
Inversion in Marlow's Dr. Faustus

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Dr. Faustus has been the subject of several research works endeavoring to contribute to a more understanding of this remarkable dramatic work. Approaches inevitably differ and cover a vast range of critical possibilities. The present paper attempts to discuss the play from the specific angle that it is essentially a drama of inversion. It depends on a close independent reading of the text rather than assessing other points of view. In fact, inversion, particularly of Christian values, suffuses the play and explains many important situations that could otherwise be either vague or misinterpreted.

Inversion simply means the reversal of a certain value of concept usually established and thus is associated in the mind with a certain significance. Inversion becomes sharp when it has for its sacred values as it is the case with Dr. Faustus. It implies perversion or distortion that evokes a shock and this could be the fundamental purpose of the writer. Inversion inevitably exerts irony, which is basically a two-layered phenomenon, and this when it takes place we are presented with two concepts; the original one and the inverted version. The juxtaposition of the two quickens the mind into holding comparisons and contrasts, and in this case the original always invalidates the inverted concept. In the

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meantime, the irony exerted ranges from the sardonic to the comic depending upon the seriousness of the situation and the amount of gravity inherent in it.⁽¹⁾ Thus, whether one labels it ironic inversion or inversion only, it amounts to the same thing. Curiously enough, this device of inversion is deftly made use of modern writers with subtler variation that readers sometimes regard it as a modern technique. But the fact that an Elizabethan dramatist used such a technique proves that it is not really a modern device. The following can serve as an adequate example in persuading himself to follow this blasphemous desire Dr. Faustus says:

*When Mephistophilis shall stand by me,
What god can hurt thee, Faustus?*⁽²⁾

However, in order to cope with the real dimensions of the inversions in Dr. Faustus, one has to discuss first what Faustus is really after. This critical question has been left unanswered so that Mr. Stephen Greenblatt in a recent essay wonders, "but what is it exactly that he wants? By the end of the play it is clear that knowledge, voluptuousness, and power are each mere approximation of the goal for which he sells his soul and body; what that goal is remains maddeningly."⁽³⁾ Meanwhile, the simplest answer found to this question of Faustus's aspirations is that he craves more knowledge leading to ultimate truth-fostered by the analogy with Icarus suggested in the prologue. But this is to oversimplify the whole issue. Faustus has already acquainted himself with the major areas of knowledge pursued by Renaissance scholars; Aristotle's

(1) Christopher Marlow, Dr. Faustus, ed. Harold Osborn (London: University Tutorial Press Limited, 1979). Further references to this edition will parenthetically be cited.

philosophy, Galen's medicine, Justinian law, and Divinity. It is not a case peculiar to Faustus as it is a typical Renaissance enthusiasm for acquiring encyclopedic knowledge. We can find a concrete example in John Lily's *Euphues* where the hero expresses this enthusiasm saying.

*Philosophy, physic, divinity, shall be my study.
O the hidden secrets of nature, the expresses
image of moral virtues, the equal balance of
justice, the medicines to heal all diseases, how
they begin to delight me. The Axiomae of
Aristotle, the Maxims of Justinian, the
Aphorisms of Galen, have suddenly made such
a breach into my mind that I seem only to
desire them which only detest them.⁽⁴⁾*

So, to concentrate on this issue is to ignore more intrinsic points. Those areas of study represent man's very existence; logic represents the mind, medicine the body, law the society, and divinity the soul. If Faustus rejects them, we can safely infer that what he seeks is something beyond the mind, the body, the society, and the soul. But this capacity is denied to mankind, as a god can only possess it. This help us approach the answer to the critical question, what is really that Faustus seeks? What Faustus really seeks the status and capabilities of situated beyond human limits. One of those limits is the simple principle of sin and death, otherwise why should he winder sorrowfully, "why, then, belike we must sin, and so consequently die: Ay, we must die an everlasting death". I.43-4. There is irony in the fact that he sins in his very endeavours to overstep human limits and consequently suffers

as everlasting death, but there is an obsession with the fact of death. After all, it is death that leads to the inevitable stage of punishment. This explains Faustus's obsession also with bringing the dead back to life through mastering the art of necromancy whether it means the actual bringing to life of the dead even in their original physical bodies, which explains the appearance of Helen, later in the play, or mere raising of spirits and this is repeated three times:

Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please. I.77

But may I raise up spirits when I please. V.85

That I may raise up spirits when I please. V.163

But this capability belongs to a god, and this is what Faustus is after. He is frustrated with the limits of his humanity, with the fact of mortality "yet are thou still but Faustus, and a man," and this is immediately followed by his real desire:

Couldst thou make men to live eternally,

Or, ben dead, raise them to life again. I.23-5

Faustus expresses this deep desire in justifying his turning to magic when he says:

A sound magician is a mighty god:

Here, Faustus, tire thy brain to gain a diety.

I.60-61

It is noteworthy that these evil forces understand this latent desire in Faustus. Thus the Evil Angel in tempting him says: "Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky" I.4 and this inflames Faustus's imagination as regards the attainment of both physical and spiritual everlasting pleasures.

In fact, in pursuing his desire to possess superhuman powers he is willing to be a devil like Lucifer, and this Mephistophilis understands and thus tells him, “And be thou as great as Lucifer” V.51.

Inversions occur in scene III when Faustus and Mephistophilis are talking about hell. This time the inversion is coloured with a comic shade emanating from absurdity. Faustus is not terrified by damnation while Mephistophilis is; the thought of being deprived of everlasting bliss strikes a terror to his soul, and this Faustus who comforts him and encourages the devil making himself the example to follow, “learn thou of Faustus manly fortitude” III.85. It seems that the tables are turned though one can safely doubt the cunning Machinations of Mephistophilis in evoking false self-assurance in Faustus.

The process of inversion continues and we notice that it gets more intense the more it proceeds. Faustus decides to build an altar and a church to Belzebug:

The God thou serv'st is thine own appetite

Wherein is fix'd the love of Belzebug:

To him I'll build an altar and a church,

And offer lukewarm blood of new-born babes. IV.11-14.

Inversion here is double-edged for Faustus is not only promising to build a shrine where to worship Belzebug, the devil, which reserves a time-honoured tradition and reveals real Machiavellianism, but also he is defiling religious matters.⁽⁵⁾ Lucifer promises Faustus to make him see the Seven Deadly Sins in their proper shapes. Faustus's response comes as a

surprise as it contains an inversion in an absurd smile. He says:

*That sight will be as pleasing unto me
As paradise was to Adam, the first day
Of his creation. VI.106-7*

Two components are inverted here; 'paradise' because the Seven Deadly Sins are summoned from hell, 'Adam' because he lived in all purity before the Original Sin. Adam was banished from paradise because of his sin and hence we have an ironic anticipation of Faustus's banishment from grace. However, apart from the irony, we can safely say that Faustus here has a deep unconscious wish for new creation, a new world in which he could be a Dam no matter how sinning this new world is. Besides, his seeing and talking to the Seven Deadly Sins satisfies in him that passion of a capability denied to ordinary man.

In scene XV, we have an inversion of 'Faith' and its traditional associations. To appease Lucifer, Faustus stabs his arm one more time and writes with his blood assuring Lucifer of his devotions. Mephistopholis is so pleased with Faustus's act that he says: "His faith is great; I cannot touch his soul," XV.71. Faith here is in Lucifer instead of God and irony is compounded. Marlowe's arrangement of situation is subtle enough to impart to them maximum significance and exert as much irony as possible. A concrete example is this situation because what makes the substitution all more ironic is that it is preceded by the old man's talk about God and followed by another perverted substitution when Faustus applicates Helen to make him immortal and to give him his soul again. This

very scene is followed by 'Faith' but this time in its true sense when the old man says, "my faith, vile hell, shall triumph thee," XVI.6.

It is mentioned above in this paper that Faustus dreads bodily pain. Physical existence is in fact given a considerable stress in the play. This is manifested in Faustus's thought, ambition and lust for power, authority and wealth. We are given also erotic hints represented by Venus and Helen. After all, Faustus expresses his wish to live for twenty four years in all voluptuousness. Absurdly enough, amidst his agony in the final scene while waiting for Lucifer to come to seize his soul Faustus quotes a line from Ovid, "Slowly, slowly run, horses of night," Xvii.75. This is puzzling as a lover wishing the prolongation of a night of erotic pleasure utters the line from Ovid. But the paradox is resolved when we consider the stress on physical existence even when more serious issues are involved-soon after signing away his soul, Faustus asks for a wife, and while he is on the verge of eternal damnation, he expresses his desire to have Helen. Faustus, consciously or unconsciously, to the last scene cling to the physical part of human existence. Worldly pleasures are generally discarded for the sake of heavenly pleasure. But Faustus goes against this basic conception of life and death in almost all his endeavours. On the contrary, he inverts it through his harping on bodily pleasures in all its forms. But, ironically enough, Faustus has lost both worlds and attains to nothing; in this world he has not achieved anything of significance or anything that could match up to his previous cravings. His half-trivial feats end in losing both body and soul. He finds himself in the

end suffering agony and horror, the agony and horror of those sinners condemned to eternal damnation and here he utters two significant lines:

*Mountains and hills, come, come, and fall on me,
And hide me from the heavy wrath of God, XVII.85-6*

Faustus is an overreacher. He aspires to get ultimate and infinite knowledge and to be a superman in the world he lives in. Being blind to the reality of man's limitation and abilities. Faustus rejects all available science. Masinton further remarks, "Being a good is the only thing that will satisfy him (Faustus)."⁽⁷⁾ Faustus is granted by the devil full power over the dead and the living. However, when the twenty four years are about to finish, Faustus is brought face to face with his real limitations and to the natural end of sin and death.

Faustus at last realizes the gravity of his sin, the futility of his endeavours and the failure of all his hopes. He also comes to see the truth, but it is too late to repent. Finally, he realizes in the end that he is, "still but Faustus, and a man".

Marlowe, in *Dr. Faustus*, presents a man in a new age, rejecting all limitations imposed on him by a medieval world-order. But the influence of the middle-ages can still be felt for man cannot divorce himself from inherited traditions because he is still part of it.

To conclude, it can be assumed that Faustus in rejecting God and joining the devil, does not achieve the great things which he has been thinking of in the beginning; and all his desires end in trivial or half serious achievements. This also leads to the assumption motivated by pride and achieved by evil means, lead to destruction. In other words, Marlowe

shows that even the quest for knowledge, when motivated not by wisdom, but by desires for fame and power, cannot give satisfaction. Faustus has been described by Helen Gardener, in one of her essays, as turning “from a proud philosopher, master of all human knowledge, to a trickster, to a slave of phantoms, to a cowering wretch: that is a brief sketch of the progress of Dr. Faustus.”

Notes

1. That is why we find it an adequate tool in both tragedy and comedy. We can take Ben Jonson's Volpone, where gold replaces religion, as an example of a comedy man manipulating this device.
2. Christopher Marlowe, Dr. Faustus, ed. By Harold Osborn (London: University Tutorial Press Limited, 1979), p.24-25.
3. Stephen J. Greenblatt, "Marlowe and Renaissance Self Fashioning" in Two Renaissance Mythmakers, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson, ed. By Alvin B. Kernan (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p.60.
4. John Lyly Euphues, an Anatomy of Wit, Elizabethan Fiction, ed. Robert Ashley and Edwin, M. Moscky (Winston: Holt, 1966), p.151.
5. W. L. Godshalk, Marlovian World Picture (Paris: Mounon, 1974), p.75.
6. Ibid., p.84.
7. Charles J. Masinton, Christopher Marlowe's Tragic Vision: A Study in Damnation, (USA: OHTO University Press, 1972), p.96.
8. Helen Gardener, "The Tragedy of Damnation." In Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays, by Clifford Leech (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p.321.

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قلب المفاهيم في مسرحية دكتور فاست للكاتب مارلو

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المستخلص

يعد الكاتب كرتسوفر مارلو أحد كبار كتاب المسرح في عصر النهضة، بل اعتبره العددي من النقاد رائد المسرح الإنكليزي لما كان له من تأثيرات واضحة على مسرحي عصر النهضة الذي خلقوه.

كتب مارلو العديد من المسرحيات، إلا أن الدكتور فاست بقيت إلى يومنا هذا عملاً بارزاً من بين تلك المسرحيات. لهذا التألق أسباب عديدة منها أسلوب مارلو في هذه المسرحية، الشخصيات التي اعتمدها، إضافة إلى أمور عديدة مهمة لتبعها في هذه المسرحية.

هذا البحث يتطرق إلى نقطة مهمة في هذه المسرحية هي قلب المفاهيم عند البطل، حيث إنَّ البطل ونتيجة لطموحه الكبير يعمد إلى قلب مفاهيم عديدة منها دينية واجتماعية يوظفها لتطلعاته الشخصية وغرائزه الدنيوية. لتحقيق ذلك يتوجب عليه عقد اتفاق مع الشيطان لمدة أربعة وعشرون عاماً يُمنح خلالها فرصة كبيرة لممارسات دنيوية كانت تدور في خلدته. خلال هذه السنوات يمر البطل بعدة محطات لتحقيق أهدافه الشخصية والذاتية. إلا أن السؤال الذي يطرح نفسه، هل حقق فاست ما يريد؟ من خلال هذا البحث تبين أن الدكتور فاست لم يحقق إلا رغبات تافهة وصغيرة لا تستحق العناء ولا تستحق لأن يبيع نفسه للشيطان مقابل ذلك.

في الختام نستطيع القول إنَّ الكاتب مارلو قدم لنا سلوك شخصية ونزاعات داخلية عند البطل انتهت بنهاية مأساوية كبيرة.

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