

INTERESTS OF THE RENAISSANCE REFLECTED
IN THE CHARACTER, DOCTOR FAUSTUS

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INTERESTS OF THE RENAISSANCE REFLECTED
IN THE CHARACTER, DOCTOR FAUSTUS

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Introduction

The theme of The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus is that of a morality play. ^P [The contest between the forces of good and evil for man's immortal soul resembles the material used in the morality plays of the Middle Ages. The use of this medieval material in ^{any of the} this Renaissance plays illustrates the influence of medieval drama on the drama of the Renaissance. Renaissance drama conveyed a meaning on two levels, the literal and the allegorical. It portrayed life so that one may see what is actually there and infer from that what is potentially there. In the drama of this time many things were taken for granted and were not questioned by the Elizabethan mind for being improbable or impossible.] For example, no Elizabethan cared to question the possibility of Olivia's duke changing to love Viola in one line. Nor did anyone object to the improbable way in which King Lear divides his kingdom.

The allegorical element of medieval drama is apparent in The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus. Faustus would not literally sign a compact with the devil, yet on the Elizabethan stage his actions were accepted. Together with these medieval characteristics found in this play are presented the many interests of the Renaissance. Marlowe reflects in the character of Faustus nearly every interest of the Renaissance. He shows in this play Renaissance tendencies which permeated all parts of English society.

Therefore, a study of this play is a means to a more complete understanding of the Renaissance period.

It is the purpose of this thesis to list the Renaissance interests under five general topics and to show how each of them is reflected in the character of Faustus. They are to be discussed, as nearly as possible, in the order in which they appear in Marlowe's play. These characteristics are: first, the desire for knowledge; second, the rejection of authority; third, the lust for power; fourth, the love of physical beauty; and fifth, an interest in the supernatural.

Chapter I

Desire for Knowledge

R [The Renaissance was an age of expansion. Expansion in every conceivable area of experience was the desire of almost all people at this time. And to expand in so many ways required much knowledge. The revival of learning led to the re-examination of classical literature; and the tendency and desire was to learn more science, more about the existing world and its natural laws; more geography, more about the rich countries that lay beyond the shores of England; more physiology, more of the functioning of the human body. Besides these things and more, the scholars renewed an interest in the classic languages and arts. These desires were exorbitant and almost impossible; for the Renaissance man wanted to know everything and through that knowledge, be everything. He wanted to be a scholar, creative artist, warrior, explorer, painter, lover, and diplomat.] This aspiration we see in Sir Walter Raleigh, who was a statesman, courtier, soldier, writer, and explorer. Thus [Jusserand expresses this idea of the people of this period:

The man of the Renaissance must know everything, even to the metals concealed in the womb of abysses, but he must, above all, obtain a perfect knowledge of that other world which is man.¹

1. Jusserand, Literary History of the English People, II, Pt. 1, p. 7.

The accomplished Queen Elizabeth herself exemplified this quality of her people. Elizabeth was one of the most scholarly women of Europe. She had studied with the humanist Roger Ascham and had learned to speak well the classic languages as well as Italian, French, and Spanish. Strachey describes her thus in Elizabeth and Essex:

She was mistress of six languages besides her own, a student of Greek, a superb coligraphist, an excellent musician. She danced, after the Florentine style, with a high magnificence that astonished beholders.²

The Queen's pride in her accomplishments no doubt did much to increase the interest in scholarship and to inspire that continual experimenting which was so characteristic of the sixteenth century.

Roger Ascham, in his book The Schoolmaster, shows the emphasis placed upon knowledge and learning. In contrasting learning and experience, he reflects the Renaissance regard for learning. He says,

Learning teacheth more in one year, than experience in twenty; and learning teacheth safely, when experience maketh more miserable than wise.

.
Learning therefore, ye wise fathers, and good bringing up, and not blind and dangerous experience, is the . . . readiest way that must lead your children, first to wisdom, and then to worthiness, if ever ye purpose they shall come there.³

2. Strachey, Elizabeth and Essex, p. 18.

3. Woods, Watt, and Anderson, Literature of England, pp. 327-328.

Another Englishman who reflected the desire of the Renaissance man to be all knowing is the scholar, Sir Francis Bacon, who said:

I confess that I have as vast contemplative ends as I have moderate civil ends, for I have taken all knowledge to be my province.

It is this same worshiper of learning and understanding who proposed in his New Atlantis to

maintain a trade, not for gold, silver, or jewels, nor for silk, nor for spices, nor any other commodity of matter; but only for God's first creature, which was light: to have light, I say, of the growth of all parts of the world.⁴

Bacon also demonstrated a knowledge of the classics; in fact, he wrote some of his most important works in Latin. He wanted to write in Latin so that what he wrote would be permanent.

The desire for learning is reflected in Faustus' character in the lines of the opening chorus of Marlowe's play. Evidently Faustus' parents wanted him to become learned. His kinsmen, as well as he, were interested in his education, as we note in the following passage. In these opening lines we learn that Faustus is a highly educated man, even if his poor judgment does produce his fall. The words of the chorus are:

Of riper years, to Wittenberg he went,
Whereas his kinsmen chiefly brought him up.
So soon he profits in divinity,
The fruitful plot of scholarism graced,

4. Ibid., p. 556.

That shortly he was graced with doctor's name,
 Excelling all whose sweet delight disputes
 In heavenly matters of theology;
 Till swoln with cunning of a self conceit,
 His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
 And, melting, heavens conspired his overthrow;
 For, falling to a devilish exercise,
 And gluttred now with learning's golden gifts,
 He surfeits upon cursed necromancy.⁵

That Faustus is very versatile in his learning is shown in the first scene of the play. He knows philosophy, for he thinks he has attained logic's chiefest end. He knows medicine, for his prescriptions are widely known. He speaks of his knowledge of law and his knowledge of the Bible. When Faustus later rejects the authority on each of these subjects in which he is informed, he takes up the practice of necromancy in pursuit of still wider knowledge. As he questions Mephistophilis, his interest in varied knowledge is revealed. In his first meeting with this servant of hell, Doctor Faustus demonstrates his curiosity concerning Lucifer, whom he has decided to follow, and hell, which he knows, if it exists, he will later inhabit. He asks questions which show that, although he has repudiated medieval learning, he is being directed by it. "Was not that Lucifer an angel once?" he asks. The answer is also medieval in its emphasis upon the chief of the deadly sins, pride. In fact, Faustus' curiosity concerning the nature and status of Lucifer and the

5. Ibid., p. 449.

invisible angels of evil, their history and home, is such as we expect of a medieval scholar. But the realism of the Renaissance is revealed when Mephistophilis replies to Faustus' question on the location of Hell:

"Why this is Hell, nor am I out of it."⁶

This seems illogical to Faustus and serves only to increase his doubts and curiosity about Hell and Lucifer. Again Faustus questions Mephistophilis:

Faustus: Stay, Mephistophilis, and tell me,
 what good

 Will my soul do thy lord?

Mephistophilis: Enlarge his kingdom.

Faustus: Is that the reason why he tempts us thus?

Mephistophilis: Solamen miseris socios habuisse
 doloris.

Faustus: Why, have you any pain that torture
 others?

Mephistophilis: As great as have the human souls
 of men.

 But tell me, Faustus, shall I
 have thy soul?⁷

By Mephistophilis' last question Faustus is stopped from further inquiry concerning his soul and temptation. Mephistophilis wants to stop the increasing doubt so that he can be assured of the contract for Faustus' soul. But even the signing of this contract does not stop Faustus' inquiry. He seeks still to gain a definite knowledge of Hell.

Faustus: Tell me, where is the place men call hell?
Mephistophilis: Under the heavens.

6. Ibid., p. 453.

7. Ibid., p. 456.

Faustus: Aye, but whereabout?
 Mephistophilis: Within the bowels of these elements,
 Where we are tortured and remain
 forever.
 Hell hath no limits, nor is cir-
 cumscribed
 In one self place; for where we
 are is hell,
 And where hell is there must we
 ever be.⁸

Such curiosity as to the nature and location of hell reminds us of the similar desire of Elizabethans for knowledge of new lands that challenged their adventurous spirits and that cost many of them their lives, if not their souls.

It is impossible to satisfy Faustus' desire for a true knowledge concerning hell and he requests to leave the subject and turn to something else. The types of magic books which Faustus asks for reveal his interest in things other than theology. The new science claims his interest next:

Now would I have a book where I might see all
 the characters and planets of the heavens, that
 I might know their motions and dispositions.⁹

Faustus here reveals a typically Renaissance interest in what was then the chief science, astronomy. This is exhibited further by his direct questions on that subject

Come Mephistophilis, let us dispute again,
 And argue of divine astrology.
 Tell me, are there many heavens above the moon?

8. Ibid., p. 457.

9. Ibid., p. 458.

Are all celestial bodies but one globe,
As is the substance of this centric earth?

But, tell me, have they all one motion,
both situ et tempore?¹⁰

Faustus is much disgusted with the "freshman's suppositions" of Mephistophilis. His answers do not satisfy him, yet he continues to ask,

But, tell me, hath every sphere a dominion or
intelligentia?

How many heavens or spheres are there?

Why have we not conjunctions, oppositions, aspects,
eclipses, all at one time, but in some years
we have more, in some less?

Tell me who made the world?¹¹

In the last question Faustus exceeds his privilege in asking questions; and his desires are left still unsatisfied. Since Faustus' far-reaching desire for the knowledge of astrology is not satisfied by the answers of Mephistophilis nor by his necromantic books, he seeks further information from the heavens themselves. By means of his magic art he is able to do this. The chorus tells us of Faustus' actions.

Learned Faustus,
To know the secrets of astronomy
Graven in the book of Joves high firmament,
Did mount himself to scale Olympus' top,
Being seated in a chariot burning bright,
Drawn by the strength of yoky dragons' necks.¹²

10. Ibid., p. 458.

11. Ibid., p. 459.

12. Ibid., p. 460.

But he is not satisfied. He wants to know something of the "plants, herbs, and trees, that grow upon the earth."

Thus in the character of Doctor Faustus, the scholar, seeking more information in theology, astronomy, and natural science, is reflected the interest of the Renaissance man in excessive learning.

Chapter II

The Rejection of Authority

R [The people of Renaissance England had become so much interested in seeking knowledge through their own experiments that they were turning from the traditionally accepted authorities. Their idea became that expressed by Bacon, one of their strongest believers in learning. Concerning authority Bacon said,

All authority must be out of a man's self,
turned . . . either upon an art, or upon a
man.

This statement shows the emphasis placed upon the individual by making him his own authority. The rejection of other authority by the individual led to a freedom that permitted experimentation. Thus increasing individualism led to individual enterprise and investigation.] Hulme comments on this individualism and rejection of authority as follows:

The insistence upon individuality was the greatest of the many factors that gave rise to the Renaissance. It causes men to question the authority of external control, and inspired them to develop their latent powers beyond the restricting confines of authority. It made them ready to question the conventional standards of conduct. It filled them with a vivid apprehension of life and a zeal for activity of all kinds.¹

[It was this idea of authority and desire for newly established facts that prompted the actions of many of the

1. Hulme, Renaissance and Reformation, p. 70.

scientists of the day.] An expression of complete individualism and renunciation of authority is found in the character of Paracelsus, a physician and alchemist of the late fifteenth century. He exalted observation and experimentation. In his lectures he discredited past and contemporary medicine and set forth his own theories. As a more rash expression of his rejection of authority, he burned the works of Avicenna and Galen. He no longer accepted their words, but strove to make his own word supreme.

About fifteen hundred and thirty, Copernicus was attempting to satisfy his curiosity concerning the earth and its relation to other parts of the universe. And by his investigation he shook the theory which for over a thousand years had been accepted without question. Copernicus, in seeking to discredit the established theory of Ptolemy, was really seeking for the truth. He rejected the idea that the earth was the fixed center of the universe because he thought such an assumption exceeded knowledge. As he rejected the old authority, he sought by his inquisitive mind to set forth the truth, and it was the truth that the Renaissance individual sought in rejecting authority. Even this is shown in the character of Doctor Faustus as he asks Mephistophilis so many specific questions concerning the formation of the universe. To learn these things, he rejected previous authority and followed Lucifer's servant.

William Harvey, who lived some one hundred years later than Copernicus, demonstrated this same desire for establishing the truth and, consequently, for discarding the authorities of the past whose theories might be wrong. Harvey discovered not only new truths, but facts directly in opposition to those ideas previously accepted as the truth. For example, he discovered that there is no to and fro undulation in the veins, but a constant stream from the distant parts towards the heart. Thus Harvey, as did Copernicus, set aside the old authorities in order that he might establish his findings as the truth, or the authority in that field of study.

Thus Copernicus near the beginning of the Renaissance and Harvey near its end illustrate the dominant Renaissance curiosity and experimentation. Faustus, midway between them, exhibits the same regard for exact knowledge that characterized the one and the willingness to experiment that brought the other fame. He differed only in the means of his experimentation, employing black magic, rather than observation and reason.

This experimental attitude and element of unrestraint in the Renaissance is also expressed in the literature of the period. New thoughts and new forms were brought in. There was an element of freedom that Woods, Watt, and Anderson describe as follows:

Certainly there is a lift and a lilt in many of

the lyrics which refuse to be confined by stanza and line and which breaks through the conventional bands of thought and form. It is this unrestraint which makes many of the lyrics so singable, as though they were never meant--as, indeed, they were not--to be frozen in cold print.²

R [Much good in art, science, and every other means of expression was the result of this freedom. However, it led to some things that were not so good. This consistent rejection of authority led to the same attitude toward the Ultimate Authority; that is, it led to skeptical religion, the element of paganism born, or re-born, of the Renaissance. This irreligious movement was created and given its firm hold by the investigation and inquiry of the individual man. Moral recklessness, it seemed, was the inevitable result of such lax religion. At least Edward M. Hulme makes a statement to that effect.

The movement of emancipation, the casting aside of the accepted rules and criteria of the medieval period, led to moral recklessness, to that practice and tolerance of vice which constitutes the worst feature of the Renaissance.³

[But man did not necessarily consider himself lax religiously. He considered himself fortunate in having awakened to the fact that he was living in this world rather than just waiting and preparing for the next. He was living here to find out as much as possible and to possess and enjoy abundantly as he lived. This motive

2. Woods, Watt, Anderson, op. cit., p. 283.

3. Hulme, op. cit., p. 65.

almost more than any other led not only to the boundless desires for knowledge which meant power and all manner of pleasure, but also to an undaunted determination to realize these desires. Many sacrifices were made that would have seemed highly impious to the medieval mind. The Encyclopedia Britannica informs us:

The ideas of universal monarchy and of indivisible Christendom, incorporated in the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Church, had so far lost their hold that scope was offered for the introduction of new theories both of state and church which would have seemed visionary or impious to the medieval mind.⁴

Sacrifices of honesty, of honor, and of allegiance to the Church led very definitely away from the bounds of religion and of God, or, to the rejection of the Ultimate Authority.]

The character of Faustus is a product of this assertion of individualism and disregard for authority. Faustus rejected all authority in order that he might have all that the Renaissance people so passionately lusted for. He, too, as was characteristic of the age, reveled in freedom so much that he was led away from the ideals of the medieval church and into moral recklessness.

The first scene of the play shows Faustus, the versatilely informed scholar, deciding upon what he himself will profess; not what the authorities of the past have

4. Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 23, p. 86.

followed but what he will follow. He says to himself,

Settle thy studies, Faustus, and begin
To sound the depth of that thou wilt profess.⁵

Then Faustus enumerates his fields of study. At last, having cast aside the authority in each one of them, he elects to follow his own desires. The words of Faustus himself best show this rejection of authority. He says,

Sweet Analytics, 'tis thou has ravished me!
Is, to dispute well, logic's chiefest end?
Affords this art no greater miracle?
Then read no more; thou hast attained that end.
A greater subject fitteth Faustus' wit:
Bid (being and not being) farewell, and Galen come,
Seeing, Ubi desinit philosophus, ibi incipit medicus:

.....
The end of physic is our body's health.
Why, Faustus, hast thou not attained that end?

.....
Physic, farewell! Where is Justinian?
Si, una eademque res legatur duobus, alter rem,
alter valorem rei, etc.

A pretty case of paltry legacies!

.....
His study fits a mercenary drudge,
Who aims at nothing but external trash;
Too servile and illiberal for me.
When all is done, divinity is best:
Jerome's Bible, Faustus; view it well.

.....
The reward of sin is death, that's hard.

.....
Divinity, adieu!
These metaphysics of magicians,
And necromantic books are heavenly;

.....
A sound magician is a mighty god:
Here, Faustus, try thy brains to gain a deity!⁶

So there is Faustus, rejecting the authorities one

5. Woods, Watt, Anderson, op. cit., p. 449.

6. Ibid., p. 449.

after another. For what reason? For a similar reason for which the Elizabethans rejected authority. Some wanted to satisfy their desire for knowledge and their desire for experimentation. Others wanted to realize their dreams for wealth, power, and earthly pleasures. Faustus wanted to satisfy his desire for a power which would produce whatever he might want. He even aspired to be a mighty god. This exorbitant and impossible aspiration is the basis of the Faustus character that lusts for power, power over people and power that produces wealth.

Chapter III

Lust for Power

The power desired during the Renaissance may be divided into two kinds: the power that governs people, and the power that produces wealth.

P [The desire to be powerful over things and over people grew out of the exalting of the individual and the rejection of authority. ~~This~~ lust for power prevailed throughout the nation from the court of the Queen to the lower classes of people. The rising tide of nationalism exhibited the desire for national supremacy. England wanted to be mistress of the seas. The sea dogs were sent into all parts of the known and unknown world to conquer for the nation in the name of the Queen.] Sir Walter Raleigh secured from Queen Elizabeth a patent "to discover and conquer unknown lands and take possession of them in the Queen's name." Others sailed to conquer so that England might be supreme. The defeat of the Invincible Armada was highly pleasing to power-loving England.

Not only is Queen Elizabeth interested in power for her country, but also in power for herself. She enjoys her supremacy, her power. Even though she liked to have many courtiers and many counselors about her court, she did not hesitate to slap their faces or shove them from the room with her own hands when they would in any way

infringe upon her authority. Strachey describes the Queen's love for authority thus:

It was for the Queen to choose her counselors. She would listen to one and then to another; she would shift, according to her adviser, from one policy to its direct contrary; it was a system of government after her own heart. Thus it was that she could enjoy to the full the delicious sense of ruling--could decide, with the plenitude of power, between momentous eventualities--and, by that very means, could contrive to keep up an endless balance and a marvellous marking of time.¹

This same desire for power was, according to Strachey, noticeable in the servants of the court. They constantly struggled for the highest influence; yet, since they admired the power of the Queen, their profound hostility could not divert them from their duty of working together for Her Majesty.

WHP [The courtiers also vied with one another for influence, as did Essex with the Cecils in trying to prove his superiority in the control of foreign affairs.)

[With the increase in foreign trade the merchants came into prominence and power as they never had before. Thus from the court through the lower groups of English society existed the desire in some way to be supreme]

This inordinate desire for temporal power is expressed in Elizabethan literature when Tamburlaine the Great tries to add strength to his conquering ability. He boasts of

1. Strachey, Elizabeth and Essex, p. 47.

the power he is to gain.

Forsake thy king, and do but join with me,
And we will triumph over all the world;

.
Both we will reign as consuls of the earth,
And mighty kings shall be our senators.
Jove sometimes masked in a sheperd's weed,
And by those steps that he hath scaled the heavens
May we become immortal like the gods.

.
And when my name and honour shall be spread
As far as Boreas claps his brazen wings,
Or fair Bootes sends his cheerful light,
Then shalt thou be competitor with me,
And sit with Tamburlaine in all his majesty.²

Lines from Macbeth reflect this desire for power over other people. When Macbeth is moved by the witches to meditate upon the possibilities of his increase in power, he advances to the point where he will sacrifice much in order to gain the coveted power.

Early Macbeth had it in mind to murder Duncan, King of Scotland. But as he sees that he will not be the heir to the throne, he plans other murders that will make him sole heir, the only one in line for the supreme power of Scotland. This is shown in the following lines in which Macbeth speaks not only of the murder of Duncan in his own home, but of the necessity of overriding Duncan's arbitrary appointment of Malcom as the Prince of Cumberland.

The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires:

2. Marlowe, Tamburlaine the Great, I, ii, 171-208.

The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.³

Even though Macbeth realizes the evil in this deed, he wants it done because of what it will bring. As is apparent in Faustus' character, Macbeth is willing to suffer grave consequences in order to achieve great earthly power.

Faustus' desire may be shown, from the play itself, to reflect the attitudes of all classes of people. Marlowe shows that the low class of people as well as the high strives to demonstrate its power. This is shown in the character of Robin the Ostler. Robin's desires are not so immoderate as those of Tamburlaine, Faustus, or Macbeth. However, they do show that Robin derives much satisfaction in just being able to make someone do his will or, through his own ability, to satisfy his desire. This stableman finds one of Faustus' books of magic. When his friend Ralph comes in, Robin takes much pride in enumerating the things he is able to do.

Ralph: Cans't thou conjure with it?

Robin: I can do all these things easily with it;
first I can make thee drunk with ippocras
at any tabern in Europe for nothing;
that's one of my conjuring works.

Ralph: Our Master Parson says that's nothing.

Robin: True, Ralph: and more, Ralph if thou hast
any mind to Nan Spit, our kitchen-maid,
then turn her and wind her to thine own

3. Shakespeare, Macbeth, I, iv, 48-53.

use as often as thou wilt, and at midnight.⁴

In another incident Robin desires to exert and show his power over other people. When he and Ralph go to the tavern, they bring from there the vintner's silver goblet. By means of his magic the ostler makes the goblet constantly disappear while the vintner frantically searches them both. Nor does Robin give over the goblet until Mephistophilis has him to do so.

Robin's desires are more sensuous than Faustus', but they exhibit his desire to show his influence.

Another instance of desire for power, a power far more complete than Robin's, is exhibited by Valdes, Faustus' teacher of necromancy. Valdes wants power for himself and hopes to increase his own power by enlisting the wit of Doctor Faustus in the art in which he has been working. Thus in speaking for himself and for Cornelius, the other teacher, he tries to make Faustus' desire to practice magic stronger.

Valdes: Faustus, these books, thy wit, and our
 experience,
 Shall make all nations to canonize us.
 As Indian Moors obey their Spanish lords,
 So shall the subjects of every element
 Be always serviceable to us three.⁵

The desire of another ruler is shown when Emperor Charles the Fifth invites Faustus to his court. When

4. Woods, Watt, Anderson, op. cit., p. 463.

5. Ibid., p. 451.

Charles the Fifth learns of Faustus' fame in the necromantic art, he seeks aid from his magic in order to satisfy his own desires. The Emperor, almost a worshiper of power, requests that Faustus "raise from hollow vaults below," Alexander the Great. As Emperor Charles says, Alexander the Great was the "chief spectacle of the world's pre-eminence." Especially since it had been said that he might resemble this historical hero of power, the Emperor wanted to see him. He wanted to see the one whom some thought he equalled in physical appearance, but whom he did not equal in temporal power. He might even have hoped that from seeing Alexander he might gain some inspiration for increasing his own power.

The desires of another class of society are represented in the request of the Duchess of Vanholt. The Duke of Vanholt had also heard of Faustus' fame, and had sent for him to come to his court. Upon his arrival Doctor Faustus first obliges the Duchess by an offer to grant anything she might wish. Her fancy, or her idea of superiority, is easily gratified by a dish of grapes produced in January. Such a delightful dish at so unusual a time of the year was not likely to be had by any other woman of her social status. Thus was the nature of the superiority sought by the woman of society, the Duchess of Vanholt.

The first requirement Doctor Faustus makes of his necromantic practices is to give him power over all things

that move, over emperors and kings. When Faustus has put aside his last authority and said "Divinity, adieu!" he makes known this first desire. He exemplifies the desire that has been shown to exist throughout the English nation. Faustus lists his excessive desires as he gloats on the possibilities of the art which he is about to pursue.

These metaphysics of magicians,
 And necromantic books are heavenly;
 Lines, circles, scenes, letters, and characters;
 Aye, these are those that Faustus most desires.
 O, what a world of profit and delight,
 Of power, of honor, of omnipotence,
 Is promised to the studious artizan!
 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;
 But his dominion that exceeds in this,
 Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man;
 A sound magician is a mighty god:
 Here Faustus, try thy brains to gain a diety!⁶

Doctor Faustus was not even satisfied with desiring the greatest of earthly power; he wanted to be a god.

After Faustus has practiced some of his conjuring, he is still devoted to the aim of becoming all powerful. He constantly looks forward to what he can do toward gaining more power in the future. In the following lines he exhibits such thoughts.

Had I as many souls as there be stars,
 I'd give them all for Mephistophilis.
 By him I'll be emp'ror of the world,
 And make a bridge through the moving air,
 To pass the ocean with a band of men;
 I'll join the hills that bind the Afric shore,

6. Ibid., p. 450.

And make that country continent to Spain,
 And both contributory to my crown:
 The Emp'ror shall not live but by my leave,
 Nor any potentate of Germany.
 Now that I have obtained what I desired,
 I'll live in speculation of this art,
 Till Mephistophilis returns again.⁷

It was the exorbitant and impossible desire of Renaissance man. And now that desire had reached such a growth in Faustus that its maturity was impossible without the aid of something supernatural. So Doctor Faustus pursued his black art in quest of not only supremacy over others, but also wealth.

This seeking of wealth which Faustus pursued reflects a dominant characteristic of the Renaissance. The desire for wealth, as was the desire for power, is something found in the desires of the nation, of the Queen and her courtiers, and of the lower classes of English society.

The nation's desire for wealth is shown in the fact that ships were sent from her shores to every part of the world to seek wealth. For many years Drake brought gold and silver annually to England from the mines of Peru. England's contention for wealth is shown in Drake's statement of his determination to rival Spain in amassing wealth. He once said to a Spaniard, "I am resolved, by the help of God, to reap some of the golden harvest which you have got out of the earth and sent to Spain to trouble

7. Ibid., p. 454.

the earth."⁸

Other sea dogs made voyages similar to those of Drake. Some of them perhaps were made for adventure, yet they were made in the name of England for the advancement of her wealth. Sir Walter Raleigh sailed up the Orinoco in search of wealth. He sailed again, together with Lord Howard of Effingham and the young Earl of Essex, to conquer and sack Cadiz.

Hakluyt, another who was moved by the spirit of the age to seek foreign lands and bring wealth for his country, reflects in his book, Voyages, the spirit of the age. In the following passage is shown the exalted pride England had in these maritime adventures:

It cannot be denied but as in all former ages they have been men full of activity, stirrers-abroad, and searchers of the remote parts of the world, so in this most famous and peerless government of her most excellent Majesty, her subjects through the special assistance and blessing of God, in searching the most opposite corners and quarters of the world, and to speak plainly, in compassing the vast globe of the earth more than once, have excelled all nations and people of the earth.⁹

The Queen wanted wealth for herself as well as wealth for her country. She dressed most extravagantly, for she loved lavish color and ornament. In describing her manner of dress for having her portraits made, Froude describes her tastes in clothing.

8. Gardiner, A Student's History of England, p. 449.

9. Woods, Watt, Anderson, op. cit., p. 343.

When she appears as a mere woman, she was painted in robes, which it is to be presumed that she actually wore, broidered with eyes and ears as emblematic of omnipresence--or with lizards, crocodiles, serpents, and other monsters, emblematic, whatever they meant besides, of her own extraordinary taste.¹⁰

Elizabeth wanted her court, like herself, to be a display of splendor. Her courtiers spent much on their dress. Bright colors, elaborate trimmings, and excessive padding were the most notable characteristics of Elizabethan dress. It all spoke of wealth. Concerning Elizabethan dress, Harrison, a contributor to Holinshed's history, wrote:

The phantastical folly of our nation (even from the courtier to the carter) is such that no form of apparel liketh us longer than the first garment is in the wearing, if it continue so long, and be not laid aside to receive some other trinket newly devised by the fickle-headed tailors, who covet to have several tricks in cutting, thereby to draw fond customers to more expense of money. . . . And as these fashions are diverse, so likewise it is a world to see the costliness and the curiosity, the excess and the vanity, the pomp and the bravery, and finally the fickleness and nothing is more constant in England than inconstancy of attire.¹¹

This kind of attire and display of wealth was a characteristic, as is noted here, of every part of English society.

This exceedingly extravagant desire for wealth is dominant in Faustus. One of his chief purposes in having

10. Froude, History of England, X, p. 319.

11. Stephenson, The Elizabethan People, p. 359.

sought connection with the devil was to satisfy these desires of wealth. As he meditates upon his future practices, he enumerates some of the riches he hopes to possess.

Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,
 I'll have them fly to India for gold,
 Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,
 And search all corners of the new-found world
 For pleasant fruits and princely delicates;
 I'll have them read me strange philosophy,
 And tell the secrets of all foreign kings;
 I'll have them wall all Germany with brass,
 And make swift Rhine circle fair Wittenberg;
 I'll have them fill the public schools with silk,
 Wherewith the students shall be bravely clad.¹²

Faustus does have a generous spirit in his nature when he expresses a desire for riches for all the students in the public schools. But it is easy to see that Faustus was led into the practice of the black art by a desire for personal gain and personal wealth. Valdes, one of Faustus' teachers in necromancy, makes Doctor Faustus more resolute to realize his unbounded desires. The teacher tempts him thus:

From Venice shall they drag huge argosies,
 And from America the golden fleece
 That yearly stuffs old Philip's treasury;
 If learned Faustus will be resolute.¹³

Faustus' other teacher, Cornelius, also contributes his ideas of the wealth that will be gained through the aid of spirits.

12. Woods, Watt, Anderson, op. cit., p. 450.

13. Ibid., p. 451.

The spirits tell me they can dry the sea,
And fetch the treasure of all foreign wrecks,
Aye, all the wealth that our forefathers hid
Within the massy entrails of the earth:
Then tell me, Faustus, what shall we three want?¹⁴

These words from Faustus and his teachers, Valdes and Cornelius, reflect the Renaissance interest in exploration with a particular desire for wealth as the motive.

14. Ibid., p. 451.

Chapter IV

The Love of Physical Beauty

It is only natural that people who are so awakened to the importance of things of this world, and particularly to some of its beauties, should also be interested in physical beauty. It was a part of Faustus' character, and as will be shown, a part of Elizabethan character.

When people began to place more importance on this world than the next, they sought to enjoy every phase of earthly beauty. Everyone looked for it; the poets wrote about it; and the Queen loved it. Strachey tells us that once Queen Elizabeth was a handsome woman; but soon the traces of beauty began to be replaced by "hard lines, borrowed colours, and a certain grotesque intensity." He also says that "as her charms grew less, her insistence on their presence grew greater." This shows the Queen's love for beauty. Once Sir John Smith, when sent on a visit to the Court of France, found it prudent to compare favorably Her Majesty with the Queen and ladies of the French court. It was thus that Sir John appealed to the Queen's love for beauty, and probably sought power or favor for himself in doing so.

I assure your Majesty of my faith there is more beauty in your Majesty's little finger than in any one lady among them all. I had heard the French Queen before I saw her commended to be very fair and of good presence. Clear-skinned she is, but very pale and without colour; her face reasonably well formed, but for majesty of

a princess, God knows she has none.¹

These words show, even though they may be flattery, certainly the Queen wanted to be beautiful and also that the people of the age were noticing and liking beauty.

Another compliment to the Queen comes from the pen of a poet, who, like other people, was seeking favor and power. However, such a compliment to beauty and Queen Elizabeth does reflect the regard for such in the Renaissance. Spenser is the poet who says,

Her face so faire, as flesh it seemed not,
But heavenly pourtraict of bright angels' hew,
Clear as the skye withouten blame or blot,²
Through goodly mixture of complexious dew.

Other tributes are paid to beauty that are not intended to flatter. By examining some of these beautifully written compliments one sees that love of physical beauty is a dominant note in Renaissance England. In Spenser's Amoretti, the lover speaks,

Fayre is my love, when her fayre golden heares
With the loose wynd ye waving chance to marke:
Fayre, when the rose in her red cheekes appeares,
Or in her eyes the fyre of love does sparke:
Fayre, when her brest, lyke a rich laden barke
With pretious merchandize, she forth doth lay:
Fayre, when that cloud of pryde, which oft doth dark
Her goodly light, with smiles she drives away.
But fayrest she, when so she doth display
The gate with pearles and rubyes richly dight,
Through which her words so wise do make their way
To beare the message of her gentle spright.
The rest be marks of Natures wonderment,

1. Froude, History of England, p. 320.

2. Spenser, Faerie Queene, Canto III, st. 22.

But this the work of harts astonishment.³

Spenser adds a bit of praise for the words or the spirit of the admired one, yet most of his efforts are spent in lavish praise of her physical beauty.

Sir Phillip Sidney pays typically extravagant compliments, gives extraordinary praise, when he calls Stella's eyes the chief work of Nature. This superlative way of expressing an idea is a Renaissance conception.

When Nature made her chief work, Stella's eyes,
 In color black why wrapt she beams so bright?
 Would she, in beamy black, like painter wise,
 Frame daintiest lustre, mixed of shades and light?
 Or did she else that sober hue devise,
 In object best to knit and strength our sight;
 Lest, if no veil these brave gleams did disguise,
 They, sunlike, should more dazzle than delight?
 Or would she her miraculous power show,
 That, whereas black seems Beauty's contrary,
 She even in black doth make all beauties flow?⁴

[Shakespeare frequently describes and exalts beauty throughout his plays and sonnets. He like Sidney, pays almost exaggerated tributes to beauty. In the following sonnet he even feels that his words cannot describe the beautiful woman to whom he addresses the sonnet. Then if he could describe her beauty, it would so far surpass what men have seen that they would not believe it. Thus he expresses it:

Who will believe my verse in time to come,
 If it were filled with your most high deserts?

3. Spenser, Amoretti, St. LXXXI

4. Sir Phillip Sidney, Astrophel and Stella, St. VII.

Though yet, heaven knows it is but as a tomb
 Which hides your life and shows not half your parts.
 If I could write the beauty of your eyes
 And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
 The age to come would say, "This poet lies;
 Such heavenly touches ne'er touch'd earthly faces."⁵⁾

In Othello, the Moor determines to kill the beautiful Desdemona because he believes she has dishonored both him and herself. Yet Othello has regard for his wife's beauty and desires not to mar it as he kills her. So as he goes to her bedroom to commit the awful deed, he says,

I'll not shed her blood;
 Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
 And smooth as monumental alabaster.⁶

When Romeo first sees Juliet, he is moved to praise her.

O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright
 It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night,
 Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear:
 Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!⁷

"For earth too dear!" Again beauty is made divine. It is praised in the highest way. Romeo's praise of Juliet's beauty continues; even when she lies dead before him, it is yet her beauty that he thinks on.

Beauty's ensign yet
 Is crimson in thy lips, and in thy cheeks,
 And death's pale flag is not advanced there.⁸

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5. Neilson and Thorndike, Sonnets by Shakespeare, p. 19 Sonnet 17.
 6. Shakespeare, Othello, V, ii, 3.
 7. Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, I, v, 46.
 8. Ibid., V, iii, 94.

Doctor Faustus desires to look upon this beauty that everyone admires. He loves physical beauty, too. At the close of the play when Faustus' twenty-four years of worldly happiness are about ended, he realizes the uselessness of seeking more power and wealth. Consequently, in his last weak moments, he descends, perhaps to the basest part of his nature. Of his constant and invisible servant, Mephistophilis, he requests,

One thing good servant, let me crave of thee,
 To glut the longing of my heart's desire--
 That I might have into my paramour
 That heavenly Helen which I saw of late,
 Whose sweet embracings may extinguish clean
 These thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow,
 And keep mine oath I made to Lucifer.⁹

This request is granted. Helen of Troy re-enters and Doctor Faustus makes his famous tribute to her 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 flees!¹⁰

Through his power in black magic, his possession of the devil as a servant, Doctor Faustus has made it possible for his friends to see the beautiful Helen. When she appeared before them, Faustus was so moved by her beauty that it prompted his desire for her return. Thus to be able to gaze on something so rarely beautiful was Faustus' last expression of earthly wants. He was then carried off

9. Woods, Watt, Anderson, op. cit., p. 469.

10. Ibid., p. 469.

to hell by a horde of devils, which was the fulfillment of the pact in which Faustus traded his soul to the devil for power.

Chapter V

Interest in the Supernatural

Even though Marlowe's story of Faustus is based on a very old German legend, its expression here in the Renaissance period is evidence of the interest people had in its theme.

The entire play of The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus is built on black magic, or the satisfying of one's desires through the aid of the devil. This idea of being in league with the devil is only one of the many phases of the supernatural in which the Elizabethan people were interested. This wide variety of interest is thoroughly expressed in Shakespeare's plays. In Macbeth the supernatural element lies in the witches; in Hamlet, it lies in ghosts, in The Tempest it lies in spirits, in A Midsummer Night's Dream, it lies in fairies. In King Henry IV, Shakespeare employs a statement that Faustus might well have made when Glendower says to Hotspur,

I can call spirits from the vasty deep.

 Why, I can teach you, cousin, to command
 The devil.¹

Such an assertion made by Glendower to Hotspur at least indicates an interest in the practice of commanding the devil. Hotspur's answer is in direct opposition to

1. Shakespeare, King Henry IV, III, 1, 53,56.

Glendower; however, this only shows controversy over a subject of current interest. In answer to Glendower's assertion that he can call spirits from the deep, Hotspur answers:

Why, so can I, or so can any man;
But will they come when you do call for them?²

Addison tells us,

"Our forefathers loved to astonish themselves with the apprehensions of witchcraft, prodigies, and charms, and enchantments. There was not a village in England that had not a ghost in it; the churchyards were all haunted; every large common circles of fairies belonging to it; and there was scarce a shepherd to be met with who had not seen a spirit!"³

In Bourne's Antiquities of the Common People, we find this concerning the period of the Renaissance:

Nothing is commoner in country places than for a whole family in a winter's evening to sit round the fire and tell stories of apparitions and ghosts. Some of them have seen spirits in the shape of cows, and dogs, and horses; and some have even seen the devil himself, with a cloven foot.⁴

Before the time of the Renaissance, much of the interest in magic was an interest in folk-lore or a reminiscence of pagan worship. During the Renaissance the people evidence an interest in witches, in conjurations, devils, and ghosts. They consider these supernatural influences more

2. Ibid., III, i, 54, 55.

3. Addison, Spectator No. 419.

4. Stephenson, The Elizabethan People, p. 271.

definitely a part of their lives rather than a reminiscence of folklore. In Traill's Social England this fact is established.

Hitherto the magic of the people had been of the nature of folklore, reminiscent of pagan worship which had become heresy by the conquest of Christian faith; but, when in 1398, the Sorbonne published its twenty-seven articles dealing with conjurations, with images of devils, and sorcery, it gave the widest possible advertisement to the crime. We have shown how popular belief in the demoniac compact gradually took shape and grew, but it did not loom large in the public mind till in the fifteenth century the accusation of sorcery began to be used as a political weapon chiefly against women.⁵

The influence on Faustus' whole life and finally his sorrowful doom reflects the seriousness with which the Renaissance mind regarded the use of magic. Faustus practiced an art that led him to "live in all voluptuousness" and to sell his soul to Lucifer.

Lo, Mephistophilis, for love of thee,
I cut mine arm, and with my proper blood
Assure my soul to be great Lucifer's
Chief lord and regent of perpetual night.⁶

Likewise, many hundreds of people lost their lives at this time; perhaps not because of an actual pact with the devil, but because of the emphasis placed upon these demoniac superstitions.

Thus in the practices of Doctor Faustus we find reflected an interest that is an important factor in the lives

5. Traill, Social England, p. 325.

6. Woods, Watt, Anderson, op. cit., p. 456.

of the people of the Renaissance.

Conclusion

The general conclusion that has been drawn from a study of Marlowe's The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus and the Renaissance is that the play, although it contains many characteristics of medieval drama, reflects rather completely the interests of the Renaissance. These can be generally listed under five topics.

The desire for knowledge is shown in Faustus in that he is a scholar in a large university where "shortly he was graced with doctor's name." Such a desire to gain knowledge is shown to exist in Renaissance England when Bacon says "I have taken all knowledge to be my province."

The rejection of authority is obvious in Faustus' character. He rejects Aristotle, Galen, Justinian, and God. In the Renaissance Copernicus substitutes his theory for that of Ptolemy. Harvey later announces his discovery that blood circulates in the veins of man.

The desire for power of two kinds, that over people, and that which produces wealth, is a part of Faustus. He wants to be a god and have omnipotence; and he wants to send his devilish servants to all parts of the world to bring him all the wealth that they can. During the Renaissance England wants to be mistress of the sea and vie with other nations in seeking the wealth of the world. The merchants want to be more important and vie with one another in commanding the vast trade.

The love for physical beauty in Faustus is expressed when he makes known that his last earthly desire is to see the beautiful Helen of Troy. During the Renaissance Queen Elizabeth longs for tributes to the beauty which she did not possess. Spenser tries to gratify her with the flattery in his Faerie Queene, while Shakespeare lets Romeo praise his Juliet, and Othello his Desdemona, whose beauty he cannot bear to mar even in killing her.

An interest in the supernatural completely changes the life of Faustus and brings about his ruin. The practice of magic lures him on to conjuring and into evil deeds. The people of the Renaissance are interested in the reports on the sight of the devil and all manner of magic. They revel in the supernatural and the telling of ghost stories. They kill many of their people because of witchcraft. Shakespeare pleases his audience with ghosts, witches, fairies, spirits, and devils, while Jonson and others tell of the magic of alchemy.

Ⓝ This study has been a means to a more complete understanding of the broad intellect of the Renaissance. So clearly does the literature of the time reflect contemporary interests that this study leads to a more intelligent reading of additional literature. Any study which enables us to understand a people and their aspirations is valuable; this particular study has been of special value in that it reflects the interests of one of the greatest periods of

history, the Renaissance, a period which in every phase of literature, science, and life, has substantially influenced succeeding generations.]

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