

Faust: a virgin mother
he sees in her,



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Faust: The Dichotomy of Gretchen: In the play "Faust" by Johann Goethe, Gretchen's character envelops extreme aspects of Virgin Mary and of Eve.

Mary acts as the symbol of the mother of mankind, the pure woman whomakes men's salvation possible. She has no evil in her at all. In contrast, Eveis the archetypal figure of the fallen woman, the cause of man's suffering anddamnation.

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Dichotomy of GretchenText: In the play "Faust" by Johann Goethe, Gretchen's character envelopsextreme aspects of Virgin Mary and of Eve. Mary acts as the symbol of the motherof mankind, the pure woman who makes men's salvation possible.

She has no evilin her at all. In contrast, Eve is the archetypal figure of the fallen woman, the cause of man's suffering and damnation. She symbolizes death, destruction, and human depravity. Eve is the antithesis of Mary; together the two archetypescorrespond to the two sides of Gretchen's character.

When Gretchen is first introduced in the play, she appears to be the ideal ofinnocence and purity. When Faust tries to talk to her on the street, sherefuses. "I'm not a lady, am not fair; I can go home without yourcare." (2607) A properly brought up young woman would never allow herselfto be picked up on the street. It is her naivet that attracts Faust most ofall. "I've never seen Gretchen's equal anywhere! So virtuous, modest, through and through!" (2610-1) Even Mephistopheles acknowledges her virtue. He calls

her an "innocent, sweet dear!" (3007). Goethe further identifies Gretchen as a saint when Gretchen's bedroom becomes a shrine to Faust.

Faust uses religious language to describe the room. "Welcome, sweetlight, which weaves through this sanctuary. Seize my heart, you sweet pain of love, you that live languishing on the dew of hope! How the feeling of stillness breathes out order and contentment all around. In this poverty, what fullness! In this prison, what holiness!" (2687-94) Just from being in her room, he feels spiritual sacredness, often associated with shrines of saints.

He imagines her bed as a "father's throne" (2696) with "a flock of children clinging swarmed" (2697) around it, thus associating Gretchen with maternity. A large part of Faust's attraction to Gretchen is the image of a virgin mother he sees in her, the ideal of feminine purity. Gretchen's strong religious background further strengthens her saintly image. The prayer in the Ramparts scene is an example of her religious training. "Oh, bend Thou, Mother of Sorrows; send Thou a look of pity on my pain." (3587-9) Gretchen looks on the world from a religious perspective.

She wants to make Faust's actions consistent with her religious upbringing. "How do you feel about religion? But without desire you revere the Holy Sacraments, alas! It's long since you confessed or went to mass!" (3415-23) Gretchen can sense Mephistopheles is devil. She can feel his evil presence, which is what saints are supposed to be able to do. She screams when Mephistopheles comes near her prison, "What rises up from the threshold here? He! He! Thrust him out! In this holy place what is

heabout?" (4601-3) In the end of the book, Gretchen is forgiven and hersins are redeemed.

A voice from heaven calls, " She is saved!" (4611) Regardless of her sins, the religious side of Gretchen remains throughout the book. Gretchen is constantly aware of her crimes and prays. " My peace is gone, my heart is sore." (3374-5) She retains her ability to sense the presence of Mephistopheles until the end. Because of Gretchen's salvation, the audience knows that her religious side has been stronger than her sinful side.

However, in some situations, Gretchen is presented as a fallen woman who causes her own ruin. Even though Gretchen rejects Faust on the street, she is immediately attracted to him, in spite of the fact that he acts very vulgar toward her.

Gretchen disregards her religious upbringing and starts an affair with Faust. Later she tells him, " Yet I confess I know not why my heart began at once to stir to take your part." (3175-6) The double side of Gretchen's femininity is evident in the Evening scene. Gretchen is made both innocent and erotic as she removes her clothes and sings a romantic song. While she remains a girl getting ready for bed, her undressing is a foreshadowing of her affair with Faust.

Later, in the church at the mass for her mother's death, an evil spirit torments Gretchen. She does not feel comfortable in