



THE DAWN OF A RENAISSANCE REBEL IN CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S DR. FAUSTUS

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Abstract:

Dr. Faustus is one of the famous characters of Christopher Marlowe because the character represented the trends of the age and a victim of it as well. As a famous doctor, Faustus cured the whole city by preparing a medicine of plague and subsequently received recognition and popularity but as a Renaissance man, he revolted against all sorts of bindings that did not allow him to explore new horizons of knowledge and experience of the worldly pleasure. Here, is the beginning of the Renaissance rebel who strived to master over nature and human beings so that he could become all powerful and omnipotent. Dr. Faustus's journey to the world of delight and power was smothered by the practice of necromancy and subsequently sold his soul to devil for the reason of enjoying twenty four years of worldly pleasure but the man who tried to control the world subsequently lost his control over himself because of his over indulgence in sensuousness and the Renaissance rebel was tortured to death by the devil after the time of his bond was elapsed. Thus, the play represents the death of the famous Renaissance doctor who mastered every field of knowledge and suggests that his rebellion against the 'heavenly power permits' caused his misery.

Introduction:

Dr. Faustus is one of the famous plays of Christopher Marlowe and the protagonist of the play is named after the play. The play portrays the rise and fall of a genius who mastered in law, theology, medicine and philosophy etc. But his hunger for knowledge and power directs his instincts to follow the path that was unexplored by socially-conscious humans. He is in a sense restless to get more and more knowledge and wants to explore new horizons of knowledge so he learned and mastered one after another fields. But his quest for supremacy over nature and humans was not facilitated by his knowledge of law, physics, medicine etc. Therefore, he started practicing necromancy and he thought that such a practice can take him to a world of profit and delight and he thought that the practice of necromancy could provide him the omnipotence that other subjects failed to provide him.

"O, what a world of profit and delight,
Of power, of honour, and omnipotence"

Renaissance, Dr. Faustus and Rise of the Rebel:

Dr. Faustus's rise to a genius and his stupendous achievements can be compared with the rise of renaissance in England because the renaissance was a movement that started in the 15th century and it flowered and got better in the 16th and 17th centuries. The age is known for its unprecedented growth of human endeavour to learn and explore new horizons of knowledge because knowledge was considered to be power and everybody wanted to use their knowledge for the utmost advantage of self empowerment and Dr. Faustus was of no exception because he was inspired by the restlessness of the renaissance spirit and his attitude of exploring new areas of knowledge is a testimony of it.

Renaissance is often related with the history of the world because the world history can be divided into two categories -the history before the renaissance and after it. The world before renaissance is considered to be dark and unknown but the advent of renaissance made people learn new things and many dark and unknown realms of the world was unfurled just at the time of renaissance. So, the world before renaissance was mysterious and dark but the beginning of world interest in knowledge and the rebirth of classical learning provided the much needed impetus to penetrate beneath the surface truth. And this is the way that renaissance brought stupendous changes to the world.

The Renaissance flowered human individualism and worldliness because the period considered the human beings as the supremely important creature of the universe and thus they wanted to explore new horizons knowledge interspersed with pleasure. The sensuous pleasure was hankered after by the renaissance human beings. Moreover, renaissance humans wanted to achieve power and pelf with the help of their unflinching ambition and never say no attitude to corrupt means to accomplish their ambitions thus the period was marked by a sea change from the previous medieval age because the renaissance humans adopted a sense of revolt against the conventional norms and religious preaching. They were in a sense tried to adopt a new path of living unlike the medieval ages because their culture of exploring the world and accumulating new knowledge through new learning made them new to the world and they endeavored to take utmost advantage of their new found liberty accelerated by a sense of superiority coupled with new learning and new knowledge.

Dr. Faustus was born in a base family but such a humble birth did not deter him from being ambitious. He is radical from the very beginning of the play because he declined the conventional belief that one's blue

blood determines the destiny but he was a person who wants to change his destiny by his own charisma and endeavour because he was a renaissance man who wanted to break all typical form of belief system and create his own fate.

“I’ll have them fly to India for gold,
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,
And search all corners of the new-found world
For pleasant fruits and princely delicates;
I’ll have them read me strange philosophy,
And tell the secrets of all foreign kings;”

Dr. Faustus studied various branches of knowledge because he wanted to attain power from it, however, his unflinching determination to rise above his family heritage positioned him mastering all branches of knowledge. His attempt was successful because he became famous by discovering new medicine that cured many thousand people but Faustus was not content with such glamour because still he was but a man and he rebelled against it and tried to gain the unthinkable power by practicing necromancy.

The end of physic is our body’s health.
Why, Faustus, hast thou not attain’d that end?
Are not thy bills hung up as monuments,
Whereby whole cities have escap’d the plague,
And thousand desperate maladies been cur’d?
Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man.

He showed extreme disregard to conventional studies because he was still a man and he could not make men live eternally nor he could bring a dead to life because he still a man and a Faustus. And his high ambition propelled him to seek for super human power because he believed that a renaissance man should try for unearthing the mysteries of the universe and explore new horizons of knowledge. The Evil Angel speaks the inner voice of Dr. Faustus:

“Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art
Wherein all Nature’s treasure is contain’d:
Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,”

Dr. Faustus craze for power through knowledge is incomparable with other Marlovian heroes like Tamburlaine because other heroes seek political power and prestige in the society because they wanted to achieve something permissible in the human world but Dr. Faustus was a rebel and he wanted power that other people afraid to dream of and he welcomed necromancy to achieve his end:

“Nothing so sweet as magic is to him,
Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss:”

One of the supreme craze of Dr. Faustus was to achieve individualism by defying age-old traditions and beliefs and such an observation is clearly true when we see the famous doctor selling his soul to the devil. His main intension was to go beyond the set norms of the and always endeavored to achieve dizzying heights that others afraid to dream of. His denunciation of conventional branches of knowledge is a testimony of his attempt to devalue the importance of such learning. In the first act we have found that the erudite doctor rejected those branches of knowledge without any hesitation.

The Renaissance man tried to get mastery over nature because they wanted to dominate over everything and renaissance humanism encouraged them to do so. According to Renaissance humanism, human beings are at the centre of the universe and Dr. Faustus has already acquired prominence in most of the branches of knowledge and yet he cannot go beyond the nature and its rules. He cannot fly and he cannot surprise people by going back to the past. And thus his desire to dominate and break the monotony of normal life he wants to go beyond natural laws and such an endeavor is visible when he says that he would build wall around Wittenberg for the safety of the people.

“I’ll have them wall all Germany with brass,
And make swift Rhine circle fair Wertenberg;”

Thus, Dr. Faustus dreamt of getting the secrets of the foreign kings that were not easily accessible for a human being, therefore, he rebelled against all conventions and aspired to do what is not permissible in the natural world.

But the man Dr. Faustus who wants to power over nature ultimately lost his control over self because of his over indulgence in worldliness and sensuous pleasure. His sensuousness and pleasure seeking attitude caused him to bring the spirit of Helen and delivered the most famous dialogue of the Renaissance rebel:

“Was this the face that launch’d a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?—
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.” (He Kisses)

and according to the Good Angel, Faustus lost all possible way for redemption after his attachment with the spirit of Helen. And gradually the days of Faustus became numbered and all his attempts to repent were

in vain and thus the man who voraciously tried to control and win over the world around him, lost his control over himself and delivered his last speech with extreme sorrow and misery:

“O, mercy, heaven! look not so fierce on me!
Adders and serpents, let me breathe a while!
Ugly hell, gape not! come not, Lucifer!
I'll burn my books!—O Mephistophilis!”

Conclusion:

The end of the famous Renaissance rebel is a lesson to the wise. The epilogue of the play suggests that the learned person should learn from the misdemeanor of Faustus who passionately sought to go beyond the heavenly power permits. As a renaissance rebel, he did not understand any limits and tried to cross all boundaries to explore and get sensuous and worldly pleasure. Thus the play a critique of the Renaissance spirit and suggests that restlessness and passionate characteristics of Renaissance, indeed, made humans to cross the boundaries that are provided to them. The Epilogue of the play is a written document of such an observation:

“Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burned is Apollo's laurel-bough,
That sometime grew within this learned man.
Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall,
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise,
Only to wonder at unlawful things,
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits
To practise more than heavenly power permits.”

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