The Concept of Power in Christopher Marlowe's The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus

Vajnand, Laura

Sveučilište J. J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskoga jezika i književnosti i njemačkoga jezika i književnosti

Laura Vajnand

Pitanje moći u drami *Tragična pripovijest o Doktoru Faustu* Christophera Marlowea

Završni rad

Mentor: izv. prof. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

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Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti

Znanstveno polje: filologija

Znanstvena grana: anglistika

Mentor: izv. prof. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

Osijek, 2024.

J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Study Programme: Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language and Literature and German Language and Literature

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Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Ljubica Matek, PhD., Associate Professor

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Osijek, 2024

Prilog: Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti i o suglasnosti za javno objavljivanje

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U Osijeku, datum
20.08.2024

Laura Vajnand, 0122232792
ime i prezime studenta, JMBAG

Abstract

Long before Goethe wrote his *Faust* (1808), Christopher Marlowe wrote his play *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1592-93). The play follows the story of a young scholar Faustus who, after learning everything he could, sold his soul to the devil for the knowledge forbidden to him and all humans. Faustus, through various means, wants to gain power and this paper will focus on how the said power is depicted throughout the play – through divine, infernal, and human points of view. Divine power will be represented by God and the heavens, Infernal power by Lucifer and Mephastophilis, and human power, as sought by Faustus, through knowledge, magic, and mortality. Through detailed analysis, the thesis explores how Marlowe portrays these different forms of power. Marlowe uses symbolic elements, such as a good angel, to represent divine interference and moral guidance, emphasizing the constant but ultimately overlooked presence of divine power. Infernal power is shown through the character of Mephastophilis and the pact Faustus makes with the devil – Lucifer. Marlowe illustrates the seductive and deceptive nature of infernal power by depicting Faustus's initial sense of empowerment. Faustus's quest for personal power is shown through his pursuit of knowledge, magical abilities, and immortality. In his play, Marlowe explores Faustus's extreme drive for knowledge, which pushes him to go beyond human limitations and ultimately causes his moral downfall. The thesis emphasizes Marlowe's critique of the desire for limitless knowledge and power which demands the crossing of moral and ethical boundaries, and offers insight into the dangers of crossing the limitations of human abilities.

Keywords: Christopher Marlowe, Faustus, forbidden knowledge, power

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Introduction

This bachelor thesis will focus on the concept of power based on the example of Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1592-93), a seminal work in English literature that discusses human ambition, power, and moral consequences of transgressing human boundaries. Written in the time of great intellectual and cultural transformation, Marlowe's play delves into the complexities of power through its portrayal of Doctor Faustus, a scholar who, through his pact with the devil, was able to gain supernatural powers in exchange for his soul. This thesis will try to analyse the different dimensions of the concept of power as it is developed in Marlowe's tragedy and its implications for the individual and society.

The first chapter will deal with Faustus as a historical figure. The legend of Doctor Faustus, a scholar who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge and power, has fascinated audiences for centuries. The Faust legend has its roots in real historical figures, one of which is believed to be the early sixteenth-century German alchemist, astrologer, and sorcerer Johann Georg Faust, and such authenticity makes the story more appealing.

The following chapter focuses on Christopher Marlowe's *Tragic History of Doctor Faustus* as one of the most influential and successful interpretations of the Faust legend. Written in the late sixteenth century, Marlowe's play is a dramatized depiction of Faust's pact with Mephastophilis, exploring the themes of ambition, power and the human condition. The Renaissance figure of Faust is a complex one that presents the dangerous attraction of transcending human limitations.

At the heart of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* lies the concept of power which will be discussed at length in the next part of the paper. After defining the notion of power, the thesis will shift its focus in the third chapter to different aspects of power. The first subchapter deals with the divine power, that is the ultimate authority of God and the natural order. The presence of divine power is symbolized by the Good Angel who represents moral guidance and the possibility of redemption.

Infernal power, described in the second subchapter, is embodied by Lucifer, Mephastophilis and the demonic forces under which Faustus finds himself. Marlowe portrays this power as alluring but deceptive, offering the humans the illusion of control while ultimately

leading to downfall. The pact with Mephastophilis serves as a critical turning point, illustrating the dangerous consequences of seeking power through unholy means.

The third subchapter focuses on Faustus himself and is divided into three sections discussing knowledge and magic, mortality, and the loss of power. Faustus's quest for personal power drives the narrative.

The Conclusion summarizes what was previously found and suggests that Faustus's quest for knowledge and mastery of magical skills symbolizes his ambition to transcend human limitations and attain divine abilities. Marlowe explores the duality of this aspiration, presenting it as both noble and a dangerous excess. Faustus's fear of death and desire for immortality drive him to his fateful bargain, emphasizing the existential dimension of his quest for knowledge and power. The paper ends with the list of works cited.

1. Faustus as a Historical Figure

Nowadays known as an epitome for the inner struggle between good and evil, Heaven and Hell, and mostly for the search for power through knowledge, the character of Faustus is typically connected with Goethe's famous nineteenth-century play *Faust*, but Faustus's origin story is actually much older.

According to Wentersdorf, Faust was a real person: "Johann Faust, who was born at Kundling, studied necromancy at Cracow, where the subject was formerly taught publicly; and for several years prior to 1540, at various places in Germany, he practised his arts openly, to the amazement of many, but with many lies and frauds" (203). Interestingly enough, his name may not have even been Faust or Faustus but Sabellicus as it is the name mentioned in the earliest writings that are connected to the Faustus myth meaning that it could have been a penname (Wentersdorf 203).

Freya Mathews suggests that the first literary source for the character is "a chapbook, the *Faustbuch*, published in Frankfurt in 1587" (i). The book apparently merged "various contemporary tales of errant magicians and alchemists … [into] a single character, Johann Faust, whose pivotal act was to sell his soul to the devil in exchange for occult secrets and powers" (Mathews i). Indeed, "Legends formerly associated with other magicians came to be associated with his name" (Frederiksen 876). Another theory, which is most universally used, is that Joannes Faustus or Dr. Johann Georg Faust – a German alchemist, magician, and astrologist – travelled the world and piqued the public interest with an experiment gone wrong,

when he died in an explosion (Matek 23-24). In any case, it is clear that the literary character is modelled after actual people.

2. Marlowe's Version

With the mention of the name Faust, most will think of Goethe and the first part of his tragic play published in 1808 not knowing that three centuries before him – as assumed, at the very end of his career, in 1592 (Ribner vii) – Christopher Marlowe wrote about the same individual. In fact, it is Marlowe's play *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1592 or 1593) that influenced later German legends and subsequently Goethe's play (Mathews i). According to Greenblatt, "[Marlowe's] immediate source of the play [was] a German narrative called, in its English translation, *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus*" (1023). Matek explains that neither in Goethe's nor in Marlowe's version is Faustus a one-dimensional being, but a man whose soul both God and Devil want to acquire, and who is so knowledgeable that it makes him foolish (24). However, there is one key difference between the endings of Goethe's and Marlowe's plays; Goethe redeems his Faust and gives hope to humanity at the end, whereas his outcome in Marlowe's play is tragic and shows that humans need to deal with the consequences of their actions: "Unlike Goethe's Faust, who does, in a manner of speaking, come to terms with his shadow and is saved at the play's end, Faustus never comes to terms with this devil, the opposite of his ego" (Golden 206).

Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* exists in two different forms – text A and the longer text B (Greenblatt 1023) – but: "we are not sure of just when [*Doctor Faustus*] was written, of when it was staged, of how much of the two versions which have come down to us is really from the pen of Marlowe, or of what the precise relation of these two versions to one another may be" (Ribner vi). Being that the A text is shorter and was written prior to the B text, it is assumed that text A serves as the original whereas text B contains additions which may not have been written by Christopher Marlowe (Ribner vii-viii). This paper relies on the A text as published in the *Norton Anthology* (2006).

3. The Issue of Power

Matek argues that although the story of Faustus is an old legend, dating back centuries, it is still widely popular today and is referenced both in other literary works and in popular culture (23). The reason for that is that the topic of power and desire for power are universal.

According to Oxford Dictionary, power is "the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behaviour of others or the course of events," and that is precisely what Faustus wants to do. He wants to have the knowledge and the ability to influence the world around him: "I'll have them fill the public schools with silk, / Wherewith the students shall be bravely clad. / I'll levy soldiers with the coin they bring, / And chase the Prince of Parma from our land, / And reign sole king of all our provinces" (Marlowe 1.90-94).

To do this, Faustus literally sold his soul to the devil, but nowadays this notion has become idiomatic and, according to Cambridge Dictionary, means: "to be persuaded to do something, especially something bad, because of the money or other reward you will receive for doing it." This "other reward" is power. In his *Elements of Law*, Hobbes claims: "Because the power of one man resisteth and hinderth the effects of another: power simply is no more, but the excess of the power of one above that of another. For equal powers opposed, destroy one another; and such opposition is called contention" (qtd. in Read 505).

Hobbes indicates that for one person to have the power and to be on top, there has to be another suffering – which can be related to God and Lucifer, as one had to be cast out for the other to rule: "[Hobbes] tells us directly that one's gain of power is another's loss" (Read 506). However, this does not mean that power is unnecessary. Namely, power is the sole purpose humans thrive: "But if there did not exist, if there had not existed for aeons, creature more or less similar around us, if the universe hat cared to produce only isolated higher individuals, or Super-Men, would there have been a need for such a complex form of life" (Lee 848). Seeing others rise above and reach the level of greatness should help motivate an individual to try and do the same. *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* shows that in positive circumstances, and in good societies, the power of the sovereign increases with the power of their people: "'The riches, power and honour of a Monarch,' [he] tells us, 'arise only from the riches, strength, and reputation of his Subjects'" (qtd. in Read 506). In negative circumstances, the power is destructive, as with the power that comes from Lucifer. With that, power itself does not exist alone, it is a social and dynamic concept created from another form of power.

3.1. Divine Power

Marlowe's play relies on the Christian notion of power. In his play, divine power is closely connected to human faith and their readiness to live an obedient life in order to enjoy the afterlife. The chapter deals with the representations of divine power in the play. Divine power is attributed to the character of Good Angel as a representative of God, who is never directly

present it the play. This character represents the power of good and attempts to help Faustus to keep his innocence and ethics.

According to Christian doctrine, heaven is understood as a place where everything is idyllic and everyone is loved because of God and his omnipotence as he accepts everyone and fixes everything – but Lucifer. Lucifer was thrown out of heaven for not obeying God, so the almighty ruler used his power – or, in this case, abused – to expel someone who disobeyed him (Marlowe 3.65-68), that is someone who expressed their own will. Hobbes describes this in his *Leviathan* when talking about command: "Command is, where a man saith, *doe this*, or *Doe not this*, without expecting other reason than the Will of him that says it" (qtd. in Read 515). But the possibility that God may abuse power is inconceivable, so it is only suggested that he uses it to eliminate what is bad. It follows that obedience is good, and questioning the workings of the world or God's power is bad. The Good Angel tries to spread God's word to Faustus not in a bad way, but rather to warn him that these commands are not to limit him but to bring him unto heaven (Marlowe 5.17). In this instance, it is difficult to say that Faustus was wrong when he decided to go with the devil and turn his back to the divinity because God limits people's desires and also turns his back to those who transgress. Yet, as seen in the confrontation between God and Lucifer, God does this for a greater good, whereas Faustus selfishly wants was more than he already had. It does not matter how powerful a human is and which power they possess when God takes all upon himself: "For he that hath Dominion over the person of a man hath Dominion over all that is his" (Hobbes qtd. in Read 515).

In *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, the main argument for resenting the devil and turning one's back to dark magic is the possibility of afterlife: "GOOD ANGEL. Sweet Faustus, think of heaven, and heavenly things" (Marlowe 5.20). God's power comes from the promise of life after death. Marlowe shows this through Faustus who, even after turning his back to God and gaining more than any human ever has, thinks about repenting. Unfortunately, he ultimately believes he is not deserving of it, despite being constantly reminded by the Good Angel that it is "[n]ever too late" (Marlowe 5.253). For believers of any confession, it is not about earthly things but specifically about the afterlife: "When all is done, divinity is best" (Marlowe 1.37). This power may seem manipulative due to the demand to read the Scriptures, "And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head: / Read, read the Scriptures; that is blasphemy" (Marlowe 1.72-73), as it enforces obedience and limits the human mind. But, surprisingly, even the devil himself, Mephastophilis, who fell with Lucifer, speaks of heavens' beauty and testifies that the Scriptures are true. He who saw heaven wishes to go back to it and wants to deter Faustus from

heading into hell. He as one of the devils shows the real power of God's mercy and suggests that no one should have that amount of wisdom apart from him who rules heavens (Marlowe 3.77-80). Even if divine power is portrayed as ultimately good and limitless, Marlowe's play shows Faustus's lack of trust in God's power: "Ay, pray for me, pray for me; and what noise soever ye hear, / come not unto me, for nothing can rescue me" (Marlowe 13.50-51). In the play, only Faustus's lack of faith is shown, and he serves as a representation of humankind, since he is the only one who believes that his sins were too great even for God to save his soul.

3.2. Infernal Power

Power can be associated with good and bad, and this chapter will show that Lucifer and his followers are represented as more powerful than God because they have managed to secure Faustus's soul for themselves. In the context of the play, losing hope in heavens and turning to the dark side would allow you to have everything your heart desires. This means that Lucifer actually draws his power from the limitations set by God as he offers everything that God forbids: "It may be that power is inherently dark, though warm" (Berndtson 73). Lucifer's power is seductive as it grants every wish, but it does so at a steep price: "For when we hear one rack the name of God, / Abjure the Scriptures, and his saviour Christ, / We fly in hope to get his glorious soul" (Marlowe 3.47-49).

Both God and Lucifer come from the same place, heaven, but Lucifer uses his power to truly manipulate humans in order to hurt God. As Hobbes describes in his *Leviathan*: "If any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their End, […], endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another" (Read 509). Hobbes talks about people, but the power dynamics between supernatural beings seems to be the same. Lucifer was an angel who was cast out and was left alone with a few demons who fell with him. There is no explanation as to why he was cast out in the play itself, but seeing how powerful he is on his own, one can assume that he and God wanted the same power or rather the same amount of it, that life in harmony is not possible, and that destruction is inevitable. Since God limits humans while on earth and teaches them to behave in order to go to heaven, Lucifer took the other way. He uses his power to grant people the best life on earth. The "evil angels" allow humans all pleasures in order for them to forget about the "good angel" and the afterlife; desire for pleasure and power makes people Lucifer's slaves and leads them to hell: "The reward of sin is death? That's hard." (Marlowe 1.40). Although no one wants to go to hell, many people still commit sins or even crimes because following rules can be hard,

and it is difficult to imagine life after death. So, Lucifer draws his power from the weak: those who are impatient and cannot restrain themselves from indulging in life's pleasures, which are proclaimed sinful by the Church.

Devil's power is the power of torture, enabling humans to do bad things without earthly consequences in order to grow his following: "Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris." (Marlowe 5.42).[1] Lucifer offers power to his "followers" so that he himself seems more powerful than God, who limits human desires and promises joy in the afterlife, whereas Lucifer offers paradise on earth, and eternal suffering in the afterlife: "[The] power of one comes at the expense of the power of another" (Read 509). This refers both to the conflict between Lucifer and God, as well as to the consequences of humans' indulging in pleasures, which gives hell a strength in numbers due to the number of lost souls. It may seem that devil's power is greater as hell is everywhere the heavens is not:

> MEPHASTOPHILIS. Within the bowels of these elements, where we are tortured and remain for ever. Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed in one self place; for where we are is hell, and where hell is, there must we ever be. And to conclude, when all the world dissolves, and every creature shall be purified, all places shall be hell that is not heaven. (Marlowe 5.118-125)

The devil's focus on sin is visible when Faustus demands a wife: "MEPHASTOPHILIS. How, a wife? I prithee Faustus, talk not of a wife" (Marlowe 5.141). Namely, marriage is a sacrament as opposed to having out-of-wedlock affairs, and Faustus's wish shows that he is not corrupt from the beginning. The devil suggests that he can have a mistress, or even multiple mistresses, and implies that he is *free* to do so; but this does not offer the same romantic and emotional connection as marriage, and, more importantly, is sinful.

The Evil Angel makes Faustus believe that the power of Inferno is greater than that of Paradiso by suggesting that having once entered into Lucifer's kingdom there is no going back: "If thou repent, devils shall tear thee in pieces" (Marlowe 5.254). Once you spoil your soul, there is, so the Evil Angel claims, no one powerful enough to come and rescue it. He undermines the power of God and Faustus believes him, failing in the end to repent as he believes there is no salvation. Humans fall to temptations easily, and Lucifer tempts them with seven deadly sins, luring them into doing something forbidden: "in hell is all manner of delight" (Marlowe 5.331). People lack awareness that this is the ultimate trap for capturing their soul and "stealing"

[1] Latin: "Misery loves company."

it from God. The only reason why Lucifer still has not overpowered heaven is that God can see and save every soul that is ready to repent and ready to live an honest life.

Contrary to Lucifer and the Evil Angel, Mephastophilis, who is also a part of infernal life, does not enjoy the life of sin. He is one of the "[u]nhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer, / Conspired against [their] God with Lucifer, / And [is] forever damned with Lucifer" (3.70-73), suggesting that the power he got entering the infernal life was never his own choice. It was forced upon him, and it is through this character that Marlowe tries to advise both Faustus and the audience/readers that power obtained for a bad cause might not be worth spending eternity trapped in hell. Mephastophilis is not fond of hell, but he is not fond of heaven either, "Why Faustus, / Think'st thou that heaven is such a glorious thing?" (Marlowe 5.180-181). He is of the belief that man as such is where perfection lies: "I tell thee 'tis not half so fair as thou, / Or any man that breathes on earth" (Marlowe 5.182-183), which might be the reason for his service to Faustus. He is the only devil who does not see hell as power but as a punishment: "Think'st 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?" (Marlowe 3.77-80). He is a lost soul trying to prove to Faustus that it is better to be powerless and humble in one's earthly life because it means a better eternity. Mephastophilis has power of his own but cannot be called powerful as he "lives" to serve Lucifer and uses his powers: "[o]nly for pleasure of these damned slaves" (Marlowe 8.39); nevertheless, he is more powerful than Faustus, whose slave he pretends to be only so as to obtain his soul (Marlowe 5.73).

3.3. Faustus and Power

This chapter will show the meaning of power in relation to the main character, Faustus. In *The Tragic History of Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe explores the theme of power through the protagonist's insatiable quest for authority and dominance. Faustus is ambitious, which drives him to make a pact with Lucifer with the help of Mephastophilis, trading his soul for the promise of unlimited knowledge and supernatural abilities.

Faustus thinks of power from the beginning of the play; he is fascinated by it, which causes his downfall. Namely, his motives are shallow and defective: "Faustus is like modern man in his tendency to let the thought of power cloud his mind. His desire and expectation run wild, causing him to lose the ability to see wholes yet making it easy for him to analyse out of existence whatever does not agree with his hubris" (Golden 203). After having learnt everything

there is, he is still not pleased and believes there to be more, which reveals the flaw in his character and makes him an easy pray for the devil.

3.3.1. Knowledge and Magic

Faust's quest for knowledge becomes inseparable from his desire to possess supernatural power, and this combination of knowledge and magic ultimately shapes his tragic destiny. At the beginning of his play, Marlowe represents Faustus as an intellectual man, "graced with doctor's name" (Marlowe, Prologue 17); but despite having an extensive knowledge, Faustus remains unsatisfied as he believes there is more out there to be learned than just what is within human limits: "he has succumbed to what Jung calls ego-inflation, a chief danger encountered by Renaissance man (as well as modern man) with his one-sided intellect which values knowledge for the 'technological,' manipulative power it gives over things and other people" (Golden 203). This desire for power pushes him to necromancy to acquire powers that surpass human capabilities. By obtaining necromantic knowledge, Faustus believes that his newly acquired magic will grant him the power he wants: "'Tis magic, magic that hath ravished me" (Marlowe 1.110). Faustus's declaration shows that he equates magic to power as he believes it will broaden the boundaries set for humans. His earlier accomplishments in more traditional fields of knowledge – medicine, law, theology – leave him unsatisfied because they do not transcend limits of human capabilities nor give him the ultimate control:

> FAUSTUS. Are not thy bills hung up as monuments, / Whereby whole cities have escaped the plague, / And thousand desperate maladies been eased? / Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man. / Couldst thou make men to live eternally, / Or, being dead, raise them to life again, / The this profession were to be esteemed. (Marlowe 1.20-26)

Faustus's belief that magic is the ultimate form of knowledge and that it can elevate him beyond any human by giving him god-like abilities, "A sound magician is a mighty god" (Marlowe 1.62), causes him to reject God. For Faustus, this grand knowledge is a means of detaching himself from the limitations of human and heavenly laws, which he believes will ultimately bring him freedom: "O what a world of profit and delight, / Of power, of honor, of omnipotence / Is promised to the studious artisan." (Marlowe 1.53-55). These possibilities leave Faustus with an internal conflict: "FAUSTUS. Now go not backward: no, Faustus, be resolute; / Why waverest thou? O, something soundeth in mine ears: / 'Abjure this magic, turn to God again.' / Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again. / To God? He loves thee not" (Marlowe 5.6-10). He is stuck between his desire for power through knowledge and magic, and his belief in

God and ultimately Christianity: "Faustus expects to gain magical power – and minutes later deny the very existence of hell, the source of that power" (Golden 204). In this instance, power brought Faustus more confusion than it did good: he rejected Christianity because its doctrines limited him in the pursuit of the ultimate knowledge and power, but on the other hand, he cannot escape the influence it has on him as he is haunted by guilt and the sense of sin (Golden 203-204).

With the sentence: "But what is this inscription on mine arm? / Homo fuge[2]. Whither should I fly?" (Marlowe 5.76-77), Marlowe reveals that Faustus begins to face the consequences of his pact with Lucifer. The inscription on his arm appears as a warning to escape the damnation which he has brought upon himself. It symbolizes Faustus's realisation that the power he sought through magic is not liberating but something that binds him to hell – a fate he seems not to be able to escape. That moment in the play signifies Faustus's awareness that the power he is promised is an illusion – rather than becoming free, he becomes even more captive. The inscription is a reminder that despite his knowledge and magical powers, Faustus is just a human; he is limited and can never have true power – God's or Lucifer's. Being aware of the consequences, he still signs the deal with the devil and believes to have gotten the power he desired not knowing that: "[an] individual exercising power over another would exercise *complete* power; it would be the most absolute of tyrannies" (Read 513), meaning that his deal gave power to Lucifer rather than him, and conclusively lead to his downfall.

Near the end of the play, Faustus realises what he has done and believes that there is no redemption for him: "But Faustus' offense can ne'er be pardoned! The serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus" (Marlowe 13.15-16). His pursuit of knowledge and magic to attain power distanced him from God and in the end made him believe that his sin is unforgivable and worse than that of Eve, who stole the forbidden fruit and was punished for it. Faustus was insatiable in his desire to consume more knowledge than is possible for a mortal being thus bringing him to a fall as, as Jung says: "Genius to madness is near allied" (qtd. in Golden 204).

3.3.2. Mortality

In the play, human mortality is connected to Faustus's quest for power. He, driven by a desire to transcend all the limitations of an earthly life, becomes obsessed with overcoming his

[2] Latin: "O man, fly."

own mortality too. As suggested above, for Faustus, power means forbidden knowledge and, with it, magic which gives him power to control whatever he pleases, but this need for power and control reflects his fear of death.

From the beginning, Faustus is portrayed as someone dissatisfied with the limits of human knowledge, but also with the limits of human life. His true intentions are to postpone his death because, as a mortal, he had a profound fear of the unknown: where does one go when it all ends? Faustus sacrifices twenty-four of his years to Lucifer in order to have power, to accomplish all he wanted and to indulge in all earthly pleasures without having any consequences:

> FAUSTUS. So he will spare him four and twenty years, / Letting him live in all voluptuousness, / Having thee [Mephastophilis] ever to attend on me, / To give me whatsoever I shall ask, / To tell me whatsoever I demand, / To slay mine enemies, and aid my friends, / And always be obedient to my will. (Marlowe 3.91-97)

Initially, Faustus is so determined to control his own fate that he cannot see what he has done; enjoying his earthly power for a couple of years will not spare him from Lucifer's hell. Despite his initial ignorance, Faustus comes to realisation that with his deal he has not be given freedom in the form of power but rather got the power in exchange for his doom: "O soul, be changed into little water drops, / And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found" (Marlowe 13.108-109). This desperate plea shows his final recognition that he cannot escape death regardless of how much power he acquired.

According to Berndtson, "[t]he meaning of power begins with that of a source of change. Power is free to the extent that it is the source of the changes in which it participates, and compelled to the extent that other power determines these changes" (73), meaning that an immortal being – God or even Lucifer –wields power and uses it to shape the environment, in a good or bad way, to their own will, but Faustus is actually imprisoned by the power he received. Faustus's quest for power through his deal with Lucifer reflects his desire to become the source of change and transcend the limitations of mortality; he seeks to control his destiny and with that alter the natural order as he believes that magical power will free him from time and ultimately death by making him god-like: "O what a world of profit and delight, / Of power, of honor, of omnipotence / Is promised to the studious artisan! / All things that move between the quiet poles / Shall be at my command" (Marlowe 1.53-57). However, his pursuit of immortality reveals its limitations – even though Faustus believes he has free will and

autonomy, his powers are not his own and he is thus not truly free: “Then stab thine arm courageously, / And bind thy soul, that at some certain day / Great Lucifer may claim it as his own” (Marlowe 5.49-51). Faustus thought he would be protected by Lucifer, but it only meant that Lucifer “stole” him from God and took away his real immortality in heaven. Everything that Faustus does or wants to do is, in the end, permitted by Lucifer through Mephastophilis: “They say [Faustus] has a familiar spirit, by whom [he] canst accomplish what [he] list!” (Marlowe 9.5-6).

The pivotal moment of his destiny was Faustus’s speech in which he brought the doom upon himself:

> FAUSTUS. I, John Faustus of Wittenberg, doctor, by these presents, do give both body and soul to Lucifer, Prince of the East, and his minister Mephastophilis; and furthermore grant unto them that, four and twenty years being expired, the articles above-written inviolate, full power to fetch or carry the said John Faustus, body and soul, flesh, blood, or goods, into their habitation wheresoever. (Marlowe 5.104-109)

Not only does he declare his identity emphasizing his academic achievements and his intellect but he also positions himself as a man who has learnt all there is and is now seeking something greater – power. He believes that by entering into a pact with the devil; someone who can offer him so much on his life on earth without having to wait to come to heaven, he believes he can gain control over his destiny and make himself more than a man. Whereas Faustus is focused on the power he will receive, he is not yet aware of the cost that comes with it – giving his soul and facing eternal damnation. His loss is much greater than his gain.

3.3.3. The Loss of Power

The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus is an exploration of the rise and fall of a man who wanted to have it all. Faustus, even though extremely bright, thought it was impossible for him to repent despite all the evidence indicating that he could have done it: “Faustus, [can] repent, yet God will pity [him]” (Marlowe 5.88). His intellectual knowledge does not provide him with the kind of knowledge needed to save his soul. His loss of faith made it impossible for him to believe that his soul can be redeemed and that he can turn back to God. He does not know that it is never too late to repent. Marlowe attempts to show the stubbornness of humans when under influence of something greater, in this case, God and Lucifer. He portrays heroes who passionately seek power, especially for something forbidden (Greenblatt 1022), and their ambition prevents faith, since faith requires humbleness.

It is possible that Faustus did not want to repent, believing he deserved the punishment. As Stephen Greenblatt indicates, Faustus might have gotten tired of life, as he learned everything there is to know, and merely seeks to limit his life to another twenty-four years (qtd. in Habington 44). From the beginning there have been multiple indications that if Faustus wanted, he could have broken the deal with Lucifer and turned back to God. He was advised on multiple occasions to abandon dark magic and to get his life back. Yet, Faustus was determined to possess power, to be the brightest man, and to know everything:

> FAUSTUS. … yet fain would I have a book wherein I might behold all spells and incantations, that I might raise up spirits when I please. … would I have a book where I might see all characters and planets of the heavens, that I might know their motions and dispositions … let me have one book more, and then I have done, wherein I might see all plants, herbs, and trees that grow upon the earth. (5.164-173)

Without even having read the first book he has gotten, Doctor Faustus was eager to own more, to gain words before acquiring intelligence. Once the power is felt, it is hard to let it go. It is never easy to let go of something that gives the feeling of being needed, wanted, and thought of. Cornelius mentioned that, once you feel the magic, you are not able to study anything else (Marlowe 1.136-137). Cornelius and Valdes tried to dissuade the main character from making a huge mistake. Who better to listen to than the only people who know what effect magic has on one's mind. However, that did not stop Faustus from going over to the dark side.

Once the mind is lost within the realm of unlimited knowledge the reasoning stops, and what seemed possible, "Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again" (Marlowe 5.9), turns to impossible: "To God? He loves thee not" (Marlowe 5.10). Then again, just before Faustus's corpus will be carried into hell, he realises that this (and only) this moment is when it is truly late to repent: ""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 (Marlowe 13.62-65), and so he tried to use his alleged power to prevent his doom.

As Faustus's power comes from Lucifer, Faustus distances himself from humanity and the divine, which means that he lost his true power the minute he rejected his human identity, but has just not realized it. Gradually, he becomes more aware of the consequences of his acts, yet he is unable to repent and redeem his lost soul. The more Faustus tries to use his power, the more he realizes how powerless he is. His initial desire to be like a god leads only to his enslavement under demonic forces. The loss of power in *Doctor Faustus* emphasizes the tragic

irony of Faustus's journey. Marlowe illustrates that true power is not only the ability to command or control, but also the wisdom to understand one's limitations and the humility to accept them. Faust's relentless pursuit of power leads him not to triumph, but to deep and irreversible loss: "Faustus' inability to repent in the later climatic scenes of the play arises from this failure to believe wholly and passionately in the mercy of God. Dwelling upon the vileness of his sins and thinking that they can never be pardoned, he despairs and is lost" (Kocher qtd. in Campbell 221), showing the dangers of excessive ambition and the dangers of sacrificing one's soul for fleeting gains.

Conclusion

In the *Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, Christopher Marlowe explores the complexity of power, ambition, and the consequences of trying to surpass human limitations. The paper analyses the motif of power through God, Lucifer, and Faustus as three representatives of heaven, hell, and earth. Power can be a means of navigating someone else's or your own life, and is presented as both a seductive and a destructive force. In examining the different dimensions of power in the play, this thesis has highlighted the tragic irony that Faustus, in his quest to become more than human, ultimately loses his humanity and the possibility of salvation. It has also been shown that both divine and infernal beings tend to exploit the power given to them in order to prove their supremacy.

Faustus as a symbol of struggle between good and evil has been primarily associated with Goethe's *Faust* but his origins are much older. Johann Faust, a real-life alchemist, has grown to be an epitome of inner struggle and aspiration for more, and his character was shaped into existence by merging various tales about magicians and scholars. Faustus's story is still a popular one because it showcases universal human fears and desires, and he remains an influential symbol in literature and culture.

Marlowe's play, written in the late sixteenth century is a work ahead of its time that not only shaped the Faust legend but also left a lasting impact on its future adaptations. Unlike Goethe's conclusion where Faust gets to redeem himself, Marlowe' tragic ending serves as a reminder of the consequences of one's actions.

The exploration of power in *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* can be put in perspective of divinity, infernal realm, and humanity. When it comes to divinity, the power attributed to God and everything related to him is depicted as both omnipotent and benevolent,

yet it is also presented as potentially manipulative. The promise of a perfect afterlife is also used as a tool to enforce obedience and to limit humans but at the same time, Marlowe illustrates how even the devil, through Mephastophilis, acknowledges the power and mercy of God – a power so great it instils fear and regret in the damned. This play presents divine power as a force that is inspiring and fearsome, capable of great mercy but also very judgemental. It shows that the divine authority, while promising an eternal reward, is intertwined with manipulation and control.

On the other hand, infernal power is a seductive yet destructive force. Lucifer's power comes from human weaknesses and desires. His power is rooted in the rebellion against the divinity and is vast, extending everywhere that the heaven is not, symbolising the inescapable nature of damnation. Marlowe's portrayal of infernal power serves as a caution while it suggests that even though Lucifer's power may seem greater in terms of immediate rewards, it is nothing compared to the eternal consequences that come with turning away from the divine.

When it comes to humanity, Faustus's quest for power is shown through knowledge and magic, and mortality. His quest for knowledge driven by intellectual curiosity quickly becomes intertwined with his desire for supernatural power. Faustus's belief that magic can grant him a god-like status leads him down a path of rebellion against divine authority. Turning to necromancy to get unlimited control and freedom only meant losing that said freedom as power and magic turned out to be an illusion. By wanting to escape death and live eternally, Faustus only made it worse by selling his soul to the devil in exchange for twenty-four years of power. The quest for immortality becomes his own path to eternal damnation.

In the end, the only power that remained was the power of God and Lucifer. Faustus ultimately loses the control he sought and refuses to repent. Marlowe's portrayal of Faustus reveals that true power is not about ruling over others or the accumulation of knowledge and magical abilities; rather, it lies in understanding one's limitations and the wisdom to accept them.

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