phase in English drama. With him, the mature tragedy begins. Marlowe got in legacy the traditions of medieval Christianity. After the Reformation Miracle and Mystery plays ceased to entertain the English audience. This was because they were too restricted to more spiritual themes. To cater to the emerging popular taste, came the Interlude to offer a short dramatic entertainment within a play of serious nature with a purpose to offer the much required relief. With this, a lot of fun and frolic was generated, and the actors wearing bright gorgeous coloured costumes attracted the audience. But on the whole, drama was yet to develop a well-defined structure as well as serious themes to appeal

to the taste of the general public. Before the arrival of Marlowe, everything was in a chaotic and formless state.

1.4 THE TURNING POINT

A change came to the English dramatic field in 15th century with a new-found interest in the revival of learning. As a consequence, many great Italian tragedies of Seneca were translated into English. In fact, Renaissance had a tremendous influence on the development of English drama. (We shall take up the meaning of the word “Renaissance” in the later part of this chapter. Here, you only need to understand that “renaissance” or “re-birth” or revival of learning erupted as a movement roughly around 14th century. It had its genesis in Italy and soon spread all through Europe and then to England too). The first English tragedy was *Gorboduc* (1562) by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville. The impact of Senecan tragedies was quite evident in *Gorboduc*, both in style and treatment of the theme. Senecan tragedies were known for their long tedious speeches, horrible scenes, gruesome murders, crude ghosts and slow pace of action. And *Gorboduc*, with little moderations here and there, followed the Senecan formula. The tragedies that were written after *Gorboduc* followed the same traits. The Elizabethan Drama truly required a great genius to resurrect it from the ghastly effects found in Senecan tragedies. Marlowe happened to be the right man at the right time -- to him, undoubtedly, goes the credit of bringing the English tragedy to the next level and investing it with passion, poignancy and maturity that made people not only appreciate it but also develop with its help an immediate and urgent affinity with the characters of his plays. Moreover, Marlowe introduced a new kind of blank verse in his tragedies that breathed freshness into the dull verse of the old plays. Another feature that endeared Marlowe to his audience was his poignant style of writing. The element of passion was unmistakable in his plays. And, therefore, we have some powerful expressions and dialogues from his plays that remain etched in our minds forever. These expressions remain unparalleled in their appeal. It was Marlowe, the powerful dramatist and a marvellous and outstanding personality to bring this turning point to the English tragedy.

Dear Students, before we move to discuss Marlowe’s works with their distinct, striking features, let us learn a little about “Renaissance”. I am sure that the earlier mention of the term must have generated some curiosity in you to dig into the connotations of the term. It is also pertinent to understand Renaissance as Marlowe is a typical product of it and he casts his heroes with the same traits that define the age.

1.5 RENAISSANCE AND ITS IMPACT ON ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

The word “renaissance” etymologically means “revival” or “rebirth”. It was a period in European history from 14th to 17th century in Italy that saw origin and flowering of Renaissance. The movement was cultural in nature and marked the revival of the classical Greek and Italian classical art, architecture and literature. This revival of learning had far-reaching consequences. As Hudson says in *An Outline History of English Literature*, that “revival began, as we have learned, with Petrarch and Boccaccio in the 14th century, but it is with the fifteenth that we enter the great age of Italian humanism, when monastic libraries were ransacked and innumerable, long-forgotten treasures of Greek and Latin literature brought to light, and when a boundless enthusiasm for classic studies swept through the whole educated community. In the development of literature this revival of learning worked in two ways: it did much to emancipate thought from the bondage of medieval theology by restoring the generous spirit and ideals of pagan antiquity; and it presented writers with literary masterpieces which they might take as a model for their own efforts. For these two reasons, renaissance is regarded as a Chief force in the making of modern European literatures.” (*Hudson, William Henry. An Outline History of English Literature. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2015, p.35*)

Mark the words “humanism” and restoring the “generous spirit” in the above quotation. They indicate a clear cut shift from the earlier restrictive traditions of Miracle and Mystery plays. Let us ponder in some

detail how the tradition of Miracle and Mystery plays came into existence. The Elizabethan drama emerged in England somewhere around the middle of 16th century as an answer to the growing need of the general masses for entertainment and diversion. Elizabethans had to take cognizance of the persuasive influence that Church exercised in their lives. Thus, theatre became the most appropriate platform for imparting religious and moral instruction. The illustrations of the stories of the Old and New Testament, particularly during festivals like Christmas and Easter, through dramatic preparations became an important part of the Roman Catholic liturgy.

Initially the clergy used to perform in the plays which, with a passage of time, included actors from among the masses. This religious tradition became quite popular among the English people in 14th century as Mystery and Miracle plays, the former picking up stories from the Bible and the latter transforming the lives of Christian saints into dramatic performances. The wide appeal of these dramatic performances can be gauged from the fact that the venue had to shift from the cathedral to open public places to accommodate the increasing number of audience. This religious drama later advanced in the form of the Morality play which was a growth from the religious to the didactic themes. These plays were allegorical in nature and the abstract qualities like vice, virtue, avarice, pride, ignorance, love, mercy, justice etc. were personified to exhibit the external battle between the good and evil forces. The dramatic tension got heightened in the play due to the forces of good and evil trying to overpower each other. These morality plays established a sense of faith in the people that there prevails a law of nature that restores balance in the end. This was irrespective of the seeming invincible nature of evil. Morality plays had a long history in England beginning with the fifteenth century and continuing till the whole of the sixteenth century. More significantly, the plays also had to adapt to the upsurge of the revival of classical art and learning i.e. Renaissance morality plays gave a large scope for the interplay of human sentiments, paradoxes and dilemmas. Coinciding with Renaissance, the scope for “humanism” and the “generous spirit” that Hudson talked about was strengthened more. Some representative morality plays of the early Tudor period were the *Castle of Perseverance* (1425), *The Pride of Life* (1425) and *Everyman* (1500). Some later plays like *Impatient Poverty* (1547-58), *Mary Magdelene* (1490), *The Conflict of Conscience* (1581), *The Nature of the Four Elements* (1517-27) deal more or less with the social problems of the day through the allegorical method. These plays exhibit the emerging and fast spreading spirit of Renaissance, its leaning towards quest for exploring the unknown, and the infinite, human beings’ relation to nature. Later, the potential strengths and limitations offered didactically the essential fallibility of man.

In the context of such social circumstances, the evolution of the Elizabethan dramatic genres of comedy and tragedy could be seen. What is important to know is that both the genres (tragedy and comedy) found it difficult to free themselves from the impact of Biblical tradition, hence projecting the dual perspective of the essential human condition as an infallible, insignificant comic figure. In the case of tragedy, however, the burden of untold sufferings, being caught in a web of certain external forces beyond his control, attracted attention. However, drama was still in its experimental phase. The earliest, recorded comedy is *Ralph Roister Doister* (1553) written by Nicholas Udall and the earliest tragedy is *Gorboduc* written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton are to be noted. It was around this time that Elizabethan theatre was emerging as a great presence, integrating the elements of classical drama with the Greek framework of tragedy and comedy, yet evolving its uniquely English tinge.

The Latin plays of Seneca offered great inspiration to the English tragedy in its initial phase. The oft-repeated, popular components of the Senecan tragedies, like soliloquies, revenge motif, supernatural, role of chance or fate were adopted and incorporated by Thomas Kyd, Marlowe and Shakespeare and the plays proved to be extremely popular with the Elizabethan audiences. Amidst the mixed influence of Greek formulation of tragedy along with the classical Roman models of tragedy like those of Ovid, Plutarch and Seneca, the Elizabethan drama gained energy and momentum. The focus now shifted to the individual, his dilemmas, his relation to society as well as nature and the notion of public morality. Immersed in the Renaissance spirit, the Elizabethan drama explored the issues of human potential and possibilities, in a human centered world and sought to highlight man’s ambivalent relation with the forces inherent in the

world and human life, thereby changing the patterns of morality and the definition of good and evil. It is in such an atmosphere that Marlowe wrote his plays and the influence of these traits and trends can be easily seen in all his plays. The Marlovian hero is an embodiment of the typical renaissance spirit, puffed up with high aspirations, a questioning spirit and an intense urge to explore and unearth the paradoxes and mysteries of the world.

1.6 WORKS OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

Marlowe's dramatic career spans six brief years, from 1587 to 1593. Yet, he displayed his best poetic genius and wrote six splendid plays in these six years. All the plays exhibit Marlowe's essential spirit, cast in passion, intensity and poignancy. Each of his plays dramatizes a particular passion taken to an extremity till it consumes itself. The central character shows an extraordinary yearning for empire, knowledge and power which is pivotal to the scheme of the play. The force and energy with which Marlowe develops his characters is breathtaking. There are rarely any sub-plots to Marlowe's plays. In all these one comes across an awesome grandeur, intense passions, and a sublime tone. The list of Marlowe's works in a chronological logical order is as under:

1.6.1 *Tamburlaine The Great*

Tamburlaine the Great, the first play by Christopher Marlowe was produced in 1587. The Great success with which the play was greeted on its first performance encouraged Marlowe to write its second part too. The subject matter and Marlowe's "mighty line" as Ben Jonson called it, took the theatre by storm and set blank verse as the standard for later Elizabethan writers. The very opening lines of the play declare an emphatic departure from the previous trends of play writing:

From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits,
And such conceits as downage keeps in pay,
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 scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.

(*Steane, J.B. Ed. Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays. England: Penguin Books, p.105*)

(Prologue, 105)

Tamburlaine is the story of a Scythian Shepherd, an interesting study of ambitions taken to its extremes. He nurtures the dreams of conquering the world. The play is also commendable for the energy-filled use of blank verse, an innovative venture of Marlowe. The play is based on the history of Timur the Lame (1336-1406), a Mongol King and descendant of Genghis Khan.

In *Timur the Lame*, Marlowe creates his first powerful hero who epitomizes true Renaissance traits. He is defiant, ambitious, bold and ever ready for challenges. *Tamburlaine* goes ahead from one victory to another by the sheer force of his ambitious nature. He is the creator of his own destiny and there is no one to stop him. *Tamburlaine* is a study of indomitable human will, fearless spirit, high aspirations and wild energy. With such characteristics he virtually finds no one to stop him from achieving his goals. As he says to Theridamas:

Forsake thy king and do but join with me
And we will triumph over all the world:
I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains
And with my hand turn fortune's white about. (I, (ii), 116)

Noteworthy is the fact that "Fate", "destiny" or "circumstance" does not dominate or overpower the character, as it used to in the earlier tragedies, instead, the character is in full control of his destiny. It is

this reversal of roles that makes Tamburlaine typically and essentially a renaissance man. The leading ideology in the play is:

Man's desire and valiance that range,
All circumstance and come to port unspent.

In the character of Tamburlaine, Marlowe has created a hero who defies convention, challenges the traditional morality, is passionate, eloquent, and unbelievably optimistic and has a sense of conviction that he can control the universe. It is due to this sense of conviction that he refuses to see the world as a massive force and the human being a helpless, vulnerable figure in front of it. *Tamburlaine* is a great play because Marlowe presents a new type of hero who frees man from the oppressive, restrictive and rigid moral code existing in the England society of the time. The play offers to the readers a much broader scope to weigh man's relation with the universe. It is this philosophical dilemma that makes the play timeless and universal in its appeal. And the most beautiful part is that the play avoids simple didactic approach that would have sounded like moral preaching and would have undermined the artistic worth of the play. All in all, *Tamburlaine* is the most resplendent of Marlowe's plays.

1.6.2 *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*

This play, is known as the most important play by Marlowe. Dr Faustus, a great scholar had mastered all the possible branches of knowledge. He had acquired an almost perfect command over philosophy, medicine, law and theology. Yet, his hunger for more knowledge and power made him represent, at once, the typical Renaissance man. Despite being a distinguished scholar of the highest order, the nagging question that irked Dr Faustus was:

"Yet art thou still but Faustus and a man" (1, (i), 266).

Let us proceed to know the story of Dr. Faustus further from this point. We learn later that his inordinate ambition, his deep urge to know the mysterious and the unknown that makes him take recourse to black magic. As a result he sells his soul to the devil in return for 24 years during which he shall be provided with everything that catches his fancy. Dr Faustus is as ambitious and passionate as Tamburlaine and believes that he can bring the entire world under his control. Read the following:

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:

A Sound magician is a mighty God. (I, (i), 267)

The exalted language of the play with its memorable lines leave a lasting impact on one's mind. Just like Tamburlaine, Faustus, too, makes a desperate attempt to fathom the deep seated layers of knowledge only to realize the futility of it all in the end. The high spiritual dilemma experienced by Faustus makes this play a powerful literary work. Faustus' dilemma is at once spiritual, philosophical and psychological in nature. That life is essentially a network of paradoxes is eternally true and this Faustian predicament is common to all humanity. For this reason, it makes one identify with the character of Dr Faustus. His inquisitiveness, his curiosity to know the unknown is common to us all, though in different degrees.

Taking clue from the old German legend, Marlowe has created this great work of art along established lines of tradition. It is a play of vast conflicts, intense feelings, passionate outbursts and violent fancies. Of course, the play embodies the Christian perspective of good and evil forces in the symbolic presentation of good angel and evil angel pulling Dr Faustus in their respective directions. Hence intensifying the tragic dilemma. The only tragic flaw in the character of Dr Faustus is that he fails to realize that power without responsibility leads one to a dead-end. Faustus wanted to be powerful but only to satiate his individual curiosities. Any station of power, if not directed towards social welfare becomes

self-consuming. Too much individualism can be destructive. Also, one has to set limits to one's ambitions, and respect the limitations of being a human. The play is open to multiple interpretations and offers the most troubling insights into the complexities of human mind cutting across time and space. A matchless spiritual tragedy as it is, Dr Faustus touches the deepest chords of human mind with a symbolism that has an irresistible appeal.

1.6.3 *The Jew of Malta*

The Jew of Malta that outwardly appears to be a drama of deceit, frauds and intrigues, has something significant to say. The central character Barabas enters into a series of conspiracies but the question is: 'why does he do so?' And the answer is racial discrimination and religious conflict which serves as the root cause of all the deceptions. The play is a story of violent conflict between Christians, Jews and Turks. The play starts with Machiavelli's statement in the Prologue: "Religion is but a childish toy". (Prologue, 347). This prepares the reader to meet certain characters imbuing the spirit of Machiavelli (Machiavelli was an Italian politician and the writer of the most controversial work *The Prince*. The term Machiavellian is used in a negative sense to exemplify the ruthless, unscrupulous and opportunistic people. He is considered as the father of modern political theory who argued that politics is a science and not a part of philosophy.) *The Jew of Malta* is dedicated to the spirit of Machiavelli and suggests that statesmen must know the art of maneuvering in order to protect their own interests. The play unfolds many themes, for instance, that man is capable of challenging and countering destiny by the sheer force of his will power. At another level, the play leaves a message that God's will subordinates human being's capacity to control events. Yet another theme is that vengeance is self-consuming as it destroys Barabas in the play. *The Jew of Malta* proved immensely successful on the stage. It also became an inspiration for Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*.

In *Jew of Malta*, we have another extraordinary hero Barabas whose character-trait is his avarice for money. He does not originally belong to Malta and has come here for the opportunities that Malta provides for trade and cultural exchange. He is the wealthiest merchant amongst the alien Jewish community of Malta. Barabas is obsessed with two things in particular – Money and his daughter Abigail. The political situation serves the backdrop of the play. Malta is subjugated by the Turks who charge a particular amount of money as revenue. But Malta at that point has not paid this revenue over a decade. A way out is finally devised to solve this situation. The wealthiest citizens of the country are given two choices: either they give away half of their property, or else convert to Christianity. Barabas refuses to convert into a Christian and therefore all his property is confiscated. But Barabas is not the one to give up so easily. He has a plan. Abigail will pretend that she wants to convert to Christianity and enter the nunnery. His plans succeed and he is able to recover Gold with which he buys a slave – Ithamore. Two new characters are introduced in the play – Lodowick and Mathias. Both these boys are in love with Abigail and here Barabas plays another trick. He separately promises to give away Abigail to one or the other. Barabas actually wants that these men kill each other in pursuit of Abigail. Here also, Barabas succeeds in his plan as both try to kill each other in a duel because they are rivals in their pursuit of Abigail. Abigail somehow smells her father's evil designs and is disillusioned with filial bonds. She decides to become a nun. This shatters Barabas' hopes as was possessive of his daughter. He hatches another plan. With the help of Ithamore, he conspires to poison the entire nunnery. Abigail again senses her father's conspiracy and informs the Friar about it. The friar Bernadine along with another fellow friar Giacomo goes to meet Barabas but again Barabas is too shrewd for him. He throws a web of another conspiracy and declares that he wants to convert to Christianity. The two friars get into a fiery argument as to who is going to win Barabas and his money for his monastery. In this war Barabas kills Bernadine and accuses Giacomo for it. The Government executes Giacomo for the murder of Bernadine.

At this juncture, two new characters enter into the play, viz Bellamira and Pilia Borza. These two women plot with Ithamore to rob Barabas of his wealth. Here, too, Barabas is able to control the events. He disguises himself as a fiddling clown and offers poisoned flowers to them. On the other hand, the

Christian governor of Malta Ferneze who is preparing for the oncoming Turkish siege is informed by this group – Ithamore, Bellamira and Pilia Borza - that Barabas is a murderer. Ferneze puts all of them into prison as precaution. Ironically all die because of the slow effect of the poisoned flowers. As a new development in the play, Calymath, the Turkish leader joins hand with Barabas to stand against Ferneze and invade Malta. They strike a deal with each other: Barabas will help the Turks invade Malta and in turn Calymath will make Barabas Governor. The plan really works, Turks acquire control of Malta and Barabas is declared the new Governor. Ferneze is imprisoned but Barabas is not to be stopped in his dark motives. He strikes a deal with Ferneze to kill all the Turks in Malta in return for a huge ransom of money which Ferneze manages to collect from the Maltese citizens. Unfortunately for Barabas, this time the plan fails as Ferneze betrays him at the last moment. Towards the end of the play, we see the Turkish army being destroyed with Calymath standing all alone on the mercy of Ferneze. Barabas too is killed. And Ferneze emerges victorious once again as the governor of Malta.

1.6.4 *The Massacre at Paris*

This play takes into account the historical events of the times as well as addresses a unique political situation in England. It details the incident of St. Bartholomew's Day massacre provoked by the French royal rulers and Catholic nobles that include the Duke of Guise in which thousands of Protestants Huguenots were murdered in Paris in 1572. Almost all the Huguenot nobles along with the ordinary Protestants living in Paris – men women and children – were killed in this massacre. This mindless and horrific mass murder shocked the world more specifically the neighbouring protestant countries such as England and Netherlands.

The Massacre at Paris is regarded as Marlowe's most violent work. The excessive bloodshed makes the critics question the pointlessness of all this. Some critics like Sara Munson Deats, however, argue that this brutal violence and strong urge for revenge serve to underline the pointlessness of religious and political violence. She says "The bloodshed and violence come in full circle and the audience experiences a sickening sensation of déjà vu". Nevertheless the modern critical response to the play finds some strength in the presentation of the dramatis personae. The personal courage shown by Guise in face of death is one example. In addition to this, there are mighty lines and memorable phrases, magnificent speeches and very fine tragic turns and twists in the play. There is a debate regarding the part whatever Marlowe had himself written, and whether the play was an abridged version. On the whole, it is thought that the play has a strong protestant bias. Another view is that certain scenes are treated purely from the Catholic viewpoint.

1.6.5 *Edward The Second*

The play falls in the category of historical plays. It begins with Edward II recalling his favorite Pierce de Gaveston from exile. The people of England do not have a liking for Gaveston and are not happy that he has returned. Even the noblemen of England are vexed over the decision of Edward II to have sent for Gaveston who was banished by Edward's father. Among the others, young Mortimer hates Gaveston whole-heartedly. Gaveston is conferred with titles and powers on his comeback. The dislike for Gaveston arouses rebellion in the nobility and under the leadership of Mortimer, Warwick and Lancaster, they conspire to kill Gaveston. The archbishop of Canterbury and Queen Isabella (Edward's wife) also joins hands with the conspirators. Edward succumbed to the pressure of nobility and banishes Gaveston to Ireland. Edwards II neglects his responsibilities as a king, loses his wife Isabella to younger Mortimer, and provokes rebellion amongst his nobles who deprive him of his crown and eventually his life. Unlike the earlier plays of Marlowe, Edward II exhibits a mature plot, sustained theme and well-marked characters. *Edward II* is regarded as one of Marlowe's finest works.

1.6.6 *Dido, Queen of Carthage*

The material for this play was borrowed from Virgil's *Aeneid*. It is an unfinished work by Marlowe. Thomas Nashe completed it and made it ready for the stage. For a long time the play was not well received by the critics. Yet, the twentieth century response to the play is totally different. T. S. Eliot has described the play as "underrated". In it, the love story of Carthaginian queen is presented sympathetically and the poetic element is unmistakable. This is a play about love and passion. The intervention of gods in the human world is intricately woven in the play. This is the only play of Marlowe with a woman holding centre-stage. The rich imagery and high sounding metaphors make the play multi-layered. The use of blank verse is characterized by the typical Marlovian art of describing with equal ease the beautiful as well as the tragic aspects.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

Marlowe's contribution to the English Drama is undoubtedly great. He enjoys the reputation of heralding new trends of writing and providing a new direction to the Elizabethan drama that would later be followed by Shakespeare. Marlowe was a pioneer who brought a new life to the tragic trend by shifting focus from the life of Christ or the saints to that of 'man'. He introduced mental muddles and conflicts faced by the people in general. It was by no means a small development. Marlowe's art could not flourish to maturity as he died very young. Critics are of the opinion that his plays suffer from a number of loopholes. The most serious of these is that he neglected the principles of both plot and character. All his plays, except *Edward II*, have loose plots. Even his greatest tragedy, *Dr Faustus* is a juxtaposition of loosely - connected scenes. Despite these drawbacks, Marlowe is credited with innovating a method for English tragedy to be imbibed and pursued by generations of playwrights to follow. So far as Marlowe's poetic genius is concerned, critics share a common opinion. None would dispute that Marlowe was superb and masterly in the use of blank verse. As rightly said by J. B. Steane: "We know quite well the Marlowe of 'the mighty line', the man who proudly drew away from the 'jigging vein of rhyming mother wits' and introduced into theatre the noble and resonant blank verse that was to be such an expressive instrument." (Steane, J.B. Ed. "Introduction." *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*. England: Penguin Books, p.31)

1.8 KEYWORDS

Medieval Age:

The Middle Ages or the Medieval Period is a period in European history that lasted from the 5th to 15th century. It is believed to have begun from the fall of Roman Empire and came to an end with Renaissance. The western history is divided into three broad periods – Classical, Medieval and Modern. The Middle Ages are known for many beliefs and practices that became outdated in the modern times. One instance is of the Sun revolving around the Earth. Middle ages are also known for many superstitions and a firm belief in the supernatural. The early Middle Ages are also known as the Dark Ages.

Reformation Period in England:

It refers to the events in 16th century England when the church freed itself from many practices of the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformation period in England was an offshoot of the European Protestant Reformation, a religious and political movement that questioned the practices of Christianity in Europe. As the name itself suggests, Reformation aimed to bring broad religious and social reforms. The period sees in Europe the rise of nationalism, the rise of printing press that was instrumental in spreading knowledge not only among scholars, but also among the lower and lower middle classes to whom it was earlier inaccessible. It marks a turning point in the earlier established practices.

Renaissance:

Beginning in about 14th century and lasting till the 17th century, Renaissance marks a renewed and vigorous interest in ancient learning, particularly the learning of classical Greece and Rome. Renaissance was the ‘revival’, ‘re-birth’ of the ancient classical scholarships. The movement originated in Italy as a cultural movement and soon spread all through Europe. It saw innovations in the fields of arts, literature, architecture, politics and science.

Miracle and Mystery plays:

The earliest plays in the medieval period are formally termed as Mystery Plays. These plays were representation of the stories picked up from the Bible. These stories were converted into dramatic pieces are performed in the Church. The other kind of plays, the Miracle plays dealt largely with the lives of saints. Although separate names are assigned to distinguish the form of Miracle and Mystery plays, the terms often are used interchangeably.

Blank verse:

It was a new experiment with the poetic metre with no fixed number of lines. It is un-rhyming, iambic pentameter and consists of a 10-syllable line. It is a dominant form used in the dramatic and narrative verse in English. The efficacy of blank verse rests on how the poet uses the stressed and unstressed syllables. Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Robert Browning’s *Dramatic Monologues* are written in the blank verse.

1.9 QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on Marlowe and as a dramatist.
2. Discuss the role of Marlowe in the development of English tragic drama.
3. What do you mean by the term Renaissance? Critically examine its role in the development of Elizabethan theatre.
4. What is common in all the plays of Marlowe? Do you agree that his protagonists share common features?
5. Trace the typical Renaissance spirit in any two plays of Marlowe.

1.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Marlowe's Appeal in the 21st Century
- 2.3 Controversy Regarding Date of Publication of Doctor Faustus
- 2.4 The Legend of Faust: Marlowe's Innovation
- 2.5 Act I: Synopsis
 - 2.5.1 Act I: Critical Overview
- 2.6 Act II: Synopsis
 - 2.6.1 Act II: Critical Overview
- 2.7 Act III: Synopsis
 - 2.7.1 Act III: Critical Overview
- 2.8 Act IV: Synopsis
 - 2.8.1 Act IV: Critical Overview
- 2.9 Act V: Synopsis
 - 2.9.1 Act V: Critical Overview
- 2.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.11 Keywords
- 2.12 Questions
- 2.13 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit elaborates Act-wise summary of the play. It also offers a critical analysis of each Act for the students to understand meanings underneath the story.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear students, Unit 1 must have exposed you to all the necessary preliminary information about the play prescribed in your syllabus i.e. *Dr. Faustus*. It also gives you a bird's eye view of the other plays written by Marlowe. I am sure that a thorough reading of Unit 1 must have helped you picture Marlowe as a man and as a playwright. You are also apprised of the social, political and religious contexts in which Marlowe's fiery imagination unfurled. The spirit of Renaissance, the trends and demands of Elizabethan theatre, the mushrooming of English tragedy and comedy, emanating from the Greek and Italian tradition yet acquiring a unique English character, is also elaborated upon. A short discussion of all the six plays of Marlowe gives you an idea as to how Marlowe started a new trend, both in thought and technique, in matter as well as manner and left a trail to be followed by others. All the six plays of Marlowe have one thing in common – he was least bothered with the routine, ordinary and mundane areas like manners and habits, customs, traditions and rituals. What fascinated his unique sensibilities were the cravings and dilemmas of a human's soul. Men in relation with others of his clan didn't interest him. Rather, man's relation to God and to the universe was his favourite area to fathom.

2.2 MARLOWE'S APPEAL IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Marlowe in particular and the Elizabethan tragic vision in general, which began with the Renaissance, has a great appeal to the contemporary readers. The mental divide that Faustus feels also applies to the spilt self of modern man in today's world of scientific advancements and modern technology. *Tamburlaine*, *Dr. Faustus*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* are dramatic approximations of the modern man's mindset, his struggle to cope with the complex environment around him. The contemporariness of these dramatic

figures is striking, if we forget their Elizabethan lineage. In an age of nuclear technology, we are still groping and struggling to come to terms with the notion of immense human potential pitted against the situational and contextual restrictions, leading to paradoxes. We have to reconcile these paradoxes and ironies to maintain our sanity.

2.3 CONTROVERSY REGARDING THE DATE OF PUBLICATION OF *DR. FAUSTUS*

The exact date of publication of *Dr. Faustus* is not clear and difference of opinion prevails on this front. Hence it has become a subject of great controversy. But the critics agree that this is the second play by Marlowe and must have been written after *Tamburlaine*. *Dr. Faustus* was written for a theatre company of the name The Admiral Men and was staged in 1588. The first printed edition of the play was the Quarto edition of 1604. Several editions of the play were reprinted after this quarto edition, with many interpolations. Finally, an enlarged edition of the play appeared in 1616 containing many comic scenes absent in the 1604 edition. If we go by Boas' contention, the date of composition of the play cannot be earlier than 1592. The basis for this argument is that Marlowe's play was based on the *German Historia Van De. Johann Fausten*, which was first published in 1587 in Frankfurt. As Marlowe didn't know German, this play is very unlikely to be an inspiration for *Dr. Faustus*. Marlowe's source book must have been the English version, the *History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Dr John Faustus* published in 1592. Going by this version, the play must have been written later than 1592. All this has given rise to a lot of debate regarding the date of composition as well as publication of the play. But considering the authenticity of the evidence that the play was first staged by Lord Admiral's company in 1588, we may assign the date of composition to sometime between 1588 and 1590.

2.4 THE LEGEND OF FAUST: MARLOWE'S INNOVATION

That Marlowe has based his play on the famous German legend translated in English as *Faustbuch*, is true in itself. But it is also true that Marlowe has fused in the play a new breath with regard to the character of Dr. Faustus, the plot and the technique. Above all, he has shrewdly diminished the role of the supernatural (the German story tilted very heavily towards the supernatural and presented the character of Faustus as a wicked magician) and rather places the spiritual dilemma of Dr. Faustus at the centre of the play. Marlowe avoided the risk of deviation and therefore the play has no sub-plots barring some comic scenes which do not disturb the focus on the character of Dr. Faustus. Marlowe has no doubt transformed a common-place story into a great tragedy for all times to come. The reason why Dr. Faustus is so rich and intense is that diverse and many conflicting traditions manifested in the character of Dr. Faustus. The influence of the traditions of orthodox Christianity, of the Reformation and Renaissance, of Paganism, of newly found individualism and the arousal of scientific temper and a curious questioning spirit, explains the inadvertent confusion in the play, *Dr. Faustus*. This actually needs to be understood to get at the dramatic core of the play. Marlowe has remarkably aroused feelings of pity and fear, quite intrinsic to Aristotle's basic concept of a tragedy. Marlowe has maintained a subtle balance, in that he did not divorce from the convention altogether but at the same time infused novelty in the erstwhile dull and unadventurous legend of Faust. As such, the earlier morality tradition is also not totally overthrown. The essential human traits like presumption, temptation, confusion, damnation and fall, which form the crux of earlier mystery, miracle and morality plays, are central to the story of Dr. Faustus too. The interplay of the forces of good and evil, as old as humanity itself, finds a full expression in *Dr. Faustus*, but with a difference. Here, Marlowe shows the forces of good and evil not as mere external forces but as internalized in the human protagonist. Accordingly, Dr. Faustus is not tempted only by the external evil forces for signing the pact with the devil, in fact evil has roots inside him too. Same is true of the forces of good or of Christianity, which are shown as being part of the internal being of the protagonist. This shift in the play gives a fresh psychological meaning to the story of *Dr. Faustus*. What is new in Marlowe's story is that man is not a passive recipient of good and evil, but is an active participant in these. Therefore though the pattern of the morality play is kept intact, yet Faustus is an antithesis of the significant protagonists of the morality plays. If morality heroes were self-effacing human beings, Faustus is an

embodiment of self assertion and overriding ambition. Faustus aspires to gain command over the entire universe. Let us take the play Act-wise and try to build a critical appreciation of the succession of events and their significance to the overall structure of the play. But before we start this exercise, let me presume that you have read the text already. It is important to read the text as a critical understanding of the play can never be developed without it.

2.5 ACT 1 – SYNOPSIS

Prologue: The play starts with the Prologue presented by the Chorus. The Chorus apprises the audience of the basic tenets of the plot. It announces that the poet has no inclination to sing of wars, love and the great deeds of the royal kings and princesses. Instead, he presents the journey of a low-born man Faustus, from happy days to damnation. Faustus was born in the town of Rhodes in Germany, went to Wittenberg for higher studies and was sharp enough to attain proficiency in theology. Soon he mastered all the possible branches of knowledge like medicine, law and logic. He became inordinately ambitious and was soon swollen with pride and arrogance. His situation can be likened to that of Icarus who was given waxed wings to fly but blinded by pride he flew very near to the Sun. His wax wings melted, he fell down and drowned in the sea. Faustus, who was awarded the degree of doctorate, followed in the footsteps of Icarus in his ambition of becoming a super human, for which he practiced black magic and became a necromancer.

Act I Scene (i): Faustus is sitting in his study and ruminating about his achievements presented in a soliloquy (a soliloquy is a literary device in which a person is talking to himself/ herself all alone. It is often used as a device in drama to disclose the characters' innermost feelings). Dr. Faustus dismisses all the acquired branches of knowledge and learning one by one. He first considers logic and dismisses it saying that the only aim of logic is to swell the dispute, which makes it monotonous after a time. And moreover, Faustus has already achieved a benchmark in his disputing skills so he should look for something else. He then reflects on the prospects of practicing medicine, both from the monetary and social points of view. He agrees that Medicine has a tremendous potential to achieve miraculous cures which makes it one of the most fulfilling occupations but then the other part of his mind argues that he has already achieved the highest level in this profession too and has cured whole cities of incurable diseases like plague. But still it has not brought contentment. Then he shifts his attention to law. But very soon rejects law as too petty. Divinity, the study of religion and theology, he thinks offers dictums which are self contradictory and therefore totally irrational. He finds even theology redundant and turns to magic which allures him enough to achieve what he strives for :

“Oh, what a world of profit and delight/
Of power, of honor, of omnipotence/
Is promised to the stupendous artisan!

(I, (i), 30)

A sound magician is a might god (*Gill, Roma. Ed. Christopher Marlowe: Dr. Faustus. London: A&C Black Publishers Ltd, 2004, p.30*)

Wagner, Faustus's servant enters and he bids him to bring Valdes and Cornelius, Faustus's friends to lend him a helping hand in learning black magic. In the meantime, the Good Angel and the Evil Angel visit Faustus. The Good Angel urges him to forget necromancy and put aside his book of magic whereas the Evil Angel incites him to go ahead in the pursuit of magic. After they leave, Faustus weighs the prospects of both and decides in favour of practicing black art, quite excited at the prospects of great powers that magic will bring to him. By this time, Valdes and Cornelius arrive and both approve of Faustus's decision. They unfold a long list of wonderful powers that magic will bring to Faustus if he remains committed to necromancy.

Act I Scene (ii): This is a short scene. Two scholars, may be the students of Dr. Faustus, come to meet him. The servant Wagner, instead of giving them straightforward answers, makes a superficial display of his art of disputation, enough to misdirect and irk the two scholars. After a display of his vain knowledge, he finally reveals that Dr. Faustus is in a meeting with his two friends, Valdes and Cornelius. The two scholars are shocked to hear this as they fear that Faustus has fallen prey to the practice of black magic. The reputation of Cornelius and Valdes as black magicians is quiet wide spread, it seems. The two scholars plan to see the Rector so that Faustus can be dissuaded from his decision to study necromancy.

Act I Scene (iii): Faustus is found muttering a long passage in Latin to invoke the evil powers. A queer and ugly looking figure appears and says that his name is Mephistophilis. Faustus finds his appearance obnoxious and directs him to reappear in the guise of a Franciscan Friar. Mephistophilis obeys the command and Faustus asks many questions about Lucifer, the master of Hell. He is told that Lucifer was banished eternally from Heaven because he revolted against God. Faustus then enquires about Hell, its location and environment. To this Mephistophilis offers a vague and rounded answer saying that Hell is where God is not present. Ironically enough, Mephistophilis becomes nostalgic thinking of the priceless joys of Heaven. He receives a scolding from Dr. Faustus for being a traitor to his domain. He then sends Mephistophilis to Lucifer, with a proposal that Faustus will exchange his soul for 24 years of unlimited powers. Mephistophilis leaves and Faustus is left priding in his achievements. He imagines the glorious future that lies ahead of him by exercising the art of black magic.

Act I, Scene (iv): This comic scene is in a way a replay of the preceding serious scene. Here Wagner chides a clown, who is out of work, for being so desperate to sell his soul to the devil for a piece of mutton. Wagner asks the clown to serve him for seven years or he will be cursed to suffer. Wagner then gives the clown some money and threatens him that he will be carried away by the devils if he does not agree to his conditions. He then summons the devils, Biliol and Blecher, to scare the clown away. The scene echoes the scene between Faustus and Mephistophilis, though in a comic vein. It is included to offer comic relief to the audience and also to authenticate the developments in the preceding scene.

2.5.1 Act I: Critical Overview

The play starts with the Chorus chronicling the events related to the life of Faustus. According to the traditions of Greek Tragedy, Marlowe employs the Chorus to unfold the action of the play. Purpose is to provide the readers necessary exposition of the story. The function of the Chorus is fruitful. It is outside the direct action of the play and comments objectively on it. It addresses the audience directly and serves as a link between the audience and the events of the play. The Chorus also sets the tempo of the play by saying that it is an unusual, uncommon story of a low-born man Faustus, contrary to the general trends. The play is not about lofty affairs like wars or the gallant armies in the battlefields, the glorious love affairs of kings or the magnificent adventures of great heroes. The Chorus therefore, prepares the audience for a different kind of play, contrary to the established taste and expectations.

Act 1 unfolds Faustus's inner turmoil, which is a reflection of the conflict between Medieval morals and Renaissance ideas. The Chorus refers to the Greek myth of Icarus to comment on the character of Dr. Faustus:

“Till swollen with cunning, of a self conceit
His waxen wings did mount above his reach
And melting heavens conspired his overthrow” (1, (i), 27).

Whereas Icarus was punished for his disobedience to his father, Faustus is guilty of even a greater disobedience, rebellion against God. His sin is that he challenges the authority of God and tries his hand at something forbidden. Herein lies the contrast between the Medieval and Renaissance values: The

Medieval world rejected all that was not Christian whereas the Renaissance, a period of revival and rebirth of knowledge and learning, allowed people to question Divinity.

The appearance of Good Angel and Evil Angel can also be critically examined. They metaphorically, represent Faustus's perpetual struggle. The Good Angel tries to pull Faustus towards the long cherished and accepted Medieval values:

“O Faustus, lay that damned book aside
And gaze not on it lest it tempt thy soul
And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head
Read, read the scriptures: - that is blasphemy” (1 (i) 31).

The Evil Angel, on the other hand, signifies Renaissance value system: “Go forward Faustus, in that famous art/ Wherein all nature's treasures is contained” (1 (i) p 31). Renaissance values offer a great scope for the individuals to exercise choice. And Faustus sacrifices Medieval morals by affirming his preferences.

Another thing worth noticing is that blinded by his ambitious pursuit, the Renaissance ideals, Faustus does not notice Mephistophilis' nostalgia for Heaven. The devil himself is all praise for God and Faustus is too short sighted to notice this. Tragedy of Dr. Faustus is not the tragedy of an individual but a tragedy of the values that shape his ambition, making him blind to the simple truths of life.

2.6 ACT II SYNOPSIS

Act II, Scene (i)– Faustus is found alone in his study when the Good Angel and the Evil Angel make their second appearance. The Good Angel inspires Faustus to see the power of the divine whereas the Evil Angel lures Faustus to see the power that comes with wealth and material riches. Faustus, already inclined towards the devil, decides to ignore the advice of the Good Angel. He then summons Mephistophilis who tells him that Lucifer has agreed to his proposal. But Faustus has to sign the contract or his own blood. Faustus cuts his arm and as he begins to write, his blood congeals. It is God's way of warning Faustus not to enter into such a dangerous trap. Mephistophilis rushes to bring fire to make the blood flow. Faustus finishes signing the contract finally and opens his wish list in front of Mephistophilis. He asks about Hell but finds the description given by Mephistophilis unsatisfactory. He then asks for a wife. To this Mephistophilis responds by saying that he actually does not need a wife though he can bring him prostitutes every night. Faustus then demands books on the subject of animals, plants and planets to be arranged for him.

Act II, Scene (ii) – This scene presents Faustus repenting his decision of siding with the devil. The Good Angel and the Evil Angel make a third appearance on the stage. The Good Angel urges Dr. Faustus to repent and earn mercy of God. The Evil Angel reminds Faustus that he is extraordinary and not made for repentance: “Ay, but Faustus never shall repent” (II, (ii), 55.). Faustus experiences a massive disappointment realizing that he is damned. He then questions Mephistophilis about divine astrology but is disappointed with the answers. He feels that even Wagner could give better answers to such questions. Faustus again cries out for Christ to save him. Lucifer, the lord of Hell, appears and reminds Faustus that he is breaking his promise. To divert Faustus from his agony, he arranges an entertaining show of ‘Seven Deadly Sins’. These seven deadly sins are – Pride, Covetousness, Wrath, Envy, Gluttony, Sloth and Lechery.

2.6.1 Act II: Critical Overview

Main focus of this act is the allegory of Seven Deadly Sins. The earlier allegorical figures – the Good Angel and the Evil Angel appear again in this act twice. Now what is allegory? An allegory is the

representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through concrete or material forms. It is a literary device used quite often by writers to represent abstract phenomena. In this case, the Seven Deadly Sins are personified. The tradition of personifying the Seven Sins was quite common in the medieval Drama. Marlowe uses this tradition effectively. Second noticeable thing in this Act is Faustus's conflict of conscience. Ultimately, the intervention of Lucifer and Beelzebub makes Faustus surrender to the devil. His fate is then sealed forever. This scene highlights the tension between the medieval beliefs and Renaissance ideals.

2.7 ACT III: SYNOPSIS

The Chorus again appears on stage to announce Faustus's rising popularity and his glorious pursuits. They announce that he goes to the top of Mount Olympus in a chariot drawn by dragons and studies the stars and other celestial bodies, thus quenching his thirst for an exploration of the unknown. Next he prepares to undertake a journey to Rome and be a part of the feast being arranged to honour St. Peter.

Act III, Scene (i): The scene reveals Faustus in Rome and telling Mephistophilis about the places he has been to. He has been to Treves, Paris, Naples, Venice and Padua. Mephistophilis describes the beauty of the city of Rome built on seven hills and suggests Faustus that they should go and meet the Pope and participate in the feast of St Peter's Day. Mephistophilis uses a magic spell and makes Faustus invisible for the sake of amusement. The scene is set in the privy chamber of Pope. The hall is full of Cardinals and monks who have come to attend the feast. Faustus, being invisible, is in a mood to play some pranks. As the Pope offers a dainty dish to the Cardinal, Faustus snatches it away, not once but several times which annoys the Pope. No one is able to see the mischief maker as Faustus is invisible. Finally the gathering concludes that this must be the work of some ghost who has come from purgatory. Faustus and Mephistophilis then start beating the friars and fling fireworks which makes them all take to their heels in fright.

Act III, Scene (ii): This is a short scene and introduces two minor characters Robin and Ralph. Robin is seen performing magic with the help of a book. He tells Ralph that he can conjure spirits. Ralph shows no interest. Robin tempts him to get Nan Suit, a kitchen maid for Ralph. Both of them then leave and decide to finish their cleaning job and later come back to resume their conjuring business.

Act III, Scene (iii): Robin and Ralph are seen again and this time they have stolen a silver goblet from a vintner at an inn. The wine seller demands his goblet back. At this Robin calls Mephistophilis to deal with the situation. He helps them, but Mephistophilis is furious with Ralph and Robin calling him all the way from Constantinople to perform petty tricks. He turns Robin into an ape and Ralph into a dog.

2.7.1 Act III: Critical Overview

The scene in Rome shows Faustus at his worst, indulging in petty tricks. Though the scene does not make it obvious, but one can find undertones of the Protestant and Catholic ideologies at variance. For instance, the teasing depiction of Pope must have delighted the Protestant audience who believed the Pope to be cruel and power hungry. Similarly the suggestion that the invisible attacker might be a spirit from Purgatory, must have appealed to the Catholic viewers. Ghosts existed in Catholic teachings and were believed to be the spirits of Purgatory.

2.8 ACT IV: SYNOPSIS

Chorus: The act opens with the Chorus declaring that Faustus is back from his trips abroad. His friends and relatives welcome him. His popularity is on the rise. The groups of gathered people admire him for his wisdom and scholarship. The Chorus announces that Charles V invites Faustus for dinner, so he may showcase magic tricks in front of the emperor.

Act IV, Scene (i): Faustus is seen in the court of Emperor Charles V at Innsbruck. The King appreciates Dr. Faustus for his unique magical powers and expresses his wish to see some proof of it. He says that he has nurtured a strong desire to see Alexander the great and his paramour. He wonders if Faustus could bring them back to life. Faustus uses his magical powers and fetches two spirits resembling Alexander and his paramour. The Emperor is delighted to see this.

Act IV, Scene (ii): Faustus starts worrying about the fact that his end is drawing near. Suddenly a horse courser enters and shows his keenness to buy Faustus's horse for 40 Dollars. Faustus agrees to the deal and warns the courser never to ride the horse in water. Faustus again feels troubled at the thought that his last day is nearing. He falls asleep. But he is woken up by the horse courser who accuses Faustus for cheating him. The courser rode the animal into a pond, it disappeared and he found himself sitting on a bundle of hay. Now when he pulls the leg of Faustus, he sees the entire leg coming off. This scares him beyond limit and he promises to pay Faustus 40 dollars more for mistakenly accusing him. In the meantime Wagner enters to tell Faustus that the Duke of Vanholt wants to see him.

Act IV, Scene (iii): At the court of Duke of Vanholt, Faustus asks the Duchess if she would want to eat something special. The Duchess desires to have grapes though it was the month of January and grapes were off season. Faustus sends Mephistophilis to arrange the fruit and to everyone's surprise, a dish of delicious grapes is presented before the Duchess. The Duke promises to reward Faustus.

2.8.1 Act IV: Critical Overview

We for the first time see, Faustus contemplating his end and acknowledging the limitations of his powers. Faustus has come a full circle from Act I where he refuses to accept his limited faculties: "Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man" (I, (i), 29). The Faustus in Act IV is able to see that he is but a man: "what are thou, Faustus but a man condemned to die?" (IV, (i), 78).

What makes Scene (ii) different from the other scenes is the fusion of comedy and tragedy. In most of the Elizabethan plays, the comic and the tragic scenes alternate, but in this play we have the tragic and the comic elements put together. The scene with the horse courser is mingled with the scene where Dr. Faustus speculates his nearing end.

2.9 ACT V: SYNOPSIS

Act V, Scene (i) Wagner enters and expresses an inkling that Faustus is soon going to die. He doesn't understand why Faustus is feasting and celebrating when his end is so near. Faustus enters with scholars, discussing who might be the most beautiful woman in the world. The scholars unanimously agree that it is Helen of Troy. Faustus promises to conjure the spirit of Helen for the appeasement of his scholar friends. Music sounds and Helen passes over the stage. The scholars are awestruck to see the unmatched beauty of Helen. They thank Faustus for allowing them to see this "paragon of excellence" (V, (i), p128). An old man enters and the scholars depart. The old man prompts Faustus to repent so that God may show mercy on him. This makes Faustus think about his sinful actions. He becomes so desperate that he prepares to commit suicide. The old man assures him that he still has a chance to win God's forgiveness if he repented. But Faustus finds himself so deeply trapped in the evil designs of Lucifer that he can see no way out. Mephistophilis who is witnessing all this threatens to tear Faustus's body to pieces if he showed any sign of disobedience to his Lord. Faustus is terrified and surrenders meekly to the devil. He even requests Mephistophilis to torture the old man who had tried to misguide him. But Mephistophilis tells him that it is beyond his powers to harm the old man because his faith in God was firm.

The distressed and weak-willed Faustus urges Mephistophilis to have Helen as his mistress. When she appears, Faustus is overwhelmed by her beauty. He says: "Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss"

(Act V, (i), 130). The old man reappears and urges Faustus to turn to God. He still has a chance to be forgiven. But to no avail. Faustus is totally in the clutches of the devil. The old man utters his disappointment and leaves.

Act V, Scene (ii): Faustus confides in the three scholars and tells them that he has sinned against God by selling his soul to the devil. His sin is so deep that it cannot be forgiven. He is unable to pray to God because the devil has taken total control over his soul. Faustus then bids the scholars to leave as he must face the wrath of God in the final moments alone. The clock now strikes eleven. Faustus has one bare hour to live. Every single minute becomes precious to him. He pleads in desperation to the ever moving spheres of heaven to stand still, so that time may cease. He appeals to nature to make the Sun shine forever so that it is perpetual day. Or else an hour may have the duration of a year, or a month, a week or even a natural day so that he could repent. For the first time, Faustus truly repents to God but it is too late now. As the clock strikes 12, he cries out to God not to look so fierce upon him. Thunder and lightning flash on the stage and the devils enter, choke him to death, tear his body to pieces and snatch away his soul to reside in hell eternally.

Final Chorus: This final episode of the play speculates over the spectacular rise and the tragic downfall of Dr. Faustus. The Chorus addresses the audience and warns them against the vicious ways of gaining power and station in life. Faustus's travails should serve as a great warning to the wise people never to attempt to tread into the forbidden and mysterious.

2.9.1 Act V: Critical Overview

We see an entirely changed Faustus here. Faustus, so excited at the idea of gaining limitless powers through necromancy for which he throws caution to the wind says: "Had I as many souls as there be stars/ I'd give them all for Mephistophilis" (I, (iii), 42). Here, he regrets his decision. He can now see that all his arrogance and to master the forces of nature had come to naught. His Dreams, aspirations, illusions and ambitions are all shattered.

The much celebrated and lofty scene where Faustus conjures Helen has great importance. It represents the pitiful condition of Faustus and announces his defeat. The scene ironically depicts Faustus's reduced stature from a seeker of pleasures of mind to the one who succumbs to sexual pleasures. Another question that needs attention here is, why only Helen? Why not some other woman? One can say that in choosing Helen, Faustus reasserts his Renaissance ideals. Renaissance shows a strong engagement with and glorification of the ancient classical art, mythology and beauty. Helen belongs also to the ancient Greek as a symbol of ultimate beauty.

In the last scene of the play, we have one of the important scenes in Elizabethan Drama. The poignant and heart-rending last soliloquy stands out as a remarkable scene. Packed with force, it arouses passion in a dramatic manner. The scene also brings out the doctrines of medieval Christian ideas of sin, hell, damnation and eternal suffering. Faustus despite all his Elizabethan will and ambition had to submit to the medieval philosophy of sin and redemption. The didactic note at the end of the play is in keeping with the tradition of morality plays advocating the doctrines of medieval Christianity.

2.10 LET US SUM UP

The greatness of Dr. Faustus as a play speaks for itself. The phenomenon that arrests the readers' attention from beginning to the end is the character of the hero. The pull of the opposite forces of curiosity and conscience in the mind of Faustus is effectively presented. Marlowe's Faustus is a bundle of contradictions – learned but skeptical, scholarly but short-sighted. He is a muddle of the characteristics of medieval Christianity and Renaissance adventure. The play offers a great scope for a view of Dr.

Faustus. When we approach the play from psychological perspective, it rises above the temporal and the contextual.

Marlowe successfully freed the Elizabethan heavy verse from conventional restrictions and formality. He made the use of blank verse flexible. Who can ignore ‘the mighty line’ (the phrase used by Ben Jonson for Marlowe’s vigorous blank verse) that revolutionized the Elizabethan stage? One could pay a tribute to Marlowe’s genius by citing Shakespeare’s great indebtedness to Marlowe. It was Marlowe who paved the way for Elizabethan Drama. In the words of William Henry Hudson “That Shakespeare, who must have known him well, and who probably collaborated with him, was at first profoundly influenced by him, is evident. His early blank verse is fashioned on Marlowe’s. His narrative poem, *Venus and Adonis* is in part at least inspired by Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander*. His *Richard III* and *Richard II* are clearly based on the model of chronicle play provided in *Edward II*. Even in the *Merchant of Venice*, there are many details to show that Shakespeare wrote with the *Jew of Malta* in mind.” (Hudson, William Henry. *An Outline History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2015, p.57-58.)

2.11 KEYWORDS

Paganism:

Paganism refers to the religions of ancient Greece and Rome. A pagan is a man who believes in many gods. (polytheistic) but worships only one chosen God.

Aristotle’s concept of tragedy:

Tragedy, according to Aristotle, imitation in art with a serious purpose and written in a dramatic rather than narrative form. The aim of the tragedy is to arouse the feelings of pity and fear in the audience (catharsis) and to purge them of these emotions so that when they left the theatre, they felt light and cleansed.

Soliloquy:

The word Soliloquy comes from the Latin word ‘solo’ (to oneself) and ‘loquor’ (I talk). It is a literary device used by dramatists frequently when a character is talking to himself or herself, speaking aloud his/ her innermost feelings and through this mode familiarizing the audience with their state of mind.

Allegory:

Allegory is a literary device in which abstract ideas, principles and concepts are explained in terms of characters and figures. It is frequently used in literature and art for preaching a moral lesson or explaining some idea which is otherwise obscure.

2.12 QUESTIONS

1. What is the legend of Faust and how Marlowe uses it for his play? Explain.
2. What role does the Prologue play in the development of *Dr. Faustus*?
3. Trace the decline in the character of Dr. Faustus.
4. Consider the clash between Dr. Faustus the scholar and Dr. Faustus the man.

2.13 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Brown, John Russell. *Marlowe: Tamburlaine, Edward II and The Jew of Malta*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982
2. Furnham, Willard. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Dr. Faustus: A Collection of Critical Essays*. NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969

3. Johar, K.L. *Christopher Marlowe: A Study in the Renaissance Concept of Heroism*. Meerut: Shalabh Prakashan, 1988
4. Leech, Clifford. Ed. *Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays*. London: Princeton Hall, 1964



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UNIT 3 THEMES

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction – Psychological Realism in *Dr. Faustus*
- 3.2 Themes
 - 3.2.1 Theme of Sin and Redemption
 - 3.2.2 Renaissance Ideals vs. Medieval Morals
 - 3.2.3 Pride and Arrogance
 - 3.2.4 Corrupting Effects of Power
 - 3.2.5 The Split Self of Man
 - 3.2.6 Knowledge vs Wisdom
 - 3.2.7 Limitations of Being a Human
- 3.3 Motifs
 - 3.3.1 Motif of Magic and Supernatural
- 3.4 Symbols
- 3.5 Allegory
 - 3.5.1 Good Angel and Evil Angel
 - 3.5.2 Helen and the Old Man
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Keywords
- 3.8 Questions
- 3.9 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will focus on the various interpretations and themes embedded in the structure of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. The story of *Dr. Faustus* lends itself to wide ranging meanings and can be looked at from the psychological, philosophical and spiritual perspective. This unit explores these areas.

3.1 INTRODUCTION - PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM IN *DR. FAUSTUS*

Dear students, you must have come to terms with the story of *Dr. Faustus* by now. It must have thrilled you to the core; I am sure - the mighty lines, the unforgettable stanzas, the symbolic interplay of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel. The unmistakable simplicity and directness with which Faustus lays bare his feelings and thoughts – all are immensely striking. The way the story is told by Marlowe endears *Dr. Faustus* to us, despite his failings and shortcomings as a human being. The process of self identification is quick as soon as we start reading the text. We might feel that what is happening to Faustus may happen to us, or may be, has already happened to us. In the modern world of science and technology, we might not have a Mephistophilis or Lucifer to take away our soul but psychologically and spiritually, we have all confronted Mephistophilis and also have had a dialogue with him at some point in our lives. The pangs that *Dr. Faustus* has felt are experienced by us all at some stage or the other in our lives. Whenever we are confronted with making choices, right or wrong, we are in a typical Faustian situation. The paradoxes of Faustus are very much our own. Isn't it a paradox of essential human condition, true for all times, that God gives us freedom to exercise our choices but at the same time, we are bound by the consequences of our preferences. Doesn't the urge to defy the insipid and the old and try out something new presents our mindset in a critical light? Aren't we facing damnation when we make a wrong choice? Don't we all go through the pangs of conscience when we are in the wrong? Don't we find ourselves more often at crossroads just like Faustus? These and many such similarities at once bring us close to Faustus. And we are at once cast in the Aristotelian mode of 'pity and fear'. Let's cite here the comments of Laura Reis Mayor who has observed along these lines:

“While written in the renaissance language that often challenges high school and college students, Christopher Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus* is a play for the ages. In a culture laden with books, movies, television shows and video games about black magic, the subject matter alone will captivate contemporary young adults. And with its theme of ambition, desire, fate and free will, Marlowe’s Drama is excellent comparison material to works both old and new. As a genre study, *Dr. Faustus* is a morality play, a historical allegory, the tale of a hero gone bad due to the dilemma presented by an ever changing world. When Faustus is confronted by the Renaissance preference for analytical reason over the medieval deference to God, he must choose the course he believes is right, and in the process, loses his soul”. (Mayor, Laura Reis. “An Introduction.” *A Teacher’s Guide to the Signet Classics Edition of Christopher Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus*. New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2006, p.3)

This brings us closer to the considerations of our own. We realize that the play indeed relates with us closely.

3.2 THEMES

The ensuing portion will take up the various themes that emerge from the play.

3.2.1 Theme of Sin and Redemption

The story of Dr. Faustus can be read from many perspectives. One of the most explicit ways to interpret the story of Dr. Faustus is through the standpoint of sin in Christianity. The story of original sin comes to us through Adam and Eve who disobeyed God’s command not to taste the forbidden fruit. Man is thus considered to be born as a sinner as he is tainted and can be redeemed only by the grace of God. Marlowe was a student of theology and was well acquainted with the concept of sin. The doctrine of sin is central to Christianity and linked with it is the notion of redemption. Going by St. Augustine’s interpretation, sin is a deed or desire in opposition to the eternal law of God. The situation translates itself in the character of Dr. Faustus. In pursuit for boundless power, Faustus faced a number of constraints and was tempted to woo the devil. The great scholar and philosopher failed to understand that means are as important, nay, all important in the journey to achieve the ends. Faustus only looks at the ends, grossly ignoring the authenticity or legitimacy of means. Faustus is so blinded by a desire for power and knowledge that he rejects God in favour of Lucifer, the Lord of hell.

The consequences of Faustus’s sinful decision take time to show results in the external world. At the same time, his internal innermost psyche is very quick to respond to it. He becomes powerful for which he bargained his life with the devil. Thus, he is losing all will power. The allegoric appearance of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel make Faustus doubt his decision time and again. He gets convinced by the Evil Angel to go forward in his practice of necromancy. There are scenes where Faustus is awakened to the futility of his decisions, yet he surrenders under the threats of Mephistophilis. This shows that Faustus is becoming weak willed. Marlowe shows the negative effects of sin on Faustus. Faustus had entered into a contract with lofty ambitions but he ends up using his magic for petty affairs. Calling Helen to satisfy his amorous desires brings into focus his weakness of mind. The irony is quite striking here. The more he desires to become powerful, the feebler he turns out to be. Douglas Cole has commented:

Dr. Faustus is a man who of his own conscience willfulness brings tragedy and torment crashing down upon his head, the pitiful and fearful victim of his own ambitions and desires. The irony with which Marlowe habitually invests the downfall of his protagonists is here wrought to its finest and sharpest point; it is an irony based on theological concepts of sin and damnation, and dramatically expressed in two major patterns of actions: the repetitive pattern of moral choice leading to the alternative of spiritual destruction and the pattern of contrast between Faustus’s grand imaginative designs and the actual, vacuous accomplishments of his magical career” (Cole,

We see Faustus entering a web from which it is difficult to come out. Connected with the idea of sin is the concept of redemption. Faustus is given repeated chances to reverse his decision through repentance but every time he falters. The Good Angel and the Evil Angel are but two sides of his consciousness. The Good Angel prevails upon him to seek forgiveness of God: "Faustus, repent; yet God will pity thee." (II, i, 54). But Faustus is threatened by the Evil Angel never to turn to God again: "Ay, but Faustus shall never repent" (II, ii p55). Faustus falls a pray to temptation and rejects the idea of redemption. There are many reasons for this, the first being that Faustus committed this sin deliberately and knowingly. Mephistophilis tells him that the easiest way to call the spirits of Hell is to abjure God to which Faustus replies:

So Faustus hath
Already done! And holds this principle
There is no chief but only Belzebub!
To whom doth Faustus declare himself
The word damnation terrifies not him
For he confounds hell in Elysium (I, (i), 40).

And then he declares boastfully: "Had I as many souls as there be stars/ I'd give the all for Mephistophilis." (I, (iii), 42). Faustus's decision to align with the devil was very much his own. He is not ignorant of what he is doing. Therefore the onus of the moral responsibility falls on him totally. This proves disastrous for him. Finally, he would cease to be human, with no help coming from God or faith.

3.2.2 Renaissance Ideals vs. Medieval Morals

The predicament of Dr. Faustus cannot be restricted to the Christian concept of sin and redemption, particularly when we see the end of the play: "Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer! / I'll burn my books! Ah, Mephistophilis!" (V, (ii), 93). In these lines, Faustus is discarding his Renaissance curiosity for knowledge derived through books. He sacrifices the medieval Christian ideals with which he was born. The character of Dr. Faustus has been designed by Marlowe to represent the Renaissance traits like a great yearning for power and pelf, indulgence in sensual pleasures and defiance of the expected norms. Add to them skepticism and a spirit of questioning against the conventional and we shall see him falling further into sinfulness. Renaissance inspired individualism, a spirit of exploration, of putting to test the orthodox dogmas of the church. In the opening speech in scene I, Faustus logically testifies to the pros and cons of all important branches of knowledge. He rejects all these one after the other as they don't offer any scope for individual growth. He first takes up logic as a prospective field but rejects it, then moves on to medicine, law and theology, citing for each an ancient authority. The authorities are: Aristotle on logic, Galen for medicine, Justinian for law and Jerome for Bible are waded through and cast off. To quote from the play:

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
'Tis magic, that hath ravished me. (I, (i), 32)

In the medieval model, tradition and institutional authority were cherished above the individual will and freedom. The spirit of enquiry was not encouraged. But Faustus is convinced by the renaissance ideals, dedicated to the spirit of scientific enquiry for which he chooses to assert his will and freedom. He

resolves to acknowledge no bounds, accept no traditions in his quest to understand the nature of the world. In this sense, Dr. Faustus may be termed as the first Renaissance hero. In the words of Nicholas Brooke:

The Dramatic tension of the Faustus story as Marlowe presents it lies primarily in the fact that Faustus is determined to satisfy the demands of his nature as God had made him to be himself a deity and that is forbidden: and it can only be achieved by a conscious rejection of the God who created him in his own image but denied him (as much as Lucifer) fulfillment of that image. (Brooke, Nicholas. "The Moral Tragedy of Dr. Faustus." *Critics on Marlowe*. ed. Judith O'Neill. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969, p.100)

The necessity of following the logic of his deeds is restrictive.

3.2.3 Pride and Arrogance

We have in Act II, Scene ii a show of Seven Deadly Sins arranged by Lucifer for the amusement of Faustus wavering in indecision. Pride is one of the Seven Deadly Sins and it is the mightiest and the most corrupting of all. It gives rise to all other sins. When Faustus asks Mephistophilis how Lucifer, an angel once, was overthrown eternally from heaven, he gives a reply quite revealing in itself: "O, by aspiring pride and insolence! For which God threw him from the face of heaven." (I, (iii), 40-41). This is the height of irony that Faustus, puffed with a sense of pride, could not read the meaning in these revelations made by Mephistophilis. Also, he could not envisage the same fate for himself. Pride blinds him to acknowledge the whole Christian idea of life after death. He shakes off all such notions that pride will lead him to hell. The compelling passion for infinite knowledge and superhuman power drives him crazy and he overlooks the consequences that will befall him at the end of 24 years. In his pride he challenges the authority of God and turns into a demigod himself:

..... Divinity, Adieu!
These metaphysics of magicians
And necromantic books are heavenly:
.....
O, what a world of profit and delight
Of power, Of honour, Of omnipotence
Is promised to the studious artisan!
All things that move between the quiet poles
Shall be at my command
.....
A sound magician is a mighty God:
Here, Faustus, tire thy brains to gain a deity" (I, (i), 30).

We note that Faustus wants to become 'lord and commander of elements'. This desire to become God is a dire sin according to the Christian belief and enough to degenerate human beings beyond limits. It is Faustus's pride and arrogance that push him to enter the realms forbidden for human beings. In the words of Roma Gill:

His pride dashed, Faustus becomes increasingly aware of the emptiness of his bargain and the reality of damnation. The pride with which this renaissance superman scorned his human nature and aspired to become 'A mighty god' leads him inevitably to its opposite, despair; and from this there is no salvation. (Gill, Roma. Ed. "Introduction." *Christopher Marlowe: Dr. Faustus*. London: A&C Black Publishers Ltd., 1968, p.15)

The point is made that despair has its own negative logic of inventing deceit against self.

3.2.4 Corrupting Effects of Power

Marlowe has effectively conceptualised the phenomenon of power in *Dr. Faustus*. The predicament of Faustus is laden with ironies and antithesis. He gains power through black magic but loses peace of mind as well as the will to utilize power for fulfilling his preconceived plans and ambition. Power is shown as a double-edged weapon. Faustus's problem is that he does not understand the dynamics of power. He yearns to attain power only for his personal gain and upliftment. He is yet to understand that the crux of power lies in giving authority to others. Power is meaningful only when it is utilized for human well being. In case that does not happen, it becomes self destructive with all its corrupting and defiling elements. Marlowe seems to deliver this hypothesis very clearly. For him, the best utilization of power is that which combines vitally with responsibility. Power contains the seeds to become a threat to social structures. That is an issue worth going into. Faustus fails to develop this wisdom. He keeps using power for his limited interest and to successfully materialize his grand designs. Ironically even this doesn't happen as Faustus ends up using his powers to earn trifles like teasing the knights by growing horns on their heads, playing tricks for kings and noblemen, indulging in the pleasures of body by conjuring Helen, among others. After he barter his soul to the devil to gain inexhaustible powers, he sinks gradually into total mediocrity.

The notion of the polluting influence of power as it translates itself in the play can also be understood by going into the basic Christian framework of the play. Under that framework, one can hope to acquire true greatness only by aligning one's will with the will of God. God being the root of our being, we cut ourselves from the root at our own peril. Faustus meets this fate. He cuts himself from the Creator and is damned and degenerated.

3.2.5 The Split Self of Man

Man is an eternal victim of the split self. The play very strongly underlines this essential human condition. The Good Angel and the Evil Angel in the play stand for the same conflict and duality in Faustus's mind. The play transcends the limitations of topicality in its marvelous rendering of this eternal character of human mind. The tug-of-war situation is rewardingly presented in the plight of Dr. Faustus. What makes it even more remarkable is that this psychological peep into the double mindedness of Faustus emerged at a time when psychological theory as a separate discipline did not exist. The Elizabethan Drama abounds in such examples. Faustus is till last undecided whether he should listen to the advice of Good Angel and repent or continue his bargain with Lucifer. Part of him always remains attached to God but another part of him is lured by the promise of power, wealth and knowledge. Even his language betrays him and in his most avowed resolutions to side with the devil, he uses the words from the dictionary of the Divine: A sound magician is a mighty "God". Necromantic books are "heavenly". It is ironical that God whom he has willfully rejected continues to figure resides in his speech and in his unconscious mind. The divine consciousness characterizes even in his rebellion. Try howsoever he might, he cannot be disjointed with the thoughts of God in his inner consciousness.

The split consciousness of Faustus presents an enduring irony in the play. The paradox that surrounds him is that he revolts against something which constitutes his essential being. Irony intensifies when we see that with every act of revolt against God, the imprint of God in his mind is strengthened and accentuated.

3.2.6 Knowledge vs Wisdom

One way to interpret Faustus's fall is to say that he ran after knowledge for gaining material pleasures and prosperity but couldn't understand that knowledge was only a means to getting wisdom. Any knowledge in fact is a matter of increased awareness in a particular area. But wisdom is earned through life's experiences. Faustus had a rare thirst for knowledge but he could not acquire wisdom. One really wonders how Faustus, a Doctor in Theology and a scholar of a high rank was found deficient in the

understanding of simple and easy truths of life. Even the comments of Mephistophilis serve as eye-opener for him:

Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven
Am not tormented with seven thousand hells
In being deprived of everlasting bliss (I, (iii), 41)

Or when Faustus asks Mephistophilis: “ Tell me who made this world?” (II, ii, 58), to which Mephistophilis replies: “Move me not, for I will not tell thee.” (II, (ii), 58). Towards the end of the play in Act V, Scene I, Faustus commands Mephistophilis to torture the Old Man who had come as the last ray of hope for him. Mephistophilis refuses saying: “His faith is great; I cannot touch his soul.” (V, (i), 86). It needed wisdom to see through these statements of Mephistophilis that clearly indicated the meaning that Faustus was deceived. This is the tragic flaw of Faustus. Faustus could not use his knowledge to better himself or the world around him. It is sad that Faustus dies with his mind as a storehouse of knowledge, facts and information about the world. Ironically when wisdom finally dawns upon him, it is too late.

3.2.7 Limitations of Being a Human

Another tragic flaw that brings Faustus to the tragic end is his failure to acknowledge limitations of the human potential. This Christian worldview endorsed that God was omnipotent and omniscient and in the matrix of ‘Man vs. God’, Man was placed below God. Not only this, it was believed that God had conferred limited potential on human beings because the human race was the descendant of Adam and Eve. As a consequence of this original sin, man was born a sinner and burdened with the weight of perpetual guilt. This restricted his potential and imposed certain limitations on him so his place remained lower than that of God.

Marlowe brings in the Renaissance attitude into the Elizabethan world dominated by the medieval values of Christianity. This Renaissance attitude was diametrically opposed to the medieval Christian worldview and propelled human beings to realize their potential to the maximum. For them, sky was the limit. Marlowe brings this tension as the focal point of the play. We have the central character Faustus who represents this urge to master the forces of nature, try the extents of knowledge and be inordinately ambitious. He does not doubt his potential, nor does he question his limitations for a single minute. There is nothing wrong in this spirit of confidence. What is wrong is Faustus’ revolt against God, his defiance which stops him to appreciate the law of nature. What Faustus lacks is a balanced outlook, a down-to-earth attitude. In his urge to become a demigod, he falters and therefore falls. There is no harm in realizing one’s potential to the fullest but Faustus’s view is too individualistic to allow him a perceptive outlook on humanity. His concerns are too self-centric and shallow, his thoughts too haughty to recognize the limitations of being human. There is no denying that God has endowed man with immense potential but the issue is of realising the boundaries.

3.3 MOTIFS

M H Abrams defines Motif as: “A motif is a conspicuous element such as a type of incident, device, reference or formula which occurs frequently in works of literature”. (Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 7th Edition. USA: Thompson Learning Inc. 1999, p.165) Motifs are recurring structures or devices that are used for the development of themes in a work of literature. Marlowe has made an extensive use of motifs to highlight the thematic patterns of the play. Let’s take into account these motifs:

Living in the modern scientific and technological era, it becomes a subject of consideration for us to draw an affinity with the supernatural elements as used in *Dr. Faustus*. The all pervasive presence of the supernatural figures like devils and angels and the magic spells abound in the play. What needs to be

understood is to see the importance of motifs in a work of art. A work of art is a larger than life phenomenon and the writer needs certain tools and devices to bring forward the themes and central ideas thereof. Themes would become insipid if these were stated in a theoretical manner. Eliot calls them “objective correlative”. These motifs present the predicament of the central figure in a magnified manner to achieve a universal applicability. Dr. Faustus’s story, in one sentence, is the story of a man who sold his soul to the devil and faced eternal damnation. This has to be artistically rendered for being transformed into a piece of art. To this end, the writer employs certain literary devices like allegory, symbols and motifs for defining the fate of the central character. Let us at this point take the symbols, motifs and allegory in *Dr. Faustus*.

3.3.1 Motif of Magic and Supernatural

The play opens with Dr. Faustus conjuring the devil. Even the servant Wagner addresses two devils Biliol and Blecher in the play. Not only this, the minor characters Robin and Ralph know enough magic to conjure the demon. It was partially in keeping with the tradition of Miracle and Mystery plays to employ the agency of the supernatural. In the Middle Ages, supernatural used to be an integral part of the lives of people. It used to be their natural way of life. Faustus is seen playing tricks on the people and noblemen, showing magical feats to the kings and emperors. But the supernatural in the play is not presented in a horrid or weird manner. The supernatural can be understood by looking at the psychological viability and relevance of it in the play. The demons and angels are interpretable in psychological terms as two opposing pulls of our inner self. This antithesis vindicates the supernatural in the new context.

3.4 SYMBOLS

Blood plays a significant symbolic role in the play. Faustus signs the contract deed with the devil in his own blood which symbolically puts a seal of permanence on the contract. At another level, it enhances the thrill that was an urgent requirement of the Elizabethan theatre. At yet another level, it provides a supernatural tinge to the story. While writing the terms and conditions of the contract, Faustus’s blood congeals. This can also be interpreted symbolically at two levels. First, his own body revolts against his decision to side with the devil. Secondly, some divine powers are thriving to save him from paving his way to damnation. In the last scene of the play as his end draws near, he sees the blood of the Christ running across the sky. He urges Christ to bestow him just one drop of his blood which will be enough for his redemption. This again symbolizes the sacrifice that Christ made on the cross which saved humanity.

3.5 ALLEGORY

Allegory, according to M H Abrams, is “a narrative, whether in prose or verse in which the agents and actors, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the literal or primary level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, co-related order of signification.” (Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 7th Edition. p.5) We might think of the play in the light of this elaboration. There does appear a sense of parallel growing as the plays unfolds.

3.5.1 Good Angel and Evil Angel

The presence of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel underlines the conflict between quest and conscience, law and desire, religion and scepticism, the medieval and the Renaissance in the character of Dr. Faustus. The Good Angel stands for harmony, peace and order while the Evil Angel represents the base in Dr. Faustus, his overpowering and blinding desires, his irrational and crude self. These are externalizations of Faustus’s innermost sensitivities and vulnerabilities.

3.5.2 Helen and the Old Man

Similarly Helen and the old man play a small but important role in the play. Faustus is fascinated by Helen, the paragon of excellence. At one level, she stands for the Renaissance love and adoration of beauty. At another level, she stands for sensual pleasures which are short-lived and transient. Helen was the cause of Trojan War which lasted for ten years. She being the symbol of destruction completes the cycle of Faustus's damnation to hell as well. Her introduction in the last Act of the play is symbolically meaningful and well-timed. The Old Man represents Christian faith and obedience to the dictates of Christ that ensures peace, harmony and bliss. Helen and the Old Man represent two extremes—one stands for beauty, transience and destruction; the other for the eternal and the permanent. Faustus had two choices at the end. If he had paid heed to the Old Man's advice instead of being carried away by Helen's charms, he could have averted his ruin. . Both Helen and the Old man are placed intermittently in the last Act of the play. It is symbolic that Faustus was given two choices even at the point of his damnation. But Faustus, caught in the vicious circle of evil, wrote his own ruin by choosing Helen over the advice of the Old Man.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

Dr. Faustus has its pitfalls with respect to its weak form and farcical sub-plot. The weak form accounts for the lack of proper division of the play into Acts. We have only scenes put together one after the other. The elevated, lofty style is also not consistent throughout the play. It rather belongs to individual scenes which achieve a high dramatic effect. The middle portion of the play, particularly Act III and IV where Faustus is shown travelling far and wide and enjoying his rising popularity are rather sterile in nature. Despite all these shortcomings, *Dr. Faustus* has a tremendous appeal to the audience of the twentieth century as it particularly relates to the psychic condition of the modern man who is a victim of the split personality and is struggling to cope with it through various means and strategies. As Kenneth L Golden says: "Like modern man Faustus is the victim of a splitting of the will. He rejects Christianity because it would hamper his boundless desires. Yet he also cannot escape Christianity, or at least certain aspects of it – especially guilt and the sense of sin that leads to despair... Faustus's neurosis – the split, dissociated nature of his psyche – is a match for any of the "double thinking of the modern mass mind". (Golden, Kenneth L. "Myth, Psychology and Marlowe's Dr. Faustus." *College Literature*. 12, 3, 1985, pp. 203-4)

The tragedy of Dr. Faustus is the tragedy of indulgent knowledge and half truths. Faustus exhibits both the strong yearning for knowledge for the sake of it and half truths, never bothering to delve deeper to make the experience wholesome. Faustus was a rebel and an irrepressibly impatient man. Marlowe did not draw the rebellious Faustus heroically, but the point was that his act of rebellion against God, howsoever lopsided, unmethodical and weird, was immeasurably heroic. Dr. Faustus, among other rebel heroes of Marlowe stands apart and is unique in its composition.

3.7 KEY WORDS

Paradox: A paradox is a statement that seems at first glance self-contradictory but on deeper contemplation, true Paradoxes are contrary to our general beliefs, ideas and concepts. A paradox is an effective literary device used to force the reader to think more deeply about the statement.

Tragic Flaw: Tragic flaw or 'Hamartia' (Greek word) was used by Aristotle in *Poetics*. It means that the 'error of judgment' of the central protagonist brings his downfall at the end of the play. It is a tragic flaw that makes the reader see logically that the tragic downfall of the hero is not due to fate or destiny but because of the person's flaw.

Motif: In a literary work motif can be seen as an image, action, recurrent symbol or a character that is used consciously by the writer to highlight the theme. It is an independent source of knowing the truth of a literary work.

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss in detail the theme of sin and redemption in *Dr. Faustus*.
2. In what ways can a modern reader relate to the predicament of *Dr. Faustus*? Discuss.
3. What is Motif? Explain the motifs used by Marlowe in *Dr. Faustus*.
4. Elucidate upon the efficacy of allegory of Good Angel and Evil Angel in *Dr. Faustus*.

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

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2. Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 7th Edition. p.5
3. Brooke, Nicholas. "The Moral Tragedy of Dr. Faustus." *Critics on Marlowe*. ed. Judith O'Neill. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969, p.100
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5. Fermor, U.M. Ellis *Christopher Marlowe*, 1927
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UNIT 4 CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES/ RE-TELLINGS

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Outstanding Scenes in *Dr. Faustus*
- 4.3 Irony in *Dr. Faustus*
- 4.4 The ending of the play
- 4.5 Marlowe's Mighty Lines
- 4.6 Drawbacks of the play: Plot Construction
- 4.7 Comic Scenes: A Lacuna
- 4.8 Critical Response to *Dr. Faustus*
- 4.9 Keywords
- 4.10 Questions
- 4.11 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will cover two areas – concerns other than themes and the critical perspectives. Till now we have focused on themes, social background of the age and the overall thrust of the play. Apart from this we shall also include the critical response to *Dr. Faustus* without which our analysis will be incomplete.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Dear Students, now that you are familiar with the story of *Dr. Faustus* to a large extent, you must be feeling confident to face the exam questions. But for that you need more exposure to the concerns raised in the play in order to make your understanding of the text complete. While reading the play, you must have felt overwhelmed with the outstanding scenes, the breathtaking mighty lines which seldom present a parallel in literature, the heart-rending last scene, and so on. Some questions regarding plot construction and the final fate of *Dr. Faustus* at the end of the play must have also appealed to you immensely. We generally are inclined to think that *Dr. Faustus*, howsoever impious his means to attain boundless knowledge and unlimited power might have been, didn't deserve eternal damnation. These are the first impressions and quite subjective, too, but these subjective impressions open up the scope for further analysis. This unit will help you to develop a judicious understanding of the play and to read the play not as a thrilling story but as a storehouse of hidden meanings. Have you also wondered why *Dr. Faustus*, written some 400 years ago set in an entirely different society address itself so beautifully to the modern reader? Yes. The answer can be found by going beyond the story of *Dr. Faustus*, those psychological realities of human mind which stay as relatively permanent with the change of epochs. Let us start the discussion by taking the areas one by one.

4.2 OUTSTANDING SCENES IN *DR. FAUSTUS*

The strength of the play lies in the extraordinarily crafted scenes. These scenes heighten the dramatic effect as well as contribute technically to the climax of the play. Act 1 Scene (iii), a long one, contains many such exciting moments. For instance in a dialogue with Mephistophilis, Faustus asks about hell and gets an answer: "Why this is hell, nor am I out of it (1, (iii), 41). This statement actually challenges our conventional belief in hell as a physical place where the evil spirits are tormented by burning in perpetual fire. We all have somehow visualized hell as a place where the sinners are tortured day and night. Faustus has also internalized this mythological concept of physical hell. But Marlowe's hell is not a physical phenomenon. It is a spiritual or a psychological idea. It is a state of mind which creates a hell or a heaven around us. Marlowe has given the whole idea of hell a wide range of interpretations. The entire gambit of

negativity — horror, jealousy, discontentment, anger, pride etc – fall in the ambit of mental hell. One is reminded of Satan who says in Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "The mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven."

Mephistophilis tells Faustus that losing God and heaven torments him and this is enough of a hell for him.

Thinks't 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? (I, (i), 41)

The pain and agony in the heart of Mephistophilis symbolizes hell which is not outside but within his own self. But Faustus still is not satisfied with this reply and is inquisitive to know the actual location of hell to which Mephistophilis says:

Within the bowels of these elements,
Where we are tortured and remain forever!
Hell hath no limits nor is circumscrib'd
In one self place; for where we are is hell,
And where hell is, there must we ever be (II, i, 52)

In Act II, Scene ii, we have yet another phenomenal outburst of Faustus who is stricken with the pricks of conscience at having made a wrong decision of selling his soul to the devil:

My heart is so harden'd, I cannot repent:
Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven,
But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears,
Faustus, thou art damn'd! (II, i, 55)

Faustus faces this double-mindedness at many junctures in the play. This deep despair and dejection makes him human. The most remarkable aspect of Faustus's character is that despite his serious shortcomings, he wins the sympathy of the readers. Herein lies the success of Marlowe as a playwright. He presents Faustus with his highs and lows and Faustus swinging between Lucifer and God. Faustus could never surrender completely to Lucifer despite his pact with the devil. This is enough to show that Faustus basically is a noble soul. Whenever he faces this conflict of conscience, the Good Angel and the Evil Angel appear to pull him to their respective sides, symbolically representing the two sides of his nature. With the exception of Shakespeare, it is difficult to find such a remarkable conflict of conscience in the whole range of literature.

Another outstanding scene is the one where Faustus entreats Mephistophilis to call Helen so that he can feast his eyes with the sight of the ultimate beauty:

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss:
Her lips suck forth my soul, see where it flies!
Come Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven be in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena! (V, ii, 86-87)

Faustus's craving for Helen should not be seen as a man's ordinary desire for a woman. As the students of literature, we need to see beyond. Faustus had started his journey with the devil to fly high in the realms

of knowledge and power but at this juncture, when he is at the verge of the termination of the contract, he is tempted to have a glimpse of Helen. What does this mean? At one level it shows that Faustus is very much aware of the failure of his bargain. Instead of gaining something, he ends up losing his will, his peace of mind, his strong sense of conviction and most of all his command over Mephistophilis who is more of a master to him at this stage. His wish to see the vision of Helen is meant to offer himself some solace, some relaxation from this sorry situation. Do you think that Faustus, a great scholar, a man with highly developed rational faculties would stoop to such a level? No. Faustus, under the cover of his desire for Helen tries to evade the situation of utter hopelessness. Secondly, for Faustus Helen is not a woman. She is a symbol, a “paragon of excellence”. Here too, Faustus would not settle for anything less than Helen as he, a Renaissance man incarnate, is a great worshipper of classical beauty and amour and had read with thrill and admiration about Helen when he, as a student, had studied Homer and other classics. She is a symbol of great beauty and a fountainhead of the classical concept of beauty and love in the age of Renaissance. The Renaissance identity of Faustus asserts itself. He is a highly educated and refined man and Helen is the benchmark of beauty for him. The Helen scene at once discloses to us Faustus’s Renaissance self as well as the tragic awareness of his defeat, to which Helen would offer a temporary consolation.

4.3 IRONY IN *DR. FAUSTUS*

Dr. Faustus abounds in ironical situations. The happenings go contrary to the plans of Dr. Faustus. Irony is a technique used by the writer to indicate through character, situation or dialogue certain developments which are opposite to what is actually stated. In simpler words, when there is a gap between what is said and what is intended, it is an example of irony. The character of Faustus is fraught with ironies of multiple kinds. Let’s cite certain situations to exemplify this. In Act I, Scene iii, Faustus summons Mephistophilis and is swollen with pride at his achievement as the perfect conjurer but finds that the devil has come not at his calling but on his own sweet will, when he heard Faustus abjure God: “For when we hear someone rack the name of God, / abjure the scriptures, and his savior Christ,/ We fly in hope to get his glorious soul (p.40).” There is irony in the character of Dr. Faustus, too. Faustus, a formidable scholar who has acquired a glorious position in life, so sharp in reason, so fine in intellect could not understand the basic realities of life. Faustus who risked his soul to the devil only to have a command over the world becomes so fragile and feeble in front of Lucifer and Mephistophilis. This is the height of irony. Mephistophilis who according to the deal was to be Faustus’s servant becomes his commander in the later phases. We find the all confident Faustus totally at the mercy of Mephistophilis. Another ironical situation is that Faustus expected Mephistophilis to satisfy all his curiosities and queries but Mephistophilis would not answer Faustus’s queries about hell as it reminded him of his own tortured state of existence; he wouldn’t answer Faustus’s questions about the creation of the earth as well, for God, who created the Earth is his enemy. He couldn’t provide Faustus with a wife as marriage is a divine sacrament. Irony is at its peak when Mephistophilis, the devil is singing praises of heaven and its eternal bliss. Not anywhere near the realization of his aspirations, Faustus gradually degenerates into despair and dejection during the twenty-four years of his contract. In the last scene Faustus pleads to Helen to make him immortal at a time when he is so close to his eternal damnation. The Old Man is a foil to Faustus and underlines the meaning of the play as well as heightens the irony through contrast. On his side, Faustus commands Mephistophilis to torment the Old Man and gets an answer quite shaking in itself:

His faith is great; I cannot touch his soul;
But what I may afflict his body with
I will attempt, which is but little worth (V, i, 86)

What Faustus couldn’t understand is that faith in God is such a great strength that no devil can dare to come near him. No doubt human condition is quite restrictive but these restrictions and limitations are virtues to be cherished. Faustus should not have despaired for being but a man. He should have felt blessed in his human state. Most ironical is the fact that throughout the play Faustus is stricken with a

painful realization of the futility of his decision but every time he makes an effort to respond to his good sense, the Evil Angel manipulates him not to look back. In fact, Faustus does look back not once but many a time throughout the span of twenty-four years but of no avail. At least, his last call to God to forgive him shows that Faustus is genuinely repentant but it is now too late. Irony intensifies the tragedy in the play. Marlowe has used irony in a subtle way in *Dr. Faustus*. The ironical condition of Dr. Faustus, fraught with tragic dilemmas actually defines the basic human condition for all times. The immensity of human condition forces certain desperate choices on man which cannot be avoided and man is an eternal prisoner of his choices.

4.4 THE ENDING OF THE PLAY

Readers of the play tend to think that Faustus should not have got such a severe punishment at the end of the play. His genuine repentance and pleading to God to show mercy to him should have been listened to. And he should not have been condemned to eternal damnation. Even critics are divided on the ending of the play. It is felt that Faustus was a noble soul and his only sin was that he dared to tread the untrodden lands and attend to the calls of his inquisitive nature. His over ambition, they argue, has nothing individual about it, it is rather the cultural aspirations of the Renaissance which manifest into his personality so he should have been treated sympathetically at the end of the play. But going by the Aristotelian concept of tragedy, the downfall of Faustus was in keeping with the denouement or resolution that comes at the end of the play. The damnation of Faustus also satisfies the theory of cause and effect. The Renaissance temper of scientific spirit finds an expression here. Dr. Faustus made an error of judgment and he has to face the consequences. If Faustus had escaped the tragic damnation at the end, it would have been against the spirit of the age as well as the principles of a tragic play. And here the end is quite expected. All through the play the readers visualize this end for Dr. Faustus. The other ending – Faustus being acquitted and saved by God – would have confused the readers who all through were waiting for the damnation of Faustus. Moreover, the function of denouement is to preach a moral lesson. The escape of Faustus from the tragic fate at the end would have led to a failure of this essential function of tragedy. This is therefore an apt ending to the play.

How can one miss the superb rendering of the last soliloquy of Dr. Faustus at the end of the play? The final monologue of Faustus marks the climax of the play. It conveys an excruciating agony of a lost soul in a heart-rending manner. The desperation of Faustus was too intense to be framed in words, yet Marlowe has succeeded in catching the innermost chord of Faustus's soul and conveyed it through words which are rare to come across. The clock strikes eleven and Faustus says:

Ah Faustus,
Now hast though one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damned perpetually (V, ii, 91)

His appeals to heaven, to earth, to nature for stopping their momentum so that he could repent are really moving:

Stand still, you ever moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease, and midnight never come.
Fair nature's eye, rise, rise again and make
Perpetual day, or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul (V, ii, 91)

Faustus who had challenged the authority of God pleads for His compassion and mercy:

See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah my Christ – (V,ii,92)

And finally when the clock strikes twelve:

O it strikes, it strikes! Now body, turn into air,
Or Lucifer will bear thee quick to hell.
O Soul, be changed into little water drops,
And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found.
My God, my God, look no fierce on me! (V, ii, 92)

Notice the heightened passion taken to their extremes. Faustus gets visions and finally gets answer for all his previous doubts. His illusions are broken and he can now see plain and clear the implications of his doing. In these final moments he comes very close to God. He speaks of leaping up to God. He sees Christ's blood in the firmament. He then sees the 'ireful brows' of God. He entreats the mountains to fall on him and hide him in their interior so that he may be saved from "the heavy wrath of God". Consider also that he would like to be dissolved into a cloud and then ascend to heaven; he would like to be transformed into a beast, as their soul finally "dissolves in elements". He curses his parents who gave him birth; he curses himself for falling in the trap of devil. He would like to live in hell for a thousand years in the hope to be saved at last.

Theologically, Faustus still falters in his understanding of God's mercy because it is never too late to repent and to ask for God's forgiveness. But Faustus, even at the last crucial moments is pondering more on his damnation than on God's grace. He still is sceptical whether he stands a chance to be pardoned. May be it is Marlowe's intention to show that Faustus could not purge himself of pride till the end. Faustus focuses his attention on the fleeting time and is not entirely lost in God. His faith is still not firm. He still does resist his fate, imagines impossible subterfuges, and clings to every second of his remaining life. Anyway, this last soliloquy arouses a great deal of sympathy for Faustus who is more misled than sinful. This scene remains one of the most powerful in the play.

4.5 MARLOWE'S MIGHTY LINES

The superb use of blank verse touching high levels of passionate intensity is the hallmark of *Dr. Faustus*. This is explained by Ben Jonson as mighty line. Marlowe experimented with the blank verse in his plays and breathed in it enormous vigour, vitality and power to suit his heroic themes. As also touched upon in Unit II of this block, blank verse is unrhymed iambic pentameter in which each line is divided into five feet. There are two syllables in each feet and the second syllable is accented. This amounts to ten syllables and five feet in each line. Let us explain it further. The blank verse is unrhymed and uses iambic pentameter. It is unrhymed as the last word of first line and the last word of the second line do not have a similar sound pattern. For instance, if the first line ends with 'fall' the second line can have 'dream' as the last word (not 'call, or 'mall' or any other word that rhymes with 'fall'.). Secondly 'iamb is a foot or a beat (in poetry, a group of two or three syllables is called a foot.) consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a long syllable. For example the word 'remark' has two syllables –'re' is a weaker or unstressed syllable whereas 'mark' is the stressed syllable as it has a stronger emphasis. Lastly 'pent' of pentameter means five. So a line of iambic pentameter consists of five iambs. – Five stressed syllables followed by five unstressed ones. Let us take some examples from *Dr. Faustus*.

Ah, half the hour is past: 'twill all be past anon.
Now let's mark the stressed syllables with capital words and separate them from the unstressed syllables by a slash mark. The above line becomes:

ah | HALF| the | HOUR | is | PAST| 'twill| ALL| be | PAST |a| NON
Another instance:

O God, if thou wilt not have mercy on my soul

o | GOD | if | THOU | wilt| NOT | have | MERCY | on my | SOUL

Example:

Had I as many souls as there be starts
HAD | i |AS |many |SOULS |as |THERE |be |STARTS

Though Marlowe didn't innovate the blank verse but the blank verse used by his predecessors was lifeless, monotonous and artificial. The blank verse in *Gorboduc* is rigid and unnatural. It lacks spontaneity and therefore is dull. It was for Marlowe to enliven it. Marlowe loved experimentation and he revolutionized the dramatic poetry with a sanguine and refreshing blank verse. Marlowe knew that he was making a departure from the earlier trend and therefore asserts in the prologue of *Tamburlaine*:

From jiggling verses of rhyming mother wits
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to stately tent of war (Marlowe, Christopher. *Tamburlaine*. J. B. Stene. Ed. *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays*. England: Penguin English Library, 1968, p105)

M.C Bradbrook rightly says: "Marlowe has the least to rely upon; he found dramatic form, like dramatic blank verse stiff and inflexible; the history of his development is one of growing plasticity. He was affected by his age chiefly in matters of presentation." (Bradbrook, M.C. *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy*. New Delhi: Foundation Books Pvt. Ltd., p.131.)

4.6 DRAWBACKS OF THE PLAY: PLOT CONSTRUCTION

One of the greatest flaws in *Dr. Faustus* is its plot construction. The plot of the play is far from being well knit and taut. It will not be wrong to say that the play does not have a plot. Most of the action takes place in Faustus's conflicting mind. And in doing so the play touches high levels of creativity. On the whole the play is a series of scenes loosely put together, leading to a final catastrophe. The entire focus is on the mind and the inner turmoil of Dr. Faustus. The only other important character is Mephistophilis who is given large space in the play. The rest of the characters make a short appearance either to impart some additional information about Faustus or to provide comic relief. The unity of time and place are not adhered to by Marlowe. So far as the unity of place is concerned, the location is not confined to one place as the hero keeps travelling to distant lands. To speak of the unity of time, the play spans as much as 24 years. The play, however, maintains the unity of action but that too to a certain extent as most of the scenes in Act III and IV do not play an essential role — they are irrelevant and not connected with the main action of the play. The fact that the entire focus of the play is on Dr. Faustus and that there is no sub-plot leaves a certain impression of the unity of action to a certain extent.

4.7 COMIC SCENES: A LACUNA

The high seriousness in the play is not adequately balanced with a much required comic relief. The comic scenes, mostly in Act III and IV of the play, are ineffectual and disjointed. They have no sensible connection with the running story of *Dr. Faustus*. They seem to be out of place and can easily be removed without causing any harm to the overall unity of the play. For instance, Wagner's misguiding the scholars who have come asking for Dr. Faustus in Act I scene i seems to be a superfluous incorporation. The scene in which Robin and Ralph call Mephistophilis in Act III Scene ii offers certain degree of amusement but doesn't fit into the scheme of the play. Robin and Ralph in no way help in the furtherance of the central idea of the play. Instead, the scene stands as isolated and is unworthy of inclusion in the play. The mischief that Faustus plays by being invisible in Act III Scene i at the privy chamber of Pope at Rome where a feast is being hosted in the honour of St. Peter makes us see Faustus in a ludicrous light rather than offering a healthy comic relief. The humour generated at the expense of the Emperor's knight in Act

IV Scene i is crude. Instead of lightening the serious atmosphere of the play, this scene, in fact, enhances the tragic irony by projecting the view that a man of the stature of Faustus is using his powers to indulge in such trivialities. Last but not least, the horse courser scene in Act IV Scene ii has some value in that it throws light on Faustus but it is anything but comic in its thrust. This scene is placed quite at the end of the play when Faustus is on the verge of the completion of his stipulated tenure on earth. Faustus, along with negotiating with the horse courser, is simultaneously troubled with the thought that his end is drawing near. As such, growth in the character of Faustus might have been aimed. But Faustus comes out as an irritating and waxed person with no signs of illumination. The sense of loss doesn't nag Faustus out of his world of make-belief, nor is it a catalyst to mellow him down or bring him out of his shallow self to expand to the human sufferings. Therefore, this scene despite being introduced to lessen the serious effect ironically augments the tragic intensity.

4.8 CRITICAL RESPONSE TO DR. FAUSTUS

Critical response to Dr. Faustus is immense, particularly it gained new vigour in the twentieth century. The reason is quite simple. Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* does not belong to an age, it is for ages. The Renaissance upsurge for knowledge and power, the typical scientific outlook on life – too much dependence on reason, a nagging habit of questioning norms, institutions, stereotypes and accepted practices, and a heightened sense of individuality is also the reality of the modern times. Hence the popularity of Marlowe.

Lee A. Jacobus on the Elizabethan theatre

The design of the Elizabethan theatre is a matter of some speculation. Many of the plays popular before the theatres were built were performed in a yard, with a balcony above and a square yard on which actors performed. The audience looked out of their windows or stood in the yard. As a result Elizabethan theatre seems to have taken the inn yard structure as their basis. ... Indeed the first English tragedy *Gorboduc* by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton was played at the inner temple, one of the inns at court in 1562 before Marlowe and Shakespeare were born.

Roma Gill on Renaissance aspirations

Dr. Faustus, the first figure on the English stage who deserved to be called a character, is an epitome of Renaissance aspirations. He has all the divine discontent, the unwearied and unsatisfied striving after knowledge that marked the age in which Marlowe wrote. An age of exploration, its adventurers were not only the merchants and seamen who sailed round the world, but also the scientists, astronomers who surveyed the heavens with their 'optic glass', and those scholars who travelled in the realms of gold to bring back tales of a mighty race of gods and heroes in the ancient Greece and Rome. The first soliloquy is 'no mere reckoning of accounts but an inventory of the renaissance mind.' Faustus is one of the new men. For him, as for Marlowe, lowly birth was no bar to a university education; and as he sits alone in his study reading from the Latin textbooks, he is linked in a common language with scholars from Oxford, Cambridge, and all over the civilized world.

M. C. Bradbrook on Faustus's Inner Conflict

If it takes so many negatives to stop Faustus's repentance there must be very strong forces working for it. It is after this debate with himself that the two angels again appear, as incarnations of the alternatives before him. In this speech for the first time (and it is even before the contract is signed) Faustus tells himself to 'despair'. The idea of despair in the theological sense --- runs through the play. It is the means by which the devils, from the very beginning secure Faustus's soul making him incapable of repentance, even though he wills with all his might to repent. 'Distressed' is also used as an alternative description of

this mental state. At other times, however, Faustus is determined to an extent that his resolution appears ludicrous.

William Hazlitt on the Greatness of *Dr. Faustus*

His *Dr. Faustus*, though an imperfect and unequal performance, is his greatest work. Faustus himself is a rude sketch but it is a gigantic one. The character may be considered a personification of the pride of will and eagerness of curiosity, sublimed beyond the reach of fear and remorse.

James Broughton on the exalted scenes in *Dr. Faustus*

The beauties of this play have been eloquently, expatiated upon by numerous writers and, though defective as a whole, it certainly merits all the praise it has received. Some exclusively poetical passages might be selected from it, especially the apostrophe of Faustus to the shade of Helen, with his last impassioned soliloquy of agony and despair, which is surpassed by nothing in the whole circle of the English drama, and cannot fail to excite in the reader a thrill of horror, mingled with pity for the miserable sufferer.

4.9 KEYWORDS

Subjective:

It is quite distanced from facts and is least concerned with authenticity. The subjective approach in the person's own opinions of right and wrong, high and low, good and bad. In the same way, subjective writing is the one showing writers personal observations, experiences and perspectives.

Climax:

Climax is a Greek term which means 'ladder'. It is a turning point in a drama when the sequence of events in a play reaches the highest point of conflict. It is the peak point after which the fate of the central character takes a down-slide.

Unity of Time, Place and Action.

As laid down by Aristotle's *Poetics*, the play should have three unities – unity of time, place and action. Unity of place means that the play should be confined to one location and should not keep changing the geographical space. Unity of time means that the span of time covered in the play should not exceed 24 hours i.e. one single day. Unity of action indicates that all the events or scenes in the play should contribute to the main plot. The scenes or even sub-plots, if it exists, should contribute to the main plot.

4.10 QUESTIONS

1. How far do you feel convinced by the ending of the play? Does *Dr. Faustus* deserve to be damned?
2. Discuss the use of situational and verbal irony in *Dr. Faustus*.
3. Write a note on the blank verse as popularized by Marlowe with special reference to *Dr. Faustus*.
4. Throw light on the drawbacks of *Dr. Faustus*.
5. Elucidate upon the plot structure of *Dr. Faustus*.

4.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Brooke, Nicholas, "The Moral Tragedy of Dr. Faustus." *The Cambridge Journal*, Vol.5, No.11, 1952
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6. Santayana, George, "The Rehabilitation of Faustus." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Dr. Faustus*. ed. William Farnham. N.J.: Princeton Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1969
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