

Renaissance Elements Portrayed In Doctor Faustus

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Abstract

Dr. Faustus was probably performed in 1594. It was a time of tremendous change in Europe. The medieval time was over and the renaissance was beginning. However, influences of both times can be found in the play. The Renaissance is applied to the cultural revival, the new wave gradually spreading over Western Europe and England in the following two centuries. The revival of learning, new geographical and the rebellion against the medieval pattern of living and thinking dominated by religious dogmas and Christian theology were the main sources of stimulation. The main ingredients of this new spirit were individualism and worldliness. These two traits found manifestation in many forms such as its great yearning for knowledge and learning, its love of beauty and hankering after sensuous pleasure of life, its brave spirit of adventure, its sky high ambition and supreme lust of power and pelf in this world. It was Machiavelli's forceful writings that encouraged the men of that age to disregard all ethical and conventional moral principles to achieve the end by any means, fair or foul.

Key Words: Renaissance, Conflict between good and evil, Greed, Ambition & Necromancy

Introduction:

In fact Christopher Marlowe himself was the product of renaissance. He was saturated with the spirit of the renaissance with its great yearning for limitless knowledge, with its hankering after sensual pleasures of life, with its intemperate ambition and supreme lust for power and pelf and finally with the spirit of revolt against the medieval pattern of living, its orthodox religion with its spirit of revolt against the conventional morality and ethical principles.

Dr Faustus seems to be the spirit of the renaissance. His character reveals a great yearning for limitless knowledge, power and pelf, craving for sensual pleasure of life, defying spirit of atheism and also a spirit of revolt against conventional religious doctrines and Christian theology. One of the

most significant characteristics of the Renaissance was individualism that led to the spirit of revolt to free the human mind from the shackles and dogmas of the Church and feudalism. Doctor Faustus with all his erudition and scholarship, with his abnormal pride and presumption discusses in his very first monologue, in the first scene, the merits and demerits of all the important branches of study and has the great audacity to take his own decision, right or wrong and to declare without the least hesitation.

Doctor Faustus as the true embodiment of renaissance spirit starts dreaming of gaining super human powers and of performing miraculous deeds with the help of spirits raised by him.

His use of magic as a means of self-aggrandizement and hob-nabbing with the ruling power, his desire to be everywhere, for fame, pleasure and opulence are activities of renaissance period.

Faustus is endowed with the renaissance will or ambition peculiar to the sixteenth century England. Dr Faustus, a superman sells his soul to the devil in exchange for moral happiness, knowledge and power. He desires this power in order to render his country impregnable, to surround it with an iron wall, to create an unconquerable army and to establish universities etc. For acquiring unlimited knowledge, he pursues necromancy, abuses knowledge and the power of God and ultimately is given the severest penalty in the form of mental uneasiness and unrest till the end of his life. He gets moral degradation, spiritual lapses and incapacity for repentance or prayer to God. He makes contract with Lucifer which brings about his damnation. Faustus's

Inordinate desire to attain super human power is absolutely in keeping with the adventurous spirit of the age of renaissance. To attain this Faustus makes the tragic decision of his life. He feels the prick of conscience as he is going to do something against the will of God. Ultimately the final hour approaches and Dr. Faustus is to surrender his soul to Devil. His offence is not pardoned and he is left alone in his room for doom and damnation.

The character of Faustus can also be interpreted from the Renaissance point of view. At the time of this play, there was a conflict in many people's minds; including Marlowe's to accept the medieval or the

Renaissance view. The Renaissance Scholars, however, revived an interest in the classical knowledge of Greece and humanism of the past. They became absorbed in the great potential and possibility of humanity.

According to the Renaissance view, Faustus rebels against the limitations of medieval knowledge and the restriction put upon humankind that he must accept his place in the universe without challenging it. His desire, according to the Renaissance, is to transcend the limitations of humanity and rise to greater achievements and heights. In the purest sense, Faustus wants to prove that he can become greater than he presently is. Due to his desire to go beyond human limitations, Faustus is willing to chance damnation in order to achieve his goal. The tragedy results when a person is condemned to damnation for noble attempts to go beyond the petty limitations of humanity.

Doctor Faustus embodies the ambitions of the sixteenth century people of England as generated by the Renaissance movement. It also embodies religious and moral attitude of the people of the same century. Marlowe presents in this play the most awful doctrine of Medieval Christianity, namely that any person dabbling in forbidden knowledge like the knowledge of necromancy must be penalized in long run with damnation in hell.

Conclusion:

Faustus's summoning of Mephistopheles, his signing of the contract, his vision of Helen and his death and damnation are the outstanding scenes of the play, in which the medley of desire and fear, the poignancy of regret, the ecstasy and the terror are depicted

with Sureness and strength which give them a place among the greatest emotional situations in Elizabethan tragedy. Faustus's

final monologue is unsurpassed in English Drama in the expression of sheer agony and horror.

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