

# Doctor faustus as a play

Literature



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Doctor Faustus is the most famous of Marlowe's plays, and its hero, who sells his soul to the devil in return for twenty-four years of power and pleasure, is by far the best known of his rebellious protagonists. Marlowe based the plot of his play on *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus* (1592), an English translation of a German book (now known as the *Faustbuch*). The heroic tragedies of Marlowe and Shakespeare suggest that the cost of challenging the limits of human possibility often exacted a medieval price and the celebration of the self-fashioning man also resulted in social tension.

The pursuit of wealth and knowledge changed the delicate class structure of Elizabethan England. Merchants and traders became wealthier and more powerful than the aristocracy; the guild system broke down, and masterless men lost their place in the social order. It is in this changing world that Marlowe's morality tale of Dr. Faustus is told. Play is based on Christopher Marlowe's stories about scholar and magician, Johann Faust. Faust, born in 1488, made a pact with the devil to gain magical powers.

The original Faust wandered through his German homeland until his death in 1541. The first story about his life appeared in 1587 (written in German), and was translated into English in 1592. Its title, "*The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus*." Dating Renaissance texts is a difficult task, but this text is a bit more challenging. Scholars are of the opinion that Marlowe heard or read the story of Johann Faust and composed *Doctor Faustus* sometime between 1588 and 1592; it is officially registered in 1601.

The play is a tragic comedy, and only today did I learn that it is widely believed that Marlowe only constructed its beginning and conclusion. It is said that he wrote the tragic elements, whereas two other collaborators wrote the comedic dialog in the middle. None-the-less, it's a masterpiece. The play as a whole is well loved and well written. Marlowe uses a well thought out plot, and his descriptive language gives the reading audience the illusion of being physically present.

Our main character is an 'every day Joe;' we can relate to him and in many ways understand his internal struggles; his traits are very like our own. They're just amplified to a degree that catches our attention. Doctor Faustus is a lesson in morality. The never ending conflict between good and evil is evident throughout. Marlowe's personification of these characters are right on target. Faustus' struggle with the devil is real, we see him lose his soul. Angels and devils highlight this struggle by showing them as real physical beings that are encountered and use their influence rather than spiritual beings.

They're used to show Faustus' struggle and eventual capitulation to darkness, a darkness that's only exemplified in the last few moments of his struggle - those moments of regret because it's all over and there's no more turning back. Like most morality plays, Marlowe uses allegory to dramatize Faustus' struggles with good and evil. He touches on sin, redemption, and damnation; the conflict between medieval and Renaissance values; absolute power and corruption; the dividedness of human nature.