

## SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

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### **Duality in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus***

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#### **Abstract**

Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* suffers from a severe crisis which arises out of a dilemma between his religious belief and his desire for knowledge with the assistance of the evil. This dilemma gives way to a condition which may be called irreversible condition which neither he can accept nor can he nullify. Now from the Christian perspective, he is a wicked characters quite like Cain, Reuben, Absalom. So, this irreversibility gives an opportunity to pip into the story whether Faustus' redemption is possible or not through repentance or lamentation. In this process, this paper will discuss those events and characters in details who work as both active and passive agents to give it a chance to take a reversal in Faustus' life and death. Here in this, we see the good angel and bad angel which works as his own conscience; the divine signal from the divinity and the Old Man at the near end.

**Keywords:** doctor faustus, repentance, lamentation, redemption, irreversible.

Irreversible stands for inability to undo something which has already been done in the given situation. Literature being more flexible than real-life reimagining is more possible here. Though we can stop or rethink our action to have a different outcome. Even in some cases, we may avoid consequences because life and literature are not as strict as science. Scientifically, every possible action has its unavoidable reaction. But in real life and literature, it is not always so true or so strict. “Escape” could be the rightest word to describe this situation which supports reversibility. Now the question arises: Can Doctor Faustus of Christopher Marlowe also be able to escape from his fatal ending? Beforehand, the dilemma which took him to the consequence should be taken under observation. Any deed can be reversed until it reaches a trigger point. So firstly, the story where reversibility can be claimed must be looked into.

Let’s start with the main plot of *Doctor Faustus* where we see the story develops like the story of damnation of evil angels. A very similar story goes parallelly with the story of Faustus containing similar ideology of “sinning against the Lord” (Numbers 32:23). Being rebellious against the lord and refused to walk in the road shown or written by the agents of Almighty. Characters like Faustus always like to touch the untouched part of the dark which looks more appealing to them. Like these fallen angels, they ask and think of that part which is against the order. They want to change the existing order of the divine power set in the system. This rebellious nature is the common mistake, found in all of them. This sin marks their ends followed by eternal damnation of their soul.

We see Faustus committing sins against the lord but a Christian one can escape the wrath of God by confession. Then why not Faustus does so and saves his soul from eternal damnation? Why redemption is not so easily available to him? But the plot does not go so straight like this. It offers some turning points for Faustus as well through the plot which are the elements of reversibility. Faustus tried to confess multiple times but again we see the

influence on him and his submission against the confession. This marks his sin of omission makes his way out of the sin so complex.

In search of any keen chance of reversibility, the study should be started with the framework of the play which can be seen under two lights. One is of course the Christian framework and the other is viewing Faustus as a type of “Renaissance Prometheus”. Let it first be looked into from Christian point of view which obviously makes Faustus a man of desire being his fatal flaw for his consequence.

Now from the very beginning of the play, the Chorus forebodes about Faustus in the prologue,

we must now perform

The form of Faustus' fortunes, good or bad. (Chorus 7-8)

So, it is about the fortune or fate and chance of Faustus which bring him here or it is he himself whose deliberate work made him what he is. Further Chorus reveals the foundation of Faustus' life and birth and education as well. He was above all in the study which is available to common people. That is what makes him in quest for knowledge beyond the limit of good and evil under Christian framework. This is the foundation of our work that this protagonist is not a common being his needs are not common at all and he left all these behind which do not make him outrageous. He is proceeding further by knowing that the reward of sin is death and we have no sin is a complete lie, so, death is unavoidable. That's why divinity has no use to him. He needs something which may make him a demigod. That what is so close to such power is a power of a sound magician to him: “Here tire my brains to gain a deity” (1.1.59). It can be considered as the beginning of his fatal flaws and destruction.

One step ahead just after the end of Chorus and monologue of Doctor Faustus enter the good angel and bad angel. Hereon, the motif of this paper's interest “irreversibility” is established. The more proceed in the story we see him involving into the sin. When he misses

the opportunity of a possible confession he goes away from the chance of the redemption of his soul and also from the chance of reversibility. The German Valdes and Cornelius both are the easiest way for Faustus to study necromancy and conjuration. Here good angel is the first primary obstacle in that way which is none other than his conscience and his desire to do good. This serves as a reminder of the alternative to his damnation because he knows the consequences of his action.

GOOD ANGEL:

O Faustus, lay that damnèd 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. (1.1.66-69)

While Faustus is waiting for the two German scholars, Valdes and Cornelius, the 'Good Angel' and the 'Evil Angel' appear. The Good Angel advises him to lay aside the "damned book" of magic and read the holy scriptures. The Evil Angel appeals to Faustus' ambitions. Faustus becomes absorbed in a vision of what he will be able to do by the power of magic. The appearance of these allegorical figures to depict the internal conflict that Faustus is undergoing; they symbolize the two forces struggling for the soul of Faustus. Here 'Good Angel' holds the possible redemption and the 'Evil Angel' is his temptation and desire for power. When Valdes and Cornelius appear, Faustus welcomes them and tells them that he has decided to practice magic because he has found philosophy, law, medicine, and divinity to be unsatisfactory. Valdes assures Faustus that if they work together the whole world will soon be at their feet. Faustus agrees with the two men and plans to conjure that very night. Throughout the play, these angels appear at the moments when Faustus critically examines the decision that he has made. So, here it is observed that the struggle is there by his conscience against the sinning and

corrupting influence of bad angel. But eventually his desire for power wins and his conscience defeats and the play proceeds one step towards irreversibility.

After the first meeting with Mephistopheles, Faustus made up his mind to sell his soul to Lucifer after twenty-four years' service. Now he is quite sure about his damnation and that's why he abstains himself from thinking about "God or Heaven".

FAUSTUS:

Now, Faustus, must thou needs be damned?

Canst thou not be saved?

What boots it, then, to think on God or heaven?

Away with such vain fancies and despair.

Despair in God and trust in Belzebub. (1.5.1-5)

Whenever he starts thinking about what he is going to do. It seems to be a very good sign and hope for Faustus and seems a good chance for him to turn back. So, once again the good angel urges him to leave "execrable art" and to think of "famous art" and be in the way of God. By contrition, prayer, repentance heaven is still achievable. But it seems another counterpart is stronger to abstain himself from thinking of heaven and heavenly things. Faustus is one more step close to the irreversible situation.

The pact or bond in exchange of soul signed by Faustus is the most crucial scene in the context of irreversibility because this is the first action taken by him so, we see a counteraction from the divine power as an act of resistance to stop him. Mephistopheles wants Faustus to write this pact by himself using his own blood as a mark of selling it to Lucifer so that he will be able to claim it after its fulfilment. As soon as Faustus proceeds to write the pact by cutting his arm but his blood congeals:

FAUSTUS

*[Writes in blood]* Ay, so I do. But Mephistopheles,

My blood congeals, and I can write no more.” (1.5.60-61)

Meanwhile, Mephistopheles went to bring the fire, once again Faustus enters into the confusion. But somehow he manages to ensure that he is the owner of his soul so, he makes his decision to rewrite it again.

But here we see Mephistopheles, bringing the fire to melt the blood and Faustus overcomes the resistance and remarks “Now will I make an end immediately.” (1.5.71)

But even after this, we see another scene where there is an inscription on his arm appears “Homo fuge”. This phrase, "Homo fuge," is a Latin expression meaning "Flee, man". This word appears in the arm of Doctor Faustus as a mark of warning when a pact was already made with the Devil in exchange for unlimited knowledge and power. However, as the consequences of his deal become apparent. Faustus puts aside his doubts. He hands over the deed, which promises his body and soul to Lucifer in exchange for twenty-four years of constant service from Mephistophilis. Thus, "Homo fuge" is a reminder to Faustus, to resist temptation and flee from the destructive path of seeking power and knowledge without consideration for the consequences.

FAUSTUS:

Consummatum est. This bill is ended,

And Faustus hath bequeathed his soul to Lucifer.

But what is this inscription on mine arm?

'Homo fuge. Whither should I fly?

If unto heaven, he'll throw me down to hell.

My senses are deceived. Here's nothing writ.

O, yes, I see it plain; even here is writ,

'Homo fuge, yet shall not Faustus fly. (1.5.73-80)

So, see even after all these Faustus gets another chance from the divine message “to fly away or go away”. Where we see that the divine is giving him opportunity to correct himself, there the possibility remains open for him to avoid the damnation. But Faustus is not accepting these by saying that he walked so much into the route of hell so, if he turns to God now there is no possibility to go into heaven but God will throw him down to hell. So, see the dilemma that he has right now that nigher way he is going to heaven and that’s why he chooses Lucifer and Mephistopheles who at least will ensure him some power. Here also this irreversibility stays intact by writing this bill by him,

I, John Faustus of Wittenberg, Doctor, by these presents do give both body and soul to Lucifer, Prince of the East, and his Minister Mephistopheles. And furthermore, grant unto them that four-and-twenty years being expired, and these Articles above written being inviolate, full power to fetch or carry the said John Faustus, body and soul, flesh, blood, into their habitation wheresover'

By me, John Faustus (1.5.103-110)

While Faustus in his study room, we see him repenting about his past act that how Mephistopheles has deprived him of his heavenly joy. He curses him saying “wicked Mephistopheles”. Here for the first time, he laments and we see a keen hope that he may leave all these and walk on the divine and heavenly path. It seems magic and conjuration is nothing to him and divinity is what he wishes for,

FAUSTUS:

If heaven was made for man, 'twas made for me.

I will renounce this magic and repent. (1.7.10-11)

This is the moment the good angel appears and urges Faustus to repent and God will pity on him. Faustus also hears a sound of bad angel saying that he is nothing but a ‘spirit’ so, mercy is not possible. But he thinks that even if he is a devil, God will show pity on him if he repents.

FAUSTUS:

My heart is hardened. I cannot repent.

Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven,

Swords, poisons, halts and envenomed steel

Are laid before me to dispatch myself.

...I am resolved: Faustus shall not repent. (1.7.18-22)

Now here the very idea of “I cannot repent” revokes many questions. Whether he is unable to repent or he is not willing to repent. The verb 'can' suggests that he can only gain mercy if he has the ability to do so. This idea could be supported by the quotation in text: "Never too late, if Faustus can repent" (1.7.77), signifies his only way to salvation is repentance. As this sentence is followed by the sentence “My heart is hardened”. It confirms that he lacks the ability to repent any longer. Faustus' hardened heart symbolizes the grip that sin and evil can have on a person's soul. It highlights the dangers of unchecked ambition, arrogance, and the pursuit of worldly desires. Despite moments of regret and momentary glimpses of hope, Faustus remains trapped in his self-destructive choices, ultimately leading to his tragic downfall. Here he clears that he will not repent because his heart is hardened now and he can not repent any longer. He also clarifies that he could have not lived this long unless sweet pleasure conquered deep hopelessness. Faustus experiences moments of deep despair throughout the story. However, there are also instances where he finds solace and escape from this despair through the pursuit of earthly pleasures. For instance, Faustus summons the spirits of Helen of Troy and Paris, two legendary figures from Greek mythology, to entertain him and provide sensual pleasure. Their presence and the pleasure they bring momentarily distract Faustus from his doubts and fears, providing him with a respite from his despair.



Additionally, Faustus engages in various acts of mischief and plays tricks on people, finding amusement in his demonic powers. These actions temporarily alleviate his despair, giving him a sense of control and power over others.

However, despite these temporary moments of pleasure, Faustus's despair remains present and eventually intensifies over time. As the consequences of his pact become more apparent, Faustus realizes the gravity of his decision and the eternity of damnation that awaits him. This realization leads to the very beginning of the making of the "Pact". This seems a circle of moments in his life where he commits sins and again wants to repent for it but again fails.

So, he has once again confirmed his damnation and reversibility is a long-lost train. Faustus asks about 'who made the world?' to Mephistopheles but he denies to say so as it is against their faith to say about God and Godly elements like heaven. Faustus accuses Mephistopheles and thinks if it is too late for repentance, "'Tis thou hast damned distressed Faustus' soul. Is't not too late?" (1.7.74-75)

We see the re-entry of good and bad angel in this scenario, where good angel saying about God is the creator of the world. Again, good angel urges him to repent as it is not too late and his soul can be saved from eternal torment in hell.

GOOD ANGEL:

Never too late if Faustus will repent.

...

Repent and they shall never raze thy skin. (1.7.77-79)

Here we encounter him repenting and lamenting for his soul "O Christ, my Saviour, my Saviour, Help to save distressed Faustus' soul" (1.7.80-81). Though it seems now he is more into trouble as the of the demons enter into the scenario Lucifer, Belzebub, Mephistopheles and confirm,

LUCIFER:

Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just.

There's none but I have interest in the same. (1.7.82-83)

Faustus asks for pardon and assures Lucifer that he will not think of heaven takes an oath to him,

FAUSTUS:

Nor will Faustus henceforth. Pardon him for this

And Faustus vows never to look to heaven. (1.7.92-93)

Afterward we see him for a long while without asking for mercy and not repenting but acting some foul and mischievous deeds in various places.

The final encounter after a prolonged time in scene 17, the Old Man. He is the last hope for Faustus in saving his soul from damnation. The old man asks Faustus to leave him “damned art” because this is taking you to hell that is what cutting you off from your salvation. Hence, do not behold yourself like a devil. Repentance is the only way and if it comes late sight of heaven will be banished. This Old Man has the knowledge of the scripture so strong that gives a last hope for a reversal in the ending of weak-hearted Faustus.

OLD MAN:

O gentle Faustus leave this damnèd art,

This magic that will charm thy soul to hell

And quite bereave thee of salvation.”

Though thou hast now offended like a man,

Do not persever in it like a devil.

Yet, yet thou hast an amiable soul

If sin by custom grow not into nature.

Then, Faustus, will repentance come too late.

Then thou art banished from the sight of heaven.

No mortal can express the pains of hell. (1.17.31-40)

The line "O gentle Faustus, leave this damned art" is a cry for Faustus to repent and seek redemption. The Old Man urges Faustus to abandon his pursuit of dark magic and turn towards God for salvation. He implores him to realize the true consequences of his actions and to choose a path of virtue and godliness. This plea carries a sense of desperation and compassion, as he genuinely cares for Faustus's soul and wish to save him from eternal damnation. He recognizes that Faustus's pursuit of power and knowledge has led him astray and caused him immense despair. Thus, he urges him to forsake his pact with the devil and return to a path of righteousness. Faustus' lack of spiritual strength is emphasised by the strength of faith that the Old Man possess. So, he advises him that though it seems unpleasant but he is speaking not out of wrath but from love, knowing the misery of Faustus' future. His rebuke may cause little amend his soul,

It may be this my exhortation

Seems harsh and all unpleasant. Let it not,

For, gentle son, I speak it not in wrath

Or envy of thee but in tender love

And pity of thy future misery.

And so have hope that this my kind rebuke,

Checking thy body, may amend thy soul. (1.17.41-47)

Old Man sees an angel hover over Faustus' head with "a vail full of precious grace" (1.17.54) and it is there to pour on his soul, only he needs to call for mercy and still he will be able to avoid despair. But this hope for last salvation ends while he utters,

FAUSTUS:

O friend, I feel thy words to comfort my distressed soul.

Leave me a while to ponder on my sins. (1.1757-58)

Finally, the Old Man also leaves him with full of grief as Faustus is now a mere helpless soul. Mephistopheles arrives and threatens as Faustus seeks for repentance for one last time. Though it seems it was never the threats which made Faustus afraid to take a turn from the necromancy to divinity due to his wicked-soul and lack of strength in character unlike this Old Man. So, it was never been the final chapter which confirms his damnation but it was always there. Irreversibility was always with such doomed character like Faustus in spite he is so knowledgeable but lacks firmness to repent for his own salvation and seek godly pleasure over his earthly pleasure. This statement also supports the idea that 'Doctor Faustus' is a Calvinist text, and therefore focuses on the idea of predestined and unchangeable election, which leads him to his sinful actions and a doomed and fatal ending.

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## About the Author

Rajib Bala passed his Masters in English from Rabindra Bharati University. He is a freelance researcher now.