

# The Faustus Myth in the English Novel



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By

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Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-8284-4

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8284-2

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the roots of the origin of the legendary Faustus in Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* in the sixteenth century, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* in the early nineteenth century and the postmodern English novel John Fowles' *The Magus* in the twentieth century.

In this book, Faustus' striving for power and existentialist knowledge is going to be analyzed in accordance with the Faustus myth's roots in mythological and biblical sources as well as the social, political, educational and scientific upheavals that led to an existential crisis. Various documents from the sixteenth century support the idea that a necromancer calling himself Faustus really lived in the early sixteenth century. Faustus has been recreated in every genre over and over for many centuries, thus, striving for power, knowledge, and money is not only a modern concern but has also been the concern of every century since the beginning of mankind. Starting with Christopher Marlowe's Dr. Faustus in the sixteenth century there arose a popular literary interest in the story of Faustus in drama. Moreover, this myth has also created Faustian man in the novels of different ages. The Faustus Myth is a cycle in which it starts and ends tragically in Marlowe's Renaissance *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, ends in salvation in Goethe's Romantic *Faust*, and ends in an ambiguity bordering on meaninglessness in Fowles' *The Magus*.



## PREFACE

This study involves a close analysis of Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*, and John Fowles' *The Magus*, focusing on the representations of the Faustus Myth in different ages and genres. The specific claim I point out is that the Faustus Myth is a cycle which starts and ends in tragic circumstances in Christopher Marlowe's Renaissance Faustus, in salvation in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Faust, and in meaninglessness, ambiguous collapses in John Fowles' existentialist Nicholas Urfe.

This book falls into four chapters. Starting with an introduction to the ways in which I identify stories as myths, I place the Faustus Myth on a theoretical basis. Afterwards, I move to Chapter One which gives detailed information on the historical background of the Faustus Myth including the first human curiosity both in mythology and in the Bible. As I move to the Enlightenment Period I link the Faustus Myth to the theory of knowledge and continue with existentialism that existential knowledge takes us to. Chapters Two, Three and Four include close analyses of three texts in the following chronological order: *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, *Faust*, and *The Magus*. Finally, the conclusion consists of the concluding remarks derived from an overview of the discussion of each work.

In the conclusion of my book, I would like to express my deepest and sincere gratitude to Prof. Zeynep Ergun, for her support, patience, and encouragement throughout my studies. Her academic and editorial advice was invaluable to the completion of this book and has taught me innumerable lessons and insights on the workings of my academic research in general. Moreover, I am deeply grateful to Prof. Ergun, for sharing her invaluable remarks from her book, *Erkeğin Yitiği Yerde*. Besides her sharing profound experience and knowledge with me, she has also been my inspirational guide in my life and always will be.

I am also deeply grateful to Prof. Esra Melikoğlu first for her invaluable friendship, and then her expert guidance, understanding, encouragement, and support. Her innumerable insights and comments on my study helped me focus my ideas and provide them.

My thanks also go to Prof. Dikmen Gürün for providing me many invaluable comments with an intellectual stimulus and insight. My

acknowledgement also goes to Assoc. Prof. Murat Seçkin for his encouragement and motivation. I am also grateful to my colleagues for their warm support. It has been great pleasure to work in the department of English Language and Literature at Istanbul University.

My dear friends, who have always been with me since the beginning of my studies, not only have encouraged me in my studies but also have been constant source of my joy even in my depressive moments. I am grateful to them for always being with me.

Most importantly, none of this would have been possible without the love and patience of my family. I owe special gratitude to my husband Koray Sivrioğlu, my mother, Nazan İnceoğlu, my father, Ahmet İnceoğlu, and my brother Altuğ İnceoğlu for continuous, unconditional support, and the interest they showed in my studies and the motivation they gave me during those tiring times.

My family has been a constant source of love, concern, support and strength all these years. I would like to express my heart-felt gratitude to them. Also, my extended family has aided and encouraged me throughout this time.

I have to give a special mention for the support given by my grandmother, Necla İnceoğlu to whom this book is dedicated although she could not see the completion of this study. I wish I could have told her that this book had already finished before she passed away. However, I am sure that she is somewhere there watching, being proud of me. With my eternal love...

# INTRODUCTION

Myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths.

People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I think that what we're really seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonance within our innermost being and reality, so that we can actually feel the rapture of being alive.

(Campbell, 1988: 5)

In this book, the focus will be on the Faustus myth<sup>1</sup> in which Faustus is an overreacher, in pursuit of self-knowledge, which he will achieve by going beyond the boundaries of traditional knowledge as propagated by the Orthodox institutions in the given culture. The Faustus myth<sup>2</sup>, before being identified as a myth, was the folktale of a man named Faustus who lived in Germany. After his story became popular, he reappeared, even in contemporary culture, in different art forms such as literature both high-brow and popular, including comics, the ballet, the opera. The real historical Faustus came onto the scene as a scholar and persistently reappeared in literature assuming different identities which however, shared basically the same qualities. In this study, different versions of the Faustus myth in literature, the first text being Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*<sup>3</sup>, the second Goethe's *Faust* and the third John Fowles' *The Magus*<sup>4</sup> are going to be analyzed and interpreted. These works will be analysed in the context of the Renaissance, the early nineteenth century and the postmodern period. In this chapter, further texts that can be read as different versions of the

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<sup>1</sup> In this book, the latinized form of the name "Faustus" will be used except in the case of quotations taken from other texts and Goethe's *Faust*.

<sup>2</sup> The Faust Myth was coined by Burkhardt in 1855 as indicated in Stuart Atkins, "Survey of the Faust Theme", *Faust: A Tragedy: Interpretive Notes*, trans. by Walter Arndt, ed. by Cyrus Hamlin (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 583.

<sup>3</sup> From now on this text will be alluded as *Dr. Faustus*.

<sup>4</sup> John Fowles' *The Magus* is going to be analyzed in terms of the Faustus myth, thus, Fowles' rewriting of canonical works in his work is not going to be discussed in this book.

Faustus Myth or reveal an overreacher character like Faustus are also referred to.

Underneath the popularity of this myth lies the basic human instinct to trespass the limits of traditional knowledge in pursuit of self-definition, authentic knowledge and power. This search and transgression also involve the desire to exercise the right of making free authentic choices. Oswald Spengler points out that modern Western Civilization can be characterized as Faustian. In other words, according to Spengler, modern life conditions lead man from “word” to “deed” (1991: 411) into the world of ambitions and strivings in which there exists the will to trespass the boundaries that are set for mankind. What is limited is restricted by God, thus the Faustian characters try to assume the role of God in their stories. Faustus, thus, represents universal issues that are relevant for all human beings, which explains the reason why he has acquired mythic stature. Indeed, a most persistent myth has evolved, the appeal of which has led one writer after the other to reshape it. Now, there arises the question of what kind of stories myths actually are and how these myths are related to human beings’ lives.

As shall be noticed in the first chapter of this book, the Faustus myth is closely connected with the feminine and it can be argued that Faustus is repeatedly feminized in rewritings of his myth. The focus of this book, however, is metaphysical and ethical significance and the transformations that he undergoes in narratives that historicize him. Hence, this book will not be concerned with feminist readings and gender centred analyses of the texts.

Richard Chase in his *Quest for Myth* argues that “civilized man lives in the same world as the savages” and adds that “our deepest experience, needs, and aspirations are the same, as surely as the crucial biological and psychic transitions occur in the life of every human being” (1949: 20). This assumption of a basic human nature inherent in every one would explain the immense appeal of the Faustus myth throughout history and in different cultures. Faustus’ existential search for meaning in life, knowledge and power, which involves his transgression of the boundaries set by God, results in chaos both in his soul and body. Dissatisfied with what he learns through Orthodox books, Faustus turns to black magic as a means of reaching self-knowledge to take control of his own life.

*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* defines ‘myth’ as 1. “a story that is usually of **unknown**<sup>5</sup> origin. 2. a person or thing existing only in imagination or whose actuality is not

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<sup>5</sup> My emphasis.

verifiable". At this point, it is necessary to point out that as opposed to the definition given by *Webster's*, the Faustus myth is of known origin and Faustus is not a person existing only in the imagination because the myth undeniably starts with a real historical person. Thus, it would be more appropriate to quote Watt's definition of myth for the Faustus Myth: "a traditional story that is exceptionally widely known throughout the culture, which is credited with a historical or quasi-historical belief" (1996: xii), which is best illustrated in the story of Faustus. *Webster's* moreover, argues that myth is a story which is at least partially traditional, and ostensibly relates historical events usually of such character as to serve to explain some practice, belief, institution, or natural phenomenon, and is especially associated with religious rites and beliefs. Watt too emphasizes the collective nature of myth by stating that it "embodies or symbolizes some of the most basic values of a society". However, Faustus both rebels against and symbolizes the collective values and practices of a society. He undermines the reactionary institutions and thought in his society while at the same time representing its more progressive, radical impulses. In Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* for example, the character transgresses the law of God, which is still valid in his age, thereby symbolizing the newly rising Renaissance ideal of a man-centred universe which allows for greater individualism.

Joseph Campbell defines myth as "a life-shaping image, a metaphor that creates a hero out of those who heed it and as a clue to the spiritual potentialities of the human life" (*op. cit.*, 5-6). Indeed Faustus as the daring overreacher acquires true heroic stature. Faustus indeed attempts to discover his spiritual potentialities, however not by employing holy knowledge but black magic, which he hopes will enable him to understand what is unknown, that is, what cannot be explained, what cannot be reached through concrete knowledge. Like *Webster's* and Watt, Campbell stresses the collective and representative nature of myths which:

- 1) Formulate and render an image of the universe, a cosmological image in keeping with the science of the time and of such kind that, within its range, all things should be recognized as parts of a single great holy picture.
- 2) Validate and maintain some specific social order
- 3) Shape individuals to the aims and ideals of their various social groups.

(1970: 139)

The Faustus myth however, does not fit the definition of "validat[ing] and maintain[ing] some specific social order"; rather it attempts to destroy the old order and establish a radical one in its place.

Campbell goes on to argue that human beings seek meaning, an extraordinary power to influence their lives, to prove that they really exist. This power does not necessarily come from God; in other words myths do not necessarily have to be religious, traditional; they are also secular and include a motivating factor and hero for people to believe in. Motivating factors in the stories of heroes have fundamental similarities. These heroes create a myth out of their curiosity, power seeking, and ambitions; besides, they all serve the formation of the myth.

Similarly, psychoanalysts ranging from Freud, Otto Rank, Karl Abraham, Sandor Ferenczi, Ernest Jones, Hanns Sachs, and Max Eitingon to Géza Roheim, Theodor Reik, and Erich Fromm agree that myth is preoccupied with the basic elements of human existence (Vickery, 1996: 291). Freud suggested that myths arise out of and appeal to man's subconscious mind, expressing the hopes and fears of prehistoric people. Since the most basic of these hopes and fears have not changed much, the old mythic forms still have power over modern people. According to Freud, myth is a daydream symbolizing a psychological and ethno-historical reality. He claims that "the theory of the instincts is to say our Mythology. Instincts are mythical entities, magnificent in their infiniteness" (1965: 84). Thus, "all myths stem from the dark pool of the subconscious, into which we must delve if we want to reach down to their true psychological meaning" (Patai, 1972: 21). The symbolic meaning of myth is found in man's unconscious life. Fundamentals of one's own existence carry complex human problems that are also related to the collective unconscious of mankind. Carl Jung developed the theory of the collective unconscious which gave a social rather than an individual basis to Sigmund Freud's theories. According to Carl Jung, the formation of myths is a psychological process which is an essential or vital feature of the human psyche, and which can be shown to exist equally in primitive, ancient, and modern man. Mythical motifs, says Jung, are "structural elements of the psyche", or, more precisely, of its deeper, fundamental part, which Jung calls "the nonconscious psyche," or, briefly, "the unconscious." This explains why mythological ideas are often paralleled by dreams (1949: 109).

For Jung, a myth can come alive only when reclaimed and vivified by the human psyche. A myth originates or takes on new life and meaning when an individual mind attempts, sometimes desperately, to respond adequately to pressures from the world and from the collective unconscious. The subjective factor is important in Jung's theory and first of all a myth must have a numinous and emotional impact on the individual's psyche in order to be experienced and understood as a genuine myth. From the Jungian perspective, myths are essentially



culturally elaborated representations of the contents of the deepest recesses of the human psyche: the world of the archetypes (Walker, 1995: 4).

Mythic dreams and fantasies are sources of energy and adaptation for the individuals' struggle for greater awareness. A myth may enter an individual's life spontaneously at some moment of crisis and enable him or her to make decisions and take actions (*ibid.*, 93). The world of mythology according to Jung derives from the world of the archetypes of the collective unconscious. He believed that the tendency to think in terms of the forms which he calls archetypes, is an inherited trait passed along from one generation to another as a kind of storehouse of memories. Thus, myth becomes the controlling image in the lives of human beings; as the critic and novelist, Mark Schorer indicates, it is "a large, controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life" (1960: 355).

According to Géza Roheim, an anthropologically oriented psychoanalyst, a myth is a narrative, in which the actors are mostly divine and sometimes human, which has a definite locale, is part of a creed, and is believed by the narrator. In a folktale, on the other hand, the **dramatis personae** are mostly human, and especially the hero is human, although his opponents are frequently supernatural beings; the actors are nameless, the scene is just anywhere: it is purely fiction and not intended to be anything else (Patai, *op. cit.*, 21). However, as noted above, the starting point of the Faustus myth was a historical person who called himself Faustus in the sixteenth century, and this man became one of the dramatis personae of folktales. And out of these folktales, the myth was born.

Another anthropologist Branislav Malinowski says that myth is and has always been a way of reinforcing all the standards of a society, and that its most important functions are "in connection with religious, ritual, moral influence and sociological principle" (2001: 16). Faustus is not only reinforcing the more radical standards of his society, he is also transgressing his body's and soul's limits which were set by God.

In "The Structural Study of Myth", Claude Lévi-Strauss complains that today thinking about myth is merely reduced to "a picture of chaos" (1996: 118). A picture of chaos in man results in a picture of chaos in society however, without chaos nothing would be solved or conveyed. Similarly, Friedrich Nietzsche says that "You need chaos in your soul to give birth to a dancing star" (Goldman, 2001: 28). Lévi-Strauss emphasizes that first there must be a problem that bothers the individual and this problematic, traumatic situation is spread throughout society. Hence, like Nietzsche, he argues that myth does not so much uphold the traditional order, but points to a force or thought in it which disturbs this order and creates chaos in the individual and social body. This disturbance of thoughts and actions in the

individual creates a myth-making traumatic situation and chaos in the individual's unconscious mind, which indulges in illicit ambitions and hopes. As noted above, the radical Renaissance emphasis on individualism introduces a disturbance and chaos into society as well as the mind of the individual. Faustus, as a result, rebels against the order due to his desire to be in rivalry with God which results in his acting as a second god, as a sub-creator in pursuit of ruling the earth, a trait that implies his satanic quality. Faustus chooses to be the lord and master of both himself and the world since he creates his own reality which results in chaos in his myth. He thus also emerges as a proud satanic figure. Furthermore, he makes a deal with Mephistopheles, selling his soul for knowledge and power.

Ernst Cassirer regarded myths as symbolic projections of human reality and he asserted that "mythical thinking is the individual's mode of symbolically structuring the world" (1961: 94). Structuring the world and restructuring his place in the world, the mythical character places himself in such a way that he will reign over this universe, belonging to nowhere but at the same time belonging to everywhere. With the chaos in his soul, Faustus tries to restructure the world to establish order according to his terms by defying God. The psychological motivation behind the myth-making process is important. For Jung and Mircea Eliade, myth functions not only to reveal the individual deeper reality but also to enable him to experience it consciously or unconsciously; he is seeking to re-experience, not just rediscover, it. For Jung the individual seeks integration with this reality since this deeper reality exists in human beings (Segal, 1986: 91). Thus, myths deal with the essential components of individual existence; our deepest experience, needs, and aspirations are the same, as surely as the crucial biological and psychic transitions occur in the life of every human being.

Roland Barthes says that "the very principle of myth [is that] it transforms history into nature" (1973: 129). He characterizes "the function of myth itself as a form of colonialism, in which polyvalent signifier is weighted with a single sense whose specificity is masked in the name of a general application: one could say that language offers to myth an open-work meaning. Myth can easily insinuate itself into it and swell there: it is a robbery of colonization" (*ibid.*, 132). In every age, in every representation and reinterpretation of the Faustus Myth, each Faustus shares similar qualities and this is the main reason that it is a fascinating subject to be explored in all ages. What Barthes criticizes myth for is that it totalizes in a negative way by distorting reality however, the character of Faustus exists in every century. Barthes also argues that popular myths are sustained by unconscious codes which structure the production of meaning. He agrees with Lévi-Strauss' reading of myths as collective

strategies for resolving the contradictions of everyday social life at an imaginary level, thereby like Nietzsche and Lévi-Strauss pointing to a preceding disturbing force and idea in society and the mind of an individual, and adds that “it is not man who thinks myths but myths which think man” (Kearney, 1989: 272). In other words, an authentic quest in myth for historical depth moves man to the quest of the authentic individual in particular in the postmodern labyrinth of clashing and confusing ideas. For example, in the postmodern novel, *The Magus* by John Fowles, the loss of religion, tradition, identity, and meaning necessitate the protagonist Nicholas’ need to establish his own myth which is going to be analyzed in detail in Chapter Four. Nicholas, like Faustus, establishes his own myth in *The Magus*.

As noted above, Freud referred to myth as man’s unconscious life; Jung widened the subject to the collective unconscious that gave a social basis for myths rather than an individual one. Moreover, Emile Durkheim and Bronislaw Malinowski considered myth from a sociological point of view. According to Durkheim, the main function of myth was to maintain and strengthen social solidarity. Malinowski was also equally concerned with how myths maintain group solidarity; but he increased the range of such explanations by showing how myths ratify and render sacred the institutions of society, from property rights to magic (1926: 56).

Northrop Frye, too, presents mythology as a total scheme for interpreting the universe. He views Mythology as a kind of Esperanto of the soul, a universal language of the quest for a world more imaginative and more liberated than the one inhabited, and, accordingly, the basis for any regenerated society of the future (Gorak, 1991: 121). According to Frye myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative (1996: 111). Frye means a certain type of story by a myth; it is a story in which some of the chief characters are gods or other beings larger in power than humanity. Very seldom is it located in history: its action takes place in a world above or prior to ordinary time. Hence, like the folktale, it is an abstract story-pattern. The characters can do what they like, which means what the storyteller likes: there is no need to be plausible or logical in motivation. The things that happen in myth are things that do not happen only in stories; they also occur in life. Hence myth would naturally have the same kind of appeal for the fiction writer that folktales have. Myths as compared with folktales, are believed to have “really happened”, or to have some exceptional significance in explaining certain features of life, such as ritual (*ibid.*, 130). According to Frye, myths are often used as allegories of science, or religion or morality; a myth may be told and retold: it may be

modified or elaborated, or different patterns may be discovered in it; and its life is always the poetic life of a story, not the homiletic life of some illustrated truism (*ibid.*, 131).

The myth of the individualistic, proud overreacher Faustus has been modified and retold throughout centuries. Faustus, in search of the discovery of the true self, his true power, transcending the physical self and material world, building a bridge between this world and the other world, craving the sublime power of God, has been one of the mythical figures associated with complex human problems. On the one hand, Faustus, being a scholar, and on the other hand being a magician with forbidden powers, appeals to human beings since most individuals suffer from intellectual contradictions resembling those undergone by Faustus.

Faustus is neither a sacred character nor god or demi-god; he experiences the kind of disturbance, ambition, chaos that almost all human beings experience. This chaotic situation originates from his desire to assume power beyond that given by God, in other words to reach the secrets of this and the other world. The Faustus myth has been rewritten and reinterpreted in different narratives maintaining the basic peculiarities of the myth however, modifying the story. But the Faustian concerns remain the same throughout each era. Despite the seeming diversity of theoretical approaches which suggest that myths attest to the age they flourish in and the perception of the individual and society and their attachment to the religion, philosophy, culture, and history that society feeds on, most of the above approaches agree on the collective and representative nature of myth. The roots of the legendary Faustus are traced back to the early sixteenth century in which its origin appears to be centred on a man who called himself Dr. Johann Faustus. However, its real origin goes back far in history, since we can even see a cause of it in, for example, Sumerian mythology: *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in which the secret of eternal life is represented by a plant. At the end of Tablet XI, Gilgamesh plucks the plant-of-life from the depths of the seas and thus holds in his hand the secret of eternal life, the means to join the immortal gods, a state of being which he has sought and suffered for. But rather than eating the plant immediately he says:

Ur-shanabi, this plant is the remedy for our sorrow;  
 With it man will have the supreme healing.  
 I will take it to Uru-the-Fold,  
 I will give it to them to eat, divide it amongst them:  
 its name shall be “the-old-man-is-young-again”;  
 then I will it some myself, return to the time of my youth.

(Foster, trans. and ed., 2001: Tablet XI, lines, 278-83)

The power to heal, the power to control the universe, the means of holding the mysteries of eternal life is passed to human beings through a plant in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. We are, moreover, confronted with Prometheus who is an overreacher in Greek mythology, becoming a rival of Zeus, the Greek God.

Striving for knowledge, meaning, power and material wealth is not only a modern concern but has also been the concern of every century since the beginning of mankind. Whether these overreachers are saved or they undergo a physical or psychological hell as a result of their deeds, the myth of the overreacher has always been a fascinating subject in literature. For example, in Dante's *Inferno* in *The Divine Comedy*, the descent into hell is a descent into Dante's subconscious, into his past in order to understand why he is lost, why he is estranged, why he is alienated from the world. Dante is an overreacher like Faustus, and it is Dante's own decision to descend into hell to bring Beatrice back and thereby usurp God's power over life and death, as it is Faustus' own determination to play the role of God. While Dante is trying to climb up the hill and reach the light, he loses "all hope of going up the hill" (1962: Canto I, line 54) due to the three beasts' stopping him on his way to light and he decides to descend into hell in order to face the evil sides of his subconscious. His despair leads him onto another path but first he has to pass through hell to reach the light. In *Inferno*, if one dies unrepentant, one is damned forever in hell.

At this point, it may be useful to consider the etymological roots of the word 'evil': in English, the word evil has "a folk usage that derives in part from Teutonic tradition and in common with the German 'übel' and the Dutch 'euvel', derives from the Teutonic 'ubiloz' which refers to the root up, over; primarily meaning 'exceeding due measure', or overstepping proper limits'" (Pocock, 1985: 42). Present definitions of evil incorporate a number of different meanings: 1a: not good morally: wicked 1b: arising from actual or imputed bad character or conduct archaic; 2a: inferior 2b: causing discomfort or repulsion: Offensive; 2c: Disagreeable; 3a: Causing harm: pernicious 3b: marked by misfortune: unlucky; archaic- evil, 2. evil n. 1. Something that brings sorrow, distress or calamity 2a: the fact of suffering and misfortune 2b. Cosmic evil force n. (Gove, et al., 1981).

Starting with Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* in the sixteenth century there arose a popular literary interest in the story of Faustus in drama. Moreover, with the rise of the bourgeoisie and the parallel emergence of the new genre, this myth has also created Faustian man in the novels of different ages. Although the focus in this book will be on the postmodern representation of Faustus in the novel, the various representations

of the Faustus myth in the English novel in general will be discussed chronologically below.

The novels using the Faustus myth become popular particularly between the years 1850 and 1900, a time interval which covers the Victorian Age, an age of social, political, educational and scientific concerns, raised by the rapid progress in science and technological equipment, and the social and political problematics engendered by the era's strict observance of Utilitarianism, clashing with stringent realities of poverty and unrest. These changes produce the disturbance in society which in turn produces chaos in the mind of the individual who is, thus, encouraged to transgress the law of God. But before these years, these overreachers are not so explicitly depicted by the Enlightenment mind, since one of the basic tenets of the age is a belief in laws governing the workings of the world as tangible reality, and since a Prime Mover, having set the motions but keeping his distance is not actually a very adequate target for rebellion.

This book is not about the rise of the novel, but nevertheless the rise of a powerful bourgeoisie brought with it a new genre of literature in the form of the novel. From its onset, we can see echoes of the Faustus myth in many works of fiction: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, is an overreacher like Faustus: he refuses the option of the Golden Mean advocated by his father and desires more of life. However, his quest is for fortune and the establishment of his own brand of social structure, not for knowledge or intellectual supremacy. His quest for the self ends in colonizing the island, and recreating, in many ways, the very structure he rebelled against initially.

Romanticism as a movement was much more prone to the creation of Faustian protagonists. The Gothic, one of the texts of which will be discussed below, fully accommodated the questing, rebellious, and distraught figure in search of divine knowledge. The Victorian period, on the other hand, saw in the novels produced at the time, reverberations of the Faustus myth, where the natural and societal impediments haunting the contemporary individual act as an insurmountable obstacle against the overreaching ambitions of the character: Dr. Lydgate in *Middlemarch* is a particularly tragic re-enactment of Faustus with his wings clipped by Victorian provincial/societal obstructions and conventionalism. Brontë's Heathcliff, the neo-Gothic alternative to the stunted Victorian male character, is likewise unable to make good his initial promise, and is relegated to a ghostly existence, reminiscent of Hamlet's father, on the fringes of life.

To return to Romantic fiction and to more flagrantly Faustian narratives, in the early nineteenth century English novel, we are confronted with

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (1817) in which the protagonist, Victor Frankenstein's Faustian ambition of "explor[ing] unknown powers" and exercising them himself is narrated.

...soon my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose. So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein,- more, far more, will I achieve; treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation.

(1985: 49)

When Victor Frankenstein was thirteen years old, he read the works of Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus who were contemporaries of Dr. Faustus. Cornelius Agrippa was a magician and Cabbalist and lived between the years of 1486 and 1535. H. C. Agrippa influenced Frankenstein in his childhood. In his *De Occulta Philosophia* (1531: Ch. 42), he says, for example, that "Natural magic is... nothing but the chief power of all the natural sciences... - perfection of Natural Philosophy and... the active part of the same". Another influence on the main character of Shelley's novel, Paracelsus (1493-1541), was a "Swiss alchemist and physician who pioneered the treatment of certain diseases based on empirical observation; he also stated that human beings could be produced without mother and father by alchemical procedures" (*op. cit.*, 268). One a magician, the other an alchemist and physician, they, like the sorcerers and practitioners of black magic in the Faustus Myth, became the lords of Victor's imagination in creating his creature.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* carries the Faustus myth a step further, allowing its protagonist Dr. Frankenstein to create life to understand it, since abstract knowledge is not enough for him. However, the shifting power relation between creator and creature breaks social taboos and thereby challenges social norms and laws. Mary Shelley's Frankenstein creates a human being, but rejects the responsibilities that a creator has to take. He plays the role of God, but fails to fulfil it. While he is very busy with his desire to control and manipulate nature, Dr. Frankenstein completely neglects the creature he has created. His attempt is paralleled by that of the frame narrator of the novel, Robert Walton, who is trying, satanically, to circumnavigate, and thus overpower, the world in his quest for the elusive passage through the North Pole. Both characters thus display the characteristic urge to defy limitations set by nature and by God upon mankind, His subjects.

In 1886, Robert Louis Stevenson added a further rotation to the Faustus theme when the monster Mr. Hyde emerged from the gentle Dr.

Jekyll as a result of Jekyll's losing control of his knowledge. Here the Faustian mad scientist seems to be standing for the individual's desire to prove his existence as in all the other texts below. The pursuit of knowledge is desirable, but, ultimately frightening in the experiments of Dr. Jekyll. He takes the potion that he mixes, in order to free himself from Victorian restraints, but having risked to venture outside the bounds of acceptable science, like Faustus before him, he is destroyed. Jekyll covers his actions in the language of science, justifying them purely in terms of positivism and of scientific theory. But the human mind, the novel seems to argue, is no place for science to explore what is unknown due to the fact that the boundaries set by God are in danger of being trespassed in the process.

In another Faustian novel, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), Wells updates the Frankenstein theme of creating monsters. Like Mary Shelley's creature, the body parts of which are human and animal, remains collected from "[t]he dissecting room and the slaughter-house" (*op. cit.*, 48), Wells portrays Doctor Moreau as a scientist who creates monsters that violate the distinction between the human and the animal. Science drives the mad obsession in both Doctor Frankenstein and Doctor Moreau as well as in the alchemist Faustus. According to John R. Reed, Wells' purpose in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* is to show that "Man himself is the only alienating power in the universe because he can conceive himself as separate from the **bios**" (1987: 146).

Dr. Jekyll and Dr. Moreau, like Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein, are irresponsible, utterly careless. Their curiosity, their mad investigations bring them to the level of obsession with their wishes and passion to be overreachers. However, these obsessions make the characters live symbolic hell in this world. In the novels mentioned here, there is a metaphorical hell in this world. Whether physical or psychological, there is no escape from hell for Dr. Jekyll, Dr. Moreau, Dr. Frankenstein and also for Dorian Gray as will be discussed below.

*The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* were written in the nineteenth century. In the same century, we see the roots of Existentialism, which will culminate with Sartre, for example, in the twentieth century, being constituted by Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. The question of freedom of choice has a central position in Existentialism, although it is not a new concern. Freedom is defined as equal to the free choice of the individual. Then the individual is free to make a choice; however, this freedom isolates the individuals from society if they cannot reach reconciliation with society. This choice must be beneficial for the whole of society as well as for the individual which



thereby, involves a reconciliation between them. When an erroneous choice is made, alienation between the two sets in. It is Dr. Jekyll's free choice to drink the potion that turns him into Mr. Hyde in the beginning. However, it is no more freedom of choice at all after the creature takes over the control of Dr. Jekyll. The question of freedom turns into an abstract ethical problem since it is not always possible for real men and women to become free by ignoring the constraints that hold them in bondage. It is the same in Dr. Moreau's case: he chooses to be on an isolated island, which also symbolizes the self, to carry out his experiments on the creatures he turned into monsters until he is destroyed by them just like Dr. Jekyll is ruined by Mr. Hyde.

Apart from the novels that portray scientist figures mad and obsessed with knowledge, another novel which covertly re-enacts the Faustus theme is Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). It is based on the theme of capturing eternal youth and beauty, bought at the price of one's soul, and upheld through the destruction of the protagonist and others. What is significant and meaningful in this story is that the Faustus of the early twentieth century seeks something different from wisdom and enlightenment. The eternal personification of youth and beauty acts as an alternative symbolism to indicate Dorian's point of view as an art object in his own myth of modern times. Dorian Gray is translated into an art object by the man who paints him. This Faustian character assumes the identity of an art object through which he seeks to gratify the typical Faustian desire to exercise power over life and death. Dorian's picture, having thus assumed a utility must be destroyed in order to be purely art again. Since Dorian Gray's beauty is fed through art, it is not considered as art anymore because Oscar Wilde says in his "Preface": "All art is quite useless" (2001: 4). It has to lose its function in order to be seen as an art again.

The texts that I have mentioned above were composed before mankind actually experienced its own potentials in mindless mass destruction. The boundaries between good and evil, right and wrong were still comparatively relevant. The narratives' reworking the Faustus Myth still had certain norms to fall back upon. When it comes to the postmodern era, the myth completely breaks away from the norms; the borders between fiction and reality; history, philosophy and literature collapse and the roles of good and evil are blurred. In the German novel, Thomas Mann (1875-1955) centred the Faustus myth on a modern adaptation of the pact between the Renaissance necromancer and the devil in his novel: *Doktor Faustus: Das Leben des Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn, erzählt von einem Freunde* (*Doctor Faustus: The Life of the German Composer Adrian Leverkühn as Told by a Friend*) (1947). He transformed the myth into the tale of a

syphilitic artist who makes a deal with the devil. This disease enables Faustus to create innovative works that are admired. We see the effects of the Second World War on the novel, because, as the war comes to a traumatic close (1943-45), Leverkühn's career comes to an end due to the damages of syphilis after a twenty four years' creativity the disease enabled him to enjoy. The tragic end of the novel was almost inescapable because of Germany's position in the Second World War. Germany had become a synonym for evil due to the Nazis in the twentieth century and could never hope for salvation (Fetzer, 1996: 89).

In this book, the postmodern representation of the Faustus myth is going to be analyzed in detail in one contemporary English novel, John Fowles' *The Magus*, with, echoing in the background, the reverberations of previous texts from previous ages. As the most influential of these, Marlowe's and Goethe's stand out to be taken into account. They constitute historical cornerstones indicating the reappearance of the myth in times of societal traumas and its reworkings within the conditions of three major periods in human history. Mann's version displays affinities with Fowles', as they are historically posited within similar problematics. In *The Magus*, Nicholas' existentialist quest ends where it starts. The Faustus myth thus constitutes a cycle in which it starts and ends tragically in Marlowe's Renaissance *Dr. Faustus*, ends in salvation in Goethe's Romantic *Faust*, and ends in an ambiguity bordering on meaninglessness in Fowles' *The Magus*.

The texts mentioned above imply a break from the norms, a rebellion against God in each age in accordance with social, political, educational and scientific upheavals. Human beings desire to be immortal by destroying death, and they are determined to reach the infinitude of God abolishing their own finitude.

To sum up, Jung asserts that myths "have a vital significance. They not merely **represent**, but also **are** the psychic life of the primitive tribe, which instantly disintegrates and perishes if it loses its mythical heritage, like a man who has lost his soul. The mythology of a tribe is its living religion, whose loss is always and everywhere, even in the case of civilized man, a moral catastrophe" (Patai, *op. cit.*, 23). This interpretation of Jung confirms the parallelism of the Faustus myth representations in different ages. As Frye says, myths are often used as allegories of science, or religion or morality and myths may be told and retold: they may be modified or elaborated, or different patterns may be discovered in them; and their lives as versions of the Faustus myth are not limited to only one generation. As discussed in this chapter, there are some universal passions, ambitions, hopes of human beings, and because of this universality,

according to Jung, the great myths cannot be attributed to one single author and they can be rewritten again and again without losing their power. They represent truly immortal feelings and behaviour. The following chapter will show how the historical Faustus has become the personification of these universal qualities. Under the light of these views, it is not a coincidence that in the Faustus myth, Faustus has been transgressing the reactionary norms of a society, or it would be better to say each society that archetypal Faustus belongs to. He has become the personification of man's ambition for boundless knowledge, in other words, power, considering Francis Bacon's aphorism "Knowledge is power" (1966: 28).

In the following chapter, the beginning of the Faustus myth with a real historical person and his representation in the Faustus myth is going to be analyzed in terms of Gnosticism, theories of knowledge, and existentialism.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE BEGINNING OF THE FAUSTUS MYTH

The Faustus myth starts in the Renaissance, in which scientific knowledge explodes. The invention of the printing press, the emergence of humanism, the rediscovery of ancient civilizations and the classics, and the emphasis upon the individual resulted in the questioning of faith in the Church's authority. Human beings started to realize their importance as microcosms in the macrocosm and tried to give meaning to their role in the universe, on the one hand being quite aware of the limits set by God, and, on the other hand, trying to remove those boundaries. Thus, the individual becomes the little god of his world (Müller, 1976: 103). In other words, instead of following the rules of the Church, people either pursued scientific knowledge or knowledge beyond human limitations since the Church annihilated the possibility of human beings acting as sub-creators. Due to the anxiety of people's awakening into consciousness, the Church banned curiositas. St. Augustine, who was one of the Fathers of the Roman Catholic Church, believed that idle curiosity is itself an effect of the fall, and should be discouraged, and repressed. Pursuing knowledge beyond human limitations resulted in the emergence and the spread of witchcraft and necromancy. The most popular and widely known example to the second group is a person who is claimed to be a real historical personage: Dr. Johann (or Georg) Faustus. Uncertainty about God's existence, the conflict between good and evil is transferred onto this real man and this transference, unlike most myths, begins with a real historical person, Faustus, becoming the representative of human consciousness that was awakened in the Renaissance. Before the Renaissance,

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness- that which was turned within as that which was turned without- lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, and party, family, or corporation- only through some general category.

(Burckhardt, 1990: 81)

According to the quotation above, in contrast to the Middle Ages, Renaissance people lifted this veil and emancipated themselves from the countless limitations and reached a higher degree of individual development due to both intellectual and scientific developments. With the Renaissance, a new way of looking at life and the world emerged, entirely different from the Middle Ages. However, this did not take place all of a sudden since the Middle Ages itself was also characterized by a return to classical pagan Greek and Roman texts on the one hand and on the other a familiarity with Christian texts and the culture of learning in the east. Nevertheless, in the Middle Ages, there was a universal order called the Chain of Being and individuals belonged to this hierarchical universe. God stood at the top, the angels followed Him, and then came the human beings. To act against this order and struggle to destroy this hierarchical universe would cause disorder and result in chaos. In the Renaissance, this unity was shattered: the questioning of belief and disbelief in God and the humanists' claims for a higher position for human beings who would thus be in rivalry with God, resulted in the collapse of this order. Belief in the individual's power to direct his own destiny engendered greater ambitions for ultimate power. Thus, belief in God as He was presented by institutionalized religion was shaken by ambitious individuals who looked for power beyond the limits set by God. However, acquiring immense power was not possible despite the individual's full awakening into his intellectual capacity. White magic had always been performed and had been a part of everyday life throughout all ages. Thus, the historical Faustus studies the arts of necromancy and conjuration which enable him to reach immense power and knowledge. Faustus owes his gifts not to God but to the Devil at the price of his own soul. In magic, instead of academic knowledge, he finds an opportunity to achieve God-like power.

## **1.1 The Historical Faustus**

The starting point of this book stems from a Georg or Johann Faustus, a real historical personage, who was reported to be born at Knittlingen in Germany around the 1480's. And it is believed that from 1532 to 1536 this person practiced medical alchemy and soothsaying in the Rhineland and Lower Franconia with success; and he is reported to have died in 1540 or 1541 in a village in Württemberg (Atkins, 2001: 245).

Various documents from the sixteenth century support the idea that a necromancer calling himself Faustus really lived in the early sixteenth century. In 1507 the writer, the polymath, Johannes Trithem, a friend and teacher of the occultist Agrippa von Nettesheim and abbot of a Benedictine