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Representation of religion in Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlowe

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Abstract

In Christopher Marlowe's play "Doctor Faustus," the representation of religion is multifaceted and serves as a central theme throughout the narrative. Marlowe explores various aspects of religion, Christian theology, and the struggle between spiritual piety and worldly desires. The play delves into the complexities of human nature, the consequences of one's choices, and the eternal conflict between good and evil. The play portrays a classic struggle between good and evil, represented by Faustus's internal conflict. He is torn between seeking divine knowledge and spiritual fulfilment on one hand and succumbing to the temptation of worldly power and pleasures on the other. This struggle represents the broader human predicament of choosing between moral righteousness and sinful indulgence.

Keywords: Religion, Christopher Marlow, Dr. Faustus, god, the devil, Spiritual

1. Introduction

In Christopher Marlowe's play "Doctor Faustus," religion is a central theme and is represented in various ways throughout the text. The play explores the conflict between religious piety and the temptation of worldly power and knowledge, using the protagonist, Dr. Faustus, as a vehicle to portray this struggle. The play is deeply rooted in Christian theology, with references to heaven, hell, God, the devil, and biblical characters. The Seven Deadly Sins are personified and presented as temptations that lead Faustus astray. The presence of religious symbols and themes highlights the importance of morality, divine law, and the eternal struggle between virtue and sin. The representation of religion in "Doctor Faustus" provides a rich and complex exploration of human nature, morality, and the consequences of one's choices. It serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of pride, ambition, and the pursuit of forbidden knowledge without regard for spiritual values. The play prompts reflection on the eternal struggle between good and evil and the need for spiritual redemption and salvation.

"Doctor Faustus" presents a layered representation of religion, reflecting the religious uncertainties and debates of the Elizabethan period. Marlowe's exploration of spiritual powerlessness and political danger within religious institutions, along with anti-religious language and imagery, contributes to the play's complex portrayal of the era's religious ambiguities and tensions. It serves as a thought-provoking commentary on the challenges of faith, the pursuit of knowledge, and the consequences of one's choices in a time of religious and intellectual upheaval.

2. Literature review

Fazle Noor (2019) ^[1]. Marlowe's portrayal of religion in "Doctor Faustus" reflects the religious ambiguities prevalent during the Elizabethan period. The play presents a complex mix of traditional Christian theology, references to heaven, hell, and biblical characters, along with Faustus's quest for forbidden knowledge and power. This juxtaposition of religious elements and themes highlights the uncertainties and conflicts surrounding faith and spirituality during the time.

Prof. Naem, (2010) ^[2]. The play contains anti-religious language and imagery, including the portrayal of the Pope and certain religious practices in a critical and satirical manner. These elements demonstrate a scepticism towards the religious establishment and its practices, reflecting the cultural climate of religious reform and criticism during the Reformation.

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Mann, Thomas, (2007) [3]. In the play, Faustus's initial dissatisfaction with conventional religious pursuits and his quest for forbidden knowledge suggests a perception that traditional religious teachings and practices might not fully satisfy human spiritual needs. Faustus turns to dark magic and necromancy, seeking power beyond the limitations of religious dogma, indicating a perception of spiritual powerlessness in organized religion.

Asghar, Shuaib (2013) [5]. The play also portrays religion as politically dangerous, especially through its satirical depiction of the Church and certain religious representatives. Faustus's disillusionment with the Church's teachings leads him to seek alternative paths to power, challenging the religious authorities. This reflects the tensions between religious institutions and political power during the Elizabethan era, where the Church's influence on state affairs was a subject of debate and concern.

3. Representation of Religion in Dr. Faustus

3.1. Ambiguous religious beliefs

At the beginning of the play, Faustus's religious beliefs are ambiguous. He is torn between pursuing traditional Christian theology as a scholar and seeking forbidden knowledge through necromancy and dark magic. This ambiguity reflects the broader societal conflict during the Renaissance between traditional religious faith and emerging scientific and humanistic ideas. In Christopher Marlowe's play "Doctor Faustus," the protagonist, Dr. Faustus, exhibits ambiguous religious beliefs and struggles with his faith throughout the story. This ambiguity is central to the play's exploration of the human condition, the conflict between good and evil, and the consequences of one's choices. The ambiguous religious beliefs in "Doctor Faustus" illustrate the complexities of human nature and the internal conflicts that arise when one's desires and ambitions clash with their spiritual convictions. The play delves into the eternal debate of free will and the consequences of one's choices, providing a cautionary tale about the dangers of neglecting spiritual values and the pursuit of forbidden knowledge and power.

1. **Desire for Knowledge vs. Spiritual Fulfillment:** At the beginning of the play, Faustus is dissatisfied with traditional academic pursuits and seeks knowledge beyond conventional boundaries. He turns to necromancy and magic to gain forbidden knowledge, aspiring to be all-powerful. His pursuit of knowledge leads to a spiritual void and a lack of contentment, highlighting the conflict between intellectual curiosity and spiritual fulfillment.
2. **Bargaining with the Devil:** Faustus's decision to make a pact with the devil, Mephistopheles, reflects his uncertainty and desperation. He hopes that through this deal, he can gain earthly pleasures and power while also hoping that he can ultimately use this power to challenge God's authority and achieve salvation. Faustus's willingness to engage in such a deal showcases his wavering religious beliefs and moral boundaries.
3. **Moments of Repentance:** Throughout the play, Faustus experiences moments of remorse and contemplation about his actions. He understands the consequences of his choices and expresses regret for his sins, revealing an underlying struggle between his conscience and his desire for worldly power. However,

his pride and attachment to his newfound abilities prevent him from seeking genuine redemption.

4. **Confrontation with Heaven and Hell:** As the play progresses, Faustus grapples with the idea of heaven and hell, especially in his final moments when he faces the prospect of eternal damnation. The fear of damnation and the desire for salvation create tension within Faustus, as he becomes increasingly aware of the gravity of his actions and the inevitability of the consequences.
5. **Mephistopheles as a Catalyst for Ambiguity:** Mephistopheles, the devil's servant, acts as a constant reminder of Faustus's pact and the price he will have to pay. Mephistopheles also tempts Faustus with pleasures and knowledge, further complicating Faustus's internal struggle between spiritual enlightenment and worldly pursuits.

3.2. Temptation and damnation

The play presents Faustus's temptation by Mephistopheles, a devil, who offers him power and pleasure in exchange for his soul. Faustus's inner struggle between good and evil represents the classic struggle of the human soul, highlighting the consequences of succumbing to worldly desires and neglecting faith and redemption. In Christopher Marlowe's play "Doctor Faustus," temptation and damnation are crucial themes that drive the narrative and the development of the protagonist, Dr. Faustus. The play explores the consequences of succumbing to temptation and making choices that lead to eternal damnation. Through the depiction of temptation and damnation, Marlowe presents a moral lesson about the dangers of forsaking one's principles and falling prey to earthly desires and pride. The play encourages contemplation on the significance of human choices, the transient nature of worldly pleasures, and the eternal consequences of one's actions.

1. **Temptation by Mephistopheles:** The play begins with Faustus's dissatisfaction with his academic pursuits and his desire for greater knowledge and power. He turns to dark magic and necromancy, hoping to gain forbidden knowledge and unlock supernatural abilities. Mephistopheles, a devil, appears to Faustus and offers him a deal – in exchange for his soul, Faustus will have twenty-four years of worldly power and pleasure. This temptation becomes the turning point in Faustus's life, leading to a path of sin and damnation.
2. **Faustus's Inner Struggle:** Throughout the play, Faustus grapples with his conscience and experiences moments of doubt and regret. He is aware of the gravity of his actions and the consequences of his pact with the devil. However, his desires for earthly pleasures, knowledge, and power overshadow his sense of morality, leading him to continue down the path of sin and temptation.
3. **The Seven Deadly Sins:** In the play, the Seven Deadly Sins are personified as characters who visit Faustus. They represent the embodiment of sinful desires and further tempt Faustus into indulging in various vices. These encounters emphasize the allure of sin and its ability to consume and corrupt human souls.
4. **The Clock of Doom:** As part of his pact, Faustus is granted twenty-four years of power and knowledge. To signify the limited time he has left, a clock is introduced, counting down the hours and minutes until

Faustus's damnation. This constant reminder heightens the tension and emphasizes the urgency for Faustus to seek redemption.

5. **Faustus's Final Moments:** In the concluding scenes, Faustus faces the horrifying reality of his impending damnation. He realizes that he has wasted his gift of knowledge and misused his powers for trivial pursuits. Faustus pleads for mercy and seeks repentance but finds it too late to reverse his fate. The play serves as a cautionary tale, warning against the allure of temptation and the irreversible consequences of making sinful choices.

4. Christian theology and sin

In Christopher Marlowe's play "Doctor Faustus," Christian theology and the concept of sin play a significant role in the moral dilemma faced by the protagonist, Dr. Faustus. The play explores the consequences of Faustus's sinful actions and the conflict between human ambition and divine law. Throughout the play, there are references to Christian theology, including heaven, hell, God, and the devil. Faustus's descent into sin is depicted through his pursuit of forbidden knowledge and his subsequent misuse of power. The seven deadly sins are also personified as characters, appearing to Faustus and representing his moral degradation. By incorporating Christian theology and the concept of sin, "Doctor Faustus" serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of pride, ambition, and the pursuit of forbidden knowledge. The play underscores the importance of faith, the consequences of sinful actions, and the need for repentance and redemption. Marlowe uses these religious elements to explore the complexities of human nature and to deliver a powerful moral message about the implications of one's choices and actions.

1. **The Concept of Sin:** "Doctor Faustus" is deeply rooted in Christian beliefs, and the concept of sin is central to the play. Faustus's actions, such as his pursuit of forbidden knowledge through necromancy and his pact with the devil, are seen as acts of rebellion against God's divine order. The play underscores the idea that sin, especially the sin of pride, leads to spiritual degradation and eternal damnation.
2. **The Seven Deadly Sins:** Marlowe employs the allegorical representation of the Seven Deadly Sins as characters who visit Faustus. Each of these sins—pride, covetousness, envy, wrath, gluttony, sloth, and lust—tempts Faustus and highlights the allure of sinful desires. The inclusion of these sins emphasizes the broader Christian moral framework and the dangerous consequences of yielding to temptation.
3. **Faustus's Pact with the Devil:** Faustus's decision to make a pact with the devil, Mephistopheles, is a sinful act that reflects his ambition and desire for worldly power and knowledge. This act symbolizes Faustus's rebellion against God and his willingness to abandon his faith and moral values in exchange for temporal gains.
4. **Struggle with Repentance:** Throughout the play, Faustus experiences moments of remorse and contemplation about his sinful actions. He contemplates seeking repentance and turning back to God, but his pride and attachment to the power he has acquired hinder him from fully embracing redemption. Faustus's internal struggle highlights the Christian notion of

God's mercy and forgiveness in the face of human sinfulness.

5. **Damnation and the Clock of Doom:** The play builds tension by introducing a clock that counts down the hours and minutes until Faustus's damnation. This imagery serves as a constant reminder of the limited time Faustus has to repent and seek forgiveness before facing eternal punishment.

5. The Role of the Church

In Christopher Marlowe's play "Doctor Faustus", the role of the Church is depicted in a critical and somewhat negative light. The portrayal of the Church and its representatives reflects the tensions and controversies surrounding the Catholic Church during the Renaissance period. The play presents a critical view of the Church and its representatives. The Pope and other religious figures are depicted as corrupt and morally questionable. This criticism reflects the historical context of the Renaissance when there was growing discontent with the Catholic Church due to issues like corruption, indulgences, and the Church's role in suppressing scientific and intellectual advancements. The portrayal of the Church in "Doctor Faustus" reflects the tensions and conflicts that existed during the Renaissance regarding the role of the Church in society and its relationship with knowledge, power, and spirituality. Marlowe uses this critique to explore the complexities of human nature, the consequences of one's choices, and the eternal struggle between good and evil.

1. **Corruption and Worldliness:** The play highlights the corrupt nature of certain members of the Church. Faustus seeks knowledge beyond traditional academic pursuits because he finds the religious teachings of the Church unsatisfactory. The play suggests that some religious figures are more concerned with worldly matters and power than with spiritual guidance and salvation.
2. **The Pope's Role:** The Pope is portrayed in the play as a symbol of corruption and excess. Faustus performs tricks and pranks on the Pope and his court, satirizing the extravagance and materialism associated with the papal court during that time. This criticism reflects the growing discontent with the Catholic Church's involvement in politics and its perceived lack of focus on spiritual matters.
3. **Suppression of Knowledge:** Faustus's pursuit of knowledge outside the boundaries of traditional theology and the Church's teachings is seen as a rebellion against the authority of the Church. The play suggests that the Church suppresses intellectual and scientific advancements, leading Faustus to seek knowledge through dark magic and forbidden practices.
4. **Role in Faustus's Damnation:** The Church is implicitly connected to Faustus's damnation. His initial disillusionment with religious teachings drives him to seek alternative paths, leading to his fateful encounter with Mephistopheles and his eventual damnation. The play seems to imply that the Church's limitations and rigidity contribute to the protagonist's tragic downfall.
5. **Ambiguous Moral Authority:** The play raises questions about the moral authority of the Church and its representatives. While they preach about sin and damnation, some of them appear to be indulgent in their own sins and vices. This discrepancy undermines their

moral credibility and contributes to the play's broader exploration of sin, redemption, and the human struggle with faith.

6. Repentance and redemption

In Christopher Marlowe's play "Doctor Faustus," the themes of repentance and redemption are explored through the protagonist, Dr. Faustus, who faces the consequences of his sinful actions and struggles with the possibility of finding forgiveness and salvation. Despite Faustus's sinful actions and impending damnation, there are moments of remorse and longing for redemption. However, his pride and continued reliance on worldly power prevent him from fully embracing repentance. The play highlights the theme of redemption and the importance of seeking forgiveness and salvation from a religious perspective. In "Doctor Faustus," Marlowe explores the themes of repentance and redemption to emphasize the significance of human choices and the consequences of yielding to sinful desires. The play serves as a cautionary tale, warning against the dangers of pride, ambition, and the pursuit of forbidden knowledge without regard for spiritual values. Faustus's tragic fate reflects the importance of seeking redemption and divine grace before it is too late.

1. **Initial Repentance:** Throughout the play, Faustus experiences moments of doubt and regret for his actions. He acknowledges the gravity of his decision to make a pact with the devil and seeks repentance. Faustus is torn between the desire for redemption and the allure of the power and knowledge he has gained.
2. **Struggle with Redemption:** Faustus's struggle with redemption is a central aspect of the play. Despite his remorse, he is unable to fully embrace repentance. His pride, ambition, and attachment to the power he has acquired prevent him from turning back to God wholeheartedly. He is torn between seeking divine forgiveness and enjoying the temporal pleasures that his pact with Mephistopheles provides.
3. **The Good Angel and the Bad Angel:** Throughout the play, Faustus is influenced by both a Good Angel and a Bad Angel, representing his conscience and the temptations he faces. The Good Angel urges him to repent and seek God's forgiveness, while the Bad Angel encourages him to continue indulging in sinful pursuits. This internal conflict reflects Faustus's struggle with redemption and his inability to fully break free from the temptation of worldly desires.
4. **Missed Opportunities for Redemption:** On several occasions, Faustus has opportunities to turn back to God and seek redemption. He is warned by scholars and well-wishers about the consequences of his actions, but he dismisses their advice and continues down the path of sin. These missed opportunities further emphasize the tragic nature of Faustus's downfall.
5. **Final Moments and Damnation:** As the clock of doom nears its end, Faustus realizes the impending doom of his soul and the futility of his sinful pursuits. In his final moments, he is filled with fear and remorse, seeking God's mercy and the chance to repent. However, his pleas go unanswered, and he is ultimately damned, highlighting the irreversible consequences of his choices.

7. Conclusion

"Doctor Faustus" can be seen as a cautionary tale about the dangers of succumbing to worldly desires and neglecting

spiritual values. Marlowe uses religious elements to explore the complexities of human nature, the consequences of our actions, and the struggle between divine grace and individual will. The play's portrayal of religion is multifaceted, incorporating elements of Christianity and morality to deliver a powerful and thought-provoking message.

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