

Elizabethan age – age of marlowe and shakespeare

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Elizabethan age was an era of extraordinary juxtaposition of whole new avenue of thoughts and avalanche of ideologies, which flowed in words of great literary geniuses. It began with the spirit of Renaissance marked by the quest for adventure and material wealth. It was the age when the minds of the people were lured by the new visions of distant lands rich in gold jewels and were swayed by the captivating charm of the beauty and loveliness. Music, dance and mirth played a significant part in their lives. On the other hand, Elizabethan era also saw the decay of moral values. From the noble class to gentry and from royalties to peasantry: people in an inexhaustible pursuit of materialism devoid from spirituality, adopted greed and corrupt values.

The literature world delved deep into the psyche of the masses to illustrate the situation whereby in their quest for lavish life, they forgot that a tragic end awaits them. Both Marlowe and Shakespeare created the characters in their enduring plays Doctor Faustus and Hamlet, Prince of Denmark who became the emblem of tragic heroes. Both protagonists enjoyed a life of royalty because of their noble birth but both of their lives ended in tragedy in virtue of their most tragic flaw in their character. Their flaw was their greed and pride, which led them to pursue their evil designs and eventually their death. Marlowe's hero is Faustus who had extraordinary qualities and was a super human but his consuming passion reaches beyond the ordinary aspiration until he met with his fate. On the other hand, we cannot say Hamlet was lacking in moral values but he was also a conqueror and his greed to revenge the murder of his father surpassed all his good actions and

deeds. For the power and wealth, Claudius murdered King Hamlet whose soul wanders and tortures the young Hamlet to ponder upon some foul play.

Faustus and Hamlet exemplified the different faces of the human struggle of choosing between doing good and evil and how the correct or wrong choices and actions surpass the moral fiber of the individual.

An overview of Dr. Faustus would reflect how a man overpowered by greed and ambition can be driven to sell his soul to the Devil but in the end would suffer the consequences of such a repugnant act. He abjured the scriptures, the Trinity and Christ to fulfill his inordinate ambition to gain super human powers by gaining mastery over unholy art of magic. By selling the soul to Devil, he lives a blasphemous life full of vain and sensual pleasures in 24 years and did not even hesitate to insult and assault the Pope with the Holy Fathers at Rome (Sparknotes 2007, Doctor Faustus). Though he felt a constant dispute in his soul between his overweening ambition and conscience, he ignored such conviction until the time wherein it was too late as eternal damnation awaited him (Sparknotes 2007, Doctor Faustus). In his inordinate passion to unravel all the mysteries of the universe, he forgot that he cannot overpower the time and when ultimately the time came for the devil claim his soul, he realizes that his sins are unpardonable and nothing can save him. Before the devil totally snatches his soul to bring him to hell, Marlowe wrote a poignant expression of Faustus' final soliloquy: " My God, my God, look not so fierce to me! Adders and serpents let me breathe a while! Ugly hell, gape not: come not Lucifer: I'll burn my books: Ah, Mephistophilis" (Marlowe1588, Scene XIV)!

Shakespeare's Hamlet told of a tragic end brought about by bitterness and revenge- but the end of Hamlet was not due to the flaw in his moral character but the waver of the mind of the noble soul to avenge the death of his father. The play began with the presence of supernatural element in the form of the Ghost of Hamlet's father. The figure of Ghost implied the emergence of tragedy that would change the course of Hamlet's life because of the greed of Hamlet's uncle, Claudius who later ascended to the throne of Denmark after marrying Hamlet's mother (Sparknote 2007, Hamlet). Torn between righteousness and vengeance, Hamlet decided to avenge the death of his father but as he was thoughtful by nature, he delayed the revenge and instead entered in a deep melancholy. A definitive turn of events caused Hamlet's fit of rage happened when he attempted of to kill Claudius, mistakenly he killed Polonius. Hearing the news of the death of Polonius, Ophelia, Hamlet's lover, went mad with grief and killed herself by drowning in the river (Sparknote 2007, Hamlet). Laertes wanted to avenge his father, Polonius and his sister, Ophelia's death. Taking the advantage of confusion, Claudius instigated Laertes for a duel with Hamlet that allowed him to position a poisoned sword in Laertes hand to use against Hamlet, as well as poisoned drink (Sparknote 2007, Hamlet). Wounded Hamlet proved Claudius' guilt from the dying Laertes; he picked up a poisoned sword, stabbed Claudius and forced him to drink the remaining of the poisoned wine. Claudius went into the eternal doom and Hamlet too died after he had his revenge.

The first point of comparison easily becomes the moral fiber that Faustus and Hamlet had as two individuals reflected different motives and different

objectives throughout that frame of the play. Marlowe had captured the moral value of greed for materialistic desires in the form of Dr. Faustus' aspirations for gaining the knowledge of black magic. He had selfish motives that were strong enough for him to bid farewell the religious values of medieval period that valued Christian principles and that focused on the Will of God. Faustus believed that " these metaphysics of magicians and necromantic books are heavenly; O, what a world of profit and delight of power, of honor of Omnipotence, Is promised to the studious artizen: All things that move between the quiet poles shall be at my command" (Marlowe 1588, Scene I). Such a statement showed why Faustus was drawn to the black arts; he desired power and decided it was better than the traditional norms of knowledge they were accustomed to. He constructed his own demise when he initiated the deal with the Devil. He considered different fields of knowledge and dismissed them to be nothing compared to black arts, seeing them as something that would make him " a mighty god" (Marlowe 1588, Scene 1 Line 62). It was this greed that dominated Faustus' morality that led him to be impressed with Mephistophilis' lie of his so-called freedom and power (Marlowe 1588, Scene III Lines 76-80).

On the contrary, Shakespeare's protagonist, Hamlet was presented as a noble soul and possessed strong moral convictions. Although revenge was not considered morally righteous, it was his response to the evil that was injected in his life by his father's murder. It presented a more human response to evil and how he adapted such ways because of the circumstance and not for his own selfish desires for wealth and power. As an effect, he killed Polonius whom he had mistaken for Claudius, his father's murderer.

Hamlet believed that it was his moral duty to avenge his father for his father to rest in peace. Hamlet declared such duty when he said "The time is out of joint, O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right" (Shakespeare 1600, Act I Scene V). Furthermore, Hamlet had shown disgust to other forms of immorality within his family as shown in how he hated his mother's relationship with Claudius (Shakespeare 1600, Act I Scene II).

According to Studer-Pauer (1994), "He acts rather on his moral sense of duty... knowing that at the same time that he is sacrificing his own happiness and life, we consider Hamlet not only morally impeccable, but, indeed, a heroic figure" (94). The function of Hamlet's complexity exemplifies a person's goodness and how it can be challenged during the most difficult of situations. On the other hand, Faustus showed how some humans would not stop until they are satisfied with what they have, even reaching the most wretched of options to attain an imaginary level of satisfaction.

The second point of comparison the Hamlet and Dr. Faustus in the actions they took to carry out their plans to achieve their goals. Faustus defied the medieval conventions of love, selflessness and trust to become all powerful and wealthy. He was an exaggerated manifestation of a man from the Renaissance period whereby man can go into an extreme extent to achieve his aims. Faustus pushed the limits of morality the different extents in their travels throughout Europe. There was a time wherein he even went to the pope. Mephistophilis and Faustus even used their powers to play tricks on the pope. During meal time, the two made themselves invisible to curse and to cause such a ruckus as the friars and the attendants tried to drive out the

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believed ghost from their presence. Faustus' character showed that was the actually the one looking for trouble as his actions either provoked or caused it. A number of passages like the one below show the lack of wisdom Faustus held on the concept of hell. Mephistophilis describes hell to be any place that is not heaven. Faustus took hell merely as a continuation of the life on earth. His lack of morality blinded him from seeing the difference between him and Mephistophilis that he is not yet damned to hell for eternity and that he still had time to repent. However, he chose to see hell in a different light that made it seem a lot bearable that it was (Marlowe 1588, Scene V Lines 133-135).

Hamlet's motive was still connected to his sense of duty to his father's vengeance. However, the route he took to achieve such goal was not through justice and righteousness by law. He took matters into his own hands with a path inconsistent with Christian values. Homicide and deception became his tools for revenge. He reveals such disdain for himself and his actions in a conversation with Ophelia, " I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me: I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven" (Shakespeare 1600, Act III, Scene I)?

There was also a time when Claudius and even Hamlet's own mother Gertrude did not want him to go home from school. Hamlet was such a deep thinker that he almost drove himself insane from all the pondering he has done, however it has driven him to melancholy. He was so depressed that he

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even contemplated suicide. “ O that this too solid flesh would melt, Thaw, and resolve itself into dew! Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God! How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable Seem to me all the uses of this world” (Shakespeare 1600, Act I Scene 2)!

He did not commit suicide but his final actions led him to stab Claudius after Laertes revealed to him that he was truly the one to blame for the former King's death. When Hamlet had received his vengeance for his father, he has already killed Polonius and Laertes by his sword and the play ends in a tragedy.

The actions of the two protagonists showed how choices made and the actions taken were important despite the fact that one holds a high degree of morality and righteousness. In the same way that the biblical truth goes, faith without action is dead. Hamlet's morality and goodness would not matter if he chose to do evil. Faustus from the start lacked that fiber of morality and it was reflected in how he was clueless as to what he was getting into.

The third point lies on the fact that both lead characters from both plays exemplified the fight for goodness as both struggled throughout the play about the righteousness of their actions. Both of them had scenes wherein there was an inner struggle in their souls about the consequences of their deeds, an inner conflict of following good or evil. There may be a varying degree of the level of struggle and goodness; the point is it existed for both characters.

Even if Faustus has already sold his soul to the devil there were countless instances wherein good tried interfering to push him to ask for forgiveness and repentance. In the beginning, there was a time wherein a good angel and the evil angel reflected that Faustus' struggle whether he should stop studying the black arts and turn to the Scriptures of God again. Like the other times that he struggled, he chose the evil path. Near his death, he was urged by an old man to repent and to ask for forgiveness from God, " Ah, stay, good Faustus, stay thy desperate steps! I see an angel hovers o'er thy head, And, with a vial full of precious grace, Offers to pour the same into thy soul: Then call for mercy, and avoid despair" (Marlowe 1588, Scene XII Lines 44-46).

Once again, Faustus listened to Mephistophilis. He renewed his vow to the devil and stabbed himself sending him to an eternity in hell. Even in his final hours when there he was asking for mercy. However, he could not completely be freed from his ties with the devil partly because he did not have enough faith the God would forgive him.

It is Hamlet's nature to be meditating on the things that are going on around him. The presence of the ghost that was supposed to be his father's symbolized his contemplation of whether the ghost really was his father or if it was an evil spirit trying to get him to murder Claudius. Hamlet caught up in the despair of it all said, " To be, or not to be: that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of troubles, And by opposing end them" (Shakespeare 1600, Act III Scene 1). His despair brought him to a point of

hopelessness and depression that he questioned whether it was better to take his own life, which was a mortal sin, or to live and suffer.

Nevertheless, Hamlet suffered and struggled inside for the rest of the play, more so because of his genuine goodness. Faustus showed the same regard for the consequences of his actions. Both opted to choose evil, even if one was lesser than the others; one chose revenge over justice, the other chose temporary wealth and power over salvation.

There was reformation in every sphere of life and people were swept by the waves of such change of mindsets. The struggle for good and evil reflects the reality of the common man who constantly fights to uphold goodness in one's life. A number of times, people fail to triumph over evil as the will grows weaker against the desires of the heart. The important lesson manifested in both plays was the importance of choices that is available to everyone.

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