

The story of the
faustian bargain:
trading soul and
salvation for vast
power



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Commonly referenced in Western Europe and around the world, the story of the Faustian bargain—in which a remarkable individual trades soul and salvation for vast power—has appeared throughout history in poems, plays, newspapers, and novels describing characters' dilemmas. In *The Invention of Morel* by Adolfo Bioy Casares, the narrator falls in love with a machine-generated image of a woman named Faustine. He claims to be a criminal fugitive who escaped to live on an island, and he makes a bargain to sacrifice his soul to be with his love Faustine forever. Upon further examination of his journal, however, we see he is in fact a coward trying to redeem his previous life and create a new image rather than allegedly sacrificing himself nobly for love. Although he himself may be unaware, the narrator's journal serves to mask his deeper immoral desire for immortality and power.

The first indications of the narrator's self-seeking motives arise from his previous background. We learn from his journal that he arrived on the island as a means to escape his fugitive status, and perhaps start a new life. He explains, " I hope to write as a kind of justification for my shadowy life on this earth" (18). Thus, even before he has the opportunity to die nobly, he intends to use the journal as justification. Rather than feeling ashamed for his crimes, he is fearful what others think of his image and paranoid of getting caught. When he discovers what he thinks are visitors on the island, his first reaction is that they're coming for him. He is undoubtedly self-centered, and responds to his past deeds by escaping them. His pursuit of Faustine serves as a distraction from his fear. When he feels like he wants to escape, he says, " but I am not so worried about the dangers I am facing—I

am most concerned about the mistake I made—it can deprive me of the woman forever” (23). Just as he fearfully carried himself from his previous life to the island, Faustine provides another pursuit, or means of escaping, psychologically.

The narrator’s isolated and psychological state on the island suggests that allegedly sacrificing his soul to be with Faustine is an act of suicide. Like Faus, in the German legend, he is immensely bored with his current state. Not only that, he is hopeless and writes, “ I had nothing to hope for” (19). Although he believed risking escaping to the island would end his previous troubles, or at least result in death, it is the end of his physical journey. Without being able to move anywhere, he feels trapped emotionally as well, “ but will I ever be allowed to leave” (21). The narrator also feels like a victim to the island, and is imprisoned. His paranoia also indicates how tormented he is by being caught. His state of hopelessness and isolation further escalates with time on the island with the images. He writes he feels like a “ dead man in the midst of the living” (47). Without the images, there would be no comparison for the narrator—no glimpse of humanity or sanity. Therefore, he is somewhat aware of his psychological condition, yet with the repeating images, is constantly reminded. He grabs hold to his perception of love for Faustine, since love is a powerful emotion and ultimate distraction. As he is dying, he finally feels like he has “ the reward of a peaceful eternity” and this peace is what he has been seeking and has ultimately reached for both his body and spirit (124).

The narrator also seeks to be with Faustine to win against Morel, thus redeeming his previous image. As mentioned previously, the narrator is <https://assignbuster.com/the-story-of-the-faustian-bargain-trading-soul-and-salvation-for-vast-power/>

aware of his readers and worries how he is perceived. Unlike Morel, he provides a timeline to “ give my readers a way to date” (45). He even aspires to go beyond winning Faustine and hopes to eliminate Morel completely. He writes, “ I am obsessed by the hope of removing Morel’s image from the eternal week” (121). But why would the narrator want to remove him from the images if it was clear Faustine did not love Morel, as said in the journal? Perhaps it was evident that Faustine did in fact love Morel, but the narrator did not share that with his readers. Alternatively, the narrator perceived that there was no relationship at that time, but Morel was rather a competitor for the future. A similar question can be asked of Morel, the inventor. Did he create his invention for the noble love of science or rather for the immortal fame and reputation that would result from it?

Although the narrator shares his thoughts in a personal journal, it is unclear whether he is cognizant of his cowardice and selfish motives. In the narrator’s mind, he believes that his bargain does in fact redeem his image as well as grant him immortality and power. Through the narrator’s pursuit, Bioy Casares suggests society overvalues fame and power over death, especially in 1940 when the novel was published. In preparation for World War II, scientists dedicated their soul to building weapons for the war. Although their perceived motives for helping their country and advancing technology were noble, like Morel they were killing people for the sake of scientific progress or even fame. Similarly, as the narrator is transferring his soul to the images, he cries “ but I still love you” as he remembers his home country Venezuela, “ with its leaders, its troops with rented uniforms and deadly aim” (122). The narrator suddenly feels regret for betraying his other

love, which illustrates his conflicted nature. Just like his self-seeking love for Faustine, his fear of being forgotten overpowers his love, and he was compelled leave his country to save himself.

Though as readers we may critique the narrator as being self-seeking, fearful, and deceptive, Bioy Casares forces us to examine ourselves and our surroundings. Furthermore, what others present to the world may be different than their true personality, whether they're conscious of it or not. Before World War II, propaganda inspired people to join the war out of patriotism. Furthermore, scientific progress was greatly celebrated and many technologies developed were useful following the war. In some ways, it's impossible to predict future impact in the present, though one can try. Another question Bioy Casares raises is how much we overvalue fame and power over life as humans. For the narrator, death is impending, so choosing immortality over dying in the near future seems logical. During war, however, many soldiers die for love of their country and perhaps for an honorable image. Thus, is the point of life for some to die an honorable life? Perhaps it's from past pain, hopelessness, fear of the present, or from competition, as the narrator experiences. No matter what our inner motives may be it's possible to mask them and project a more permanent image of ourselves through text, photos, or social media.