

A personification of the spirit english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Outline

Prescribed Question:

Text and genre: How could the text be read and interpreted differently by two different readers
Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlowe, Norton Critical Editions.

Task is related course section:

Part 3: Literature - texts and contexts

Task Focus:

This essay concentrates on the possibility of different interpretations and/or reactions to Dr. Faustus by two different readers. Namely a person from the renaissance period and a modern reader. This essay deals with how the text could be inferred differently, the varying impacts it might have on the two readers, and the reasons for these contrasting responses for the text. I am going to, through this essay, study the audience response from two different eras. Christopher Marlowe was a man with strong renaissance beliefs, and this clearly had its implications in what he wrote and how he portrayed his thoughts through his stories and thoughts. His works are nothing but manifestations of his thoughts and perspectives. The subjects Marlowe borrowed, the heroes he molded, were no more than his mouthpiece, voicing his exorbitant dreams. Like him they sought the infinite and like him were never sated. Dr. Faustus was Marlowe's representation of none but himself. Marlowe's Faustus has been called a 'Renaissance Man' - a personification of the spirit of the Renaissance. It typically means a man with

expertise in various fields and subjects, empowered and limitless in his capacities for development. This exactly is what Faustus's character implied. Renaissance, means ' rebirth', and is the name given to the period of European history, which followed the Middle Ages. Its development has been attributed to a new confidence in the potential of man. The renaissance was a period where many things began to change. People began to break free from their shells, and slowly try to let go of their medieval past. However amidst all the transformation and change, there were many who feared stepping outside the confined yet comfortable dominance of the church. Dr. Faustus, was however a character Marlowe sketched that portrayed to the renaissance audience all they could be, but given their religious inhibitions, chose not to. This play, to the Elizabethans, wasn't like on of the other traditional morality plays that they grew accustomed to through age- old habits. Christopher Marlowe, lived in the same era as Shakespeare and therefore these conventional new forms of plays were slowly beginning to gain acceptance from the audience. However, this work of Dr. Faustus wasn't just another entertaining entity, it was almost like a piercing question. I believe the renaissance readers would have been intrigued and terrified in equal measure at the rebellion of Faustus. While the entire play carries innumerable incidents of rebellion against the church, which would inevitably stun many believers and those who could never imagine rising against the church, it still reached out and spoke to those such as Marlowe and the revolutionaries who Faustus only embodied. According to the medieval view of the universe, Man was placed in his position by God and should remain content with his station in life. Any attempt or ambition to go beyond his

assigned place was considered a great sin of pride. This notion was one that stayed yet, in the minds and beliefs of many people even in the renaissance period, therefore making Faustus nothing close to a hero. A hero to them would have been someone who was imbued with all the perfect qualities, and didn't question god but Faustus in contrast, would have only posed a villain. The 7 deadly sins that infamously revolved in the lives of everyone were highlighted in Faustus time and again. Pride, which prevailed even in the character of Lucifer and the concept of lust, would have brought a sense of astonishment in the audiences. However, apart from only the religious values of the Elizabethan audience that would have led to such varied perceptions, cultural factors too could have played a role. In the Elizabethan era, there was control and controlling, the peasants and the ruling. This meant that the entire concept of Faustus gaining power would have appealed to many if not all the people at that time who would have snatched the opportunity to gain immediate gratification, especially peasants. While many would have remained in awe of the magnificence of the plot and the idea of revolution it brought initially, the tragic end would have only stood again as proof that anyone who dares to question the supreme, and tread the path in a quest to know more than they need to, will only face doom ultimately. Satisfying the church believers and re-confirming to the renaissance people who only then began to accept change, that Faustus was no more than one of them, an epitome of the questioning essence of Renaissance but only pulled back in by the beliefs of the medieval. Following suite, many years later, the same work is read, witnessed and studied by us, the modern readers. While the people from this era, have come far from the

grasps of a confined, narrow society, Faustus doesn't fail to captivate. While a modern reader, with a far more sense of 'open-mindedness' relates to Faustus and interprets it differently from a Renaissance person. There are no shackles of rules anymore, the Church, though still important but does not play an authoritative role. People can read Faustus, just as they read many other plays without worrying about how it affects their stand in the society. While the renaissance reader, giving in to his fears and inhibitions wouldn't fully connect with Faustus at every level, a person of this era most definitely sees that there is more to Faustus than Marlowe's atheistic beliefs. His courage, his thirst to hunt for the infinite, explore the unknown are few of the attributes that only personify the kind of people we see today. In contrast to the Renaissance people's doubt in calling Faustus a 'hero', in the mind of a modern reader, he will most definitely be more than just a hero. Maybe because the conventional notions of a 'perfect' person have changed, and because sins such as lust, pride, gluttony, greed aren't that immoral as they used to be. While a reader in the renaissance would have called Faustus "a vulgar sorcerer, tempted to sell his soul to the Devil for the ordinary price of sensual pleasure, and earthly power and glory." To a person of this times Faustus maybe "more sinned against than sinning, as one whose intellectual passion and aesthetic awareness justify his "disobedience." These varying perceptions of Dr. Faustus may majorly depend on the society and times around the reader, but one cannot simply undermine that it doesn't leave an impact. A renaissance person, after studying Faustus would have been inspired, because Faustus was everything they feared to become. To many others, he was a self-conceit who forayed away from heaven, which aptly led

him to a deserving punishment, impending doom. But to a modern reader, Faustus is a story of a genius of a man, with mistakes as human as anybody else's. Maybe just unhappy figure who acts against his own better nature, and whose agonized death is a matter for regret rather than applause.