

## INNOVATION IN THE LEGEND OF FAUSTUS BY GOETHE IN *FAUST*

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### Abstract

*Faust is one of the most famous plays by German writer Wolfgang von Goethe. This play is based on an old legend narrating a scholar who sold his soul to Satan to gain more knowledge. Many works have been written on this narrative; Christopher Marlowe wrote Dr Faustus in 1592, which detailed the life and death of Dr Faustus. In the 19th century, Wolfgang von Goethe wrote Faust, Later, Thomas Mann also wrote a novel titled Doctor Faustus. This research paper traces the innovations made to the legend of Faust by Wolfgang von Goethe.*

**Keywords:** *Faustus, Faust, Satan, Mephistopheles, paper money, artificial life.*

### Introduction

The legend of Faust is based on the narrative that scholarly people or learned men sold their souls to Satan to gain more knowledge. Accounts of a few men can be traced in the past, one from England in the medieval ages and the second from Germany. The English narrative details the account of a bishop named Theophilus, it is believed that he was dismissed from his services wrongfully, and in retaliation, he signed a pact with Satan to vent out his frustration. However, the narrative says that he realised his mistake and eventually repented and died as a believer:

One of the earliest and most widespread of these legends told of a bishop named Theophilus who was wrongfully dismissed from his office in the reign of the emperor Justinian. In his resentment, he sealed a contract renouncing Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary and acknowledging Satan as his Lord. His restoration to his office followed immediately. But Theophilus soon became terrified at what he had done. For forty nights he fasted and prayed to the Virgin; at last, she appeared and listened to his plea. Reassured of divine mercy, he publicly confessed his sin and proclaimed the miracle of his preservation. The contract was burned, and Theophilus shortly afterwards died in a state of grace, becoming known as Theophilus the Penitent. His story is representative of many, for interest in the theme persisted throughout the Middle Ages. (*Doctor Faustus*, p. 1)

The most famous narrative about the legend of Faust is based on a story of a German necromancer named George or Johan Faustus, and it is said that he also signed a pact with the devil for knowledge: A work published by a Protestant theologian in 1548 was the first to ascribe to him a definite association with the supernatural powers of evil and death at the hands of the devil. A fuller description of this terrible death followed in 1562. During the subsequent quarter-century, the legend underwent further elaboration. In 1572, a translation of a work published two years earlier on the Continent made Faustus' name known to English readers. Then, in 1587, there appeared the first full and consecutive narrative of the legendary life and death of this new leading character in the old tale of the compact with Satan. (*Doctor Faustus*, p. 2)

Most of the works like, *Dr Faustus*, *Faust* and *Doctor Faustus* make Johan Faustus as their primary source.

Most literary works have a leitmotif based on an instinct or event, but the plot is mostly designed under social, political and religious influence. The innovation in the theme depends on the type of society a writer lives in. For example, when Christopher Marlowe wrote *Doctor Faustus* in

1592, he made little changes to the legend of Faust, and the plot was shaped by the beliefs of that time. In *Doctor Faustus*, we find that Faustus does any great activity after signing the pact with the devil. Most of the activities performed by him are comic and sensuous. After signing a pact with Lucifer, he makes no significant contribution. Marlowe does not present Faustus as a positively evolved person after making a deal with the devil because he lived in a society where religious authorities stood firm. Despite the renaissance, the freehand was not given to writers to write stories which would contradict the established faith. At the end of the play, Faustus is damned, and he realises his mistake and asks for a drop of Christ's blood:

FAUSTUS:

See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!  
 One drop would save my soul, half a drop. Ah, my Christ!—  
 Rend not my heart for naming of my Christ;  
 Yet will I call on him. O, spare me, Lucifer!— (10: 146-149)

When it comes to *Faust* by, Wolfgang von Goethe makes many innovations in the original legend of Faust. One of the changes he makes is in the setting of the play. Since it was written in the 19th century under the influence of the French Revolution of 1789, the setting becomes a modern society. From Christopher Marlowe to Goethe, society had transformed, the impact of religion was reduced, and the influence of science was enhanced. Satan was no more looked upon as a primal evil character, as an enemy of man. God was not seen as an embodiment of good; atheism was on the rise. Many great writers denounced faith under the influence of the French Revolution. Under all these conditions, Goethe makes many innovations in the original legend of Faustus.

The most evident change in the original legend is that Faust does not consider signing a pact with Satan an unforgivable sin but rather considers it a part of the plan of the Lord. That is why in the first part of *Faust*, in "The Prologue of Heaven" Goethe details a conversation between Mephistopheles and Lord, where Mephistopheles tell Lord that he will lead His servant astray, to which Lord responds normally and consider it a normal thing:

MEPHISTOPHELES. What'll You bet? You'll lose him yet  
 if You  
 grant me permission  
 to guide  
 him gently along my road.

LORD. So  
 long as he is still alive on earth, 315  
 nothing  
 shall prohibit your so doing men  
 err as

long as they keep striving. (*Faust Prologue*  
 in *Heaven* 312-317)

This change in the stance of Goethe towards signing the pact with Satan also innovates the ending of *Faust*. When Faust dies at the end of the play, angels save his soul from the clutches of Mephistopheles; although Faust does not realise his mistake, neither does he repent. *Dr Faustus* realised his mistake and also repented but was not saved.

The other innovation Goethe makes to the original legend of Faust lies in how the pact is signed between Faust and Satan. In the original legend and in *Dr Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe, the pact is signed for a particular period, e.g., in *Dr Faustus*, he signs the pact for twenty-four years. Mephistopheles sets the terms and conditions; however, in *Faust*, the pact is not time-bound, and Faust determines the wager; Mephistopheles does not set the terms and conditions; Faust sets the terms and conditions.

In *Faust*, after signing the pact with Mephistopheles, Faust does great deeds and contributes to human society. After signing the pact with Mephistopheles, some of the acts that Faust performs are inventing paper money, inventing artificial life, i.e. robots, and inventing modern war weapons.

In *Faust*, Mephistopheles becomes Faust's guide, leading him to make better contributions. In one of the scenes, Faust and Mephistopheles come across an emperor who is in severe debt; he has no options to come to pay the debt. Here Faust, with the help of Mephistopheles, introduces the idea of paper money, and through this innovation in the economic setup emperor can overcome the debt; Mephistopheles, like an economist, details the benefits of paper money:

MEPHISTOPHELES. These notes, when used in lieu of gold and pearls,  
are handy, too; you know right off how much you own 6120  
and can, without first bargaining or haggling,  
enjoy the full delights of love and wine.

If metal's wanted, there are money-changers,  
and if they're short, you go and dig a while;  
the golden cups and chains can then be sold at auction, 6125  
and prompt redemption of these shares  
confounds all sceptics who might mock us.

Once used to this, no one will want another system,  
and from now on all your imperial states  
will thus be well supplied with jewels, gold, and paper. (1. 6119-6130)

The other contribution that Faust would make through Wagner with the help of Mephistopheles would be by creating artificial life in a laboratory named Homunculus; Wagner describes Homunculus as:

WAGNER (*who has continued to watch the vial attentively*).  
It's rising, flashing, piling up another  
moment and it's done!

A grand design may seem insane at first;  
but in the future chance will seem absurd,  
and such a brain as this, intended for great thoughts,  
will in its turn create a thinker too.

(*He contemplates the vial delightedly.* )

I hear a strong but pleasing sound; the glass vibrates,  
clouds up, then clears-success is certain!

I see a pretty mannikin  
who's making dainty gestures.

What more can we or can the world demand  
now that the mystery has been revealed?

Listen! The sound we hear is changing that  
is a voice, now I hear speech.

HOMUNCULUS (*in the vial, to WAGNER*).

Is daddikins all right? A serious business, that!

Come and give me a nice affectionate hug,  
but gently, so the glass won't break!

It is a curious property of things  
that what is natural takes almost endless space,  
while what is not requires a container. (2. 6864-6884)

This, again, is a profound contribution, which in the contemporary time in the field of science is the most researched area, and scientists have been able to advance artificial intelligence by developing humanoid robots.

Faust also invents modern war weapons in the play and helps the emperor. It can be said that Goethe made innovations to the legend of Faust when he adapted it in his play *Faust*. These innovations were influenced by the changes that had taken place in European society under the influence of the French Revolution and due to the decadence of religion and the advancement of science. Faust becomes the representative of modern man and modern society. He is not a representative of evil, nor is he damned a soul.

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