UGC MHRD ePG Pathshala

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Module No 08: Christopher Marlowe: *Doctor Faustus*

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Lesson Plan

This Unit introduces Renaissance dramatists other than Shakespeare and will thus examine another very well-known contemporary, Christopher Marlowe and one of his most famous works, *Doctor Faustus*. This lesson will consider *Doctor Faustus* as an illustration of Renaissance attitudes towards and cultural beliefs about magic, religion, education and free will/agency. We will begin with a brief introduction to Marlowe's life, his major works and recurring themes/ideas before moving to an overview of the many socio-historic contexts within which *Doctor Faustus*, the central focus of this lesson, can be studied. We will then move on to a discussion of the main themes evidenced in *Doctor Faustus* and their relevance/significance for an understanding of Renaissance society. We conclude with a brief survey of *Doctor Faustus* in popular culture in contemporary times to reflect on the continuing relevance of this text.

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Section 1
Introduction: Christopher Marlowe and Renaissance England

Christopher Marlowe was born in Canterbury in 1564 and can be considered the first major dramatist of the Elizabethan period, if we leave Thomas Kyd out of the reckoning. Marlowe was born into a very ordinary family - his father was a shoemaker - but was able to rise above his social position through his university education. He shares this in common with several other dramatists (William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Robert Greene) in an age where, under the influence of the European Renaissance, social mobility was seen as 'acceptable' only in the context of classical education. Anxious about the fluidity in social hierarchies created by an emerging merchant class, the nobility began to define the 'upper' or 'ruling' classes in terms of education, manners and attitudes. The 'true' gentleman, in Marlowe's time, conversant with Greek and Latin epics and trained in Philosophy and the Arts was more suited to being a 'ruler' than the merchant who was merely a man of means. Marlowe's education first at King's School, Canterbury and later at Cambridge was made possible by scholarships and helped shape several of the themes/debates that he would explore in his works. For instance,

Marlowe's introduction to the ancients in his school education exposed him to ways of thinking and experiencing the world that were in conflict with religious institutions and their teachings in the Elizabethan age. His reading/study of ancient authors would have introduced Marlowe to a non-Christian world view where human beings are not necessarily viewed as inherently depraved on account of original sin and forms of government that are not monarchical (Rome had been a republic for a great part of its history) are also seen to be successful. Moreover, Marlowe is also celebrated for the innovations and power he brought to dramatic blank verse and this is also something he owed to his classical education.

Marlowe's university education (the period of his MA) also forms an important backdrop for more controversial details about his life and involvement in the religious and political tensions of the period. In 1593, at twenty-nine years of age, Marlowe went to a tavern in Deptford with friends, where he was stabbed to death during an argument over the bill. Later studies reveal that Marlowe was under investigation at the time for treason and atheism and even his roommate, the playwright Thomas Kyd, was tortured for information by the Queen's Privy Council. While the premeditated nature of Marlowe's death is a matter of great debate, what is of greater significance is the climate of religious and political authority under which the Elizabethan dramatist worked. We can now move on to a discussion of the major themes and key ideas in Marlowe's works, for which the preceding biographical details are a useful context.

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Section II

Christopher Marlowe: Major Works and Key Themes

Marlowe's reputation as a playwright rests on four major works: *Tamburlaine the Great*, *Doctor Faustus*, *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta* and *Edward the Second*. The chronology of Marlowe's works is greatly contested although his first play is likely to have been *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, which was co-authored with his contemporary at Cambridge, Thomas Nashe. One of the first major themes that can be seen across Marlowe's works is that of the use and abuse of power. For instance, in his

Tamburlaine, which is based on the story of Timur the Lame, Marlowe examines imperial power. Marlowe's Tamburlaine is a shepherd who rises to the position of general before eventually taking command of the Mongol empire. *Tamburlaine*, like Marlowe's other plays, portrays an arrogant, unapologetically ambitions and powerful character, marked by many dramatic speeches. In the *Jew of Malta*, Marlowe portrays an evil central character, drunk on commercial power and motivated by the ruin he can bring to others' lives. *Doctor Faustus*, as the rest of the lesson will elaborate, is about the desire and eventual failure to control demonic or satanic power. In his quest for knowledge, especially forbidden knowledge, Marlowe's Faustus is seen to desire power over Lucifer and the spirits/bad angels he commands. Similarly, *Edward the Second* is also a meditation on monarchial power and the dilemma between one's individual desires and the setting aside of personal wants for communal/social benefit. Marlowe's characters thus present a close engagement with the subject of power, individual ambition and the taboos associated with a conflict between personal desires and social goals. Social mobility for instance, which several of Marlowe's characters (and Marlowe himself, as evidenced by his educational scholarships) illustrate is seen to be taboo, a source of discrimination and can even result in personal social ruin. For instance, several other characters condemn Faustus's interest in magic and necromancy in the play and he is seen not to pay heed to their warning. The pact Faustus makes with the devil results in momentary wish fulfillment – he is able to travel the world, seeks answers to the universe's secrets and can attain the love of beautiful women of his choosing – but is seen as simultaneously isolating. Faustus attains a greater social status in accordance with his ambition to achieve knowledge that other men are too tame or foolish not to pursue but simultaneously becomes ostracized from everyday social life. He is seen to have no friends or well wishers who can save him from damnation by the end of the play. Faustus' reputation precedes him but it invokes fear, anxiety and enmity in those who hear of his ability to engage in magic and necromancy and summon demonic forces.

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The second theme that merits attention in Marlowe's works is the idea of predestination or the lack of agency in determining the course of one's life. This theme is important in the context of not only Marlowe's plays, but also Renaissance dramatists in general. The

idea of predestination is linked closely with the religious climate and the content of school and university curriculum at the time. Marlowe thus illustrates the violent religious wars of the time through his *Massacre at Paris* and the conflict between politics in religion in *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta*. These plays demonstrate how belonging to one faith over the other determined the extent to which one could be seen as a 'safe' member of a country where a public performance of loyalty to the monarch was a condition of citizenship/social and civic security. Individuals in Marlowe's England would have thus been faced with a continuous battle between individual interests/beliefs and social/monarchial mandates. *Doctor Faustus* similarly examines an individual faced with the choice between renouncing salvation and being tortured to death. Alexander Nowell's *A Cathecism or First Instruction of Christian Religion* espoused several of the monarchial tenets of the Church of England, headed by the Queen. Nowell's text would have been part of the instruction that schoolboys received at the time, where the Biblical commandment of honoring one's father and mother was also extended to any person who wielded state authority. The Queen herself, as the head of the state, was seen as parent, against whom any act of violence/dissent was forbidden. Another crucial doctrine set out in *A Cathecism* is the idea that all human beings are born sinners and are in need of god's mercy. This is central to the development of Faustus' story where any good deeds or acts performed during his life are seen as incapable of relieving him from damnation. Marlowe and his contemporaries were thus taught to believe that one cannot earn mercy through the "work" we carry out in this life and the question of our salvation or damnation has been determined before our birth. One did not, therefore, in Marlowe's England, believe in Free Will or agency in shaping one's course to heaven or hell without being seen as defying monarchial doctrines.

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Section III

Doctor Faustus: Summary and Significance

Doctor Faustus narrates the story of the eponymous Renaissance scholar, one who is at the forefront of knowledge in an age of great exploration and discovery but is still marked by discontent. The play's Prologue features a Chorus who sum up Faustus' personality by comparing him to Icarus – 'His waxen wings did mount above his reach' –

this contextualizes Faustus' ambitions, their transgressive nature and role in his eventual downfall. The chorus also supplies us with the information that Faustus was born of parents 'base of stock' and his respectable educational credentials. His lowly birth does not stand in the way of a university education, but characteristic of the age, he is dissatisfied with conventional and traditional modes of understanding and experiencing the world. The play opens with Faustus discrediting different disciplines and subjects of study (divinity, medicine) before finally deciding that necromancy and magic are the true windows to the fulfillment of power, honor and omnipotence. Faustus then proceeds to become a student of magic and necromancy by conjuring the devil/spirit Mephistopheles. Through Mephistopheles, Faustus makes a pact with Lucifer to attain twenty-four years of unbridled pleasure and power in exchange for his soul. Mephistopheles is to remain, during this time, Faustus' servant, to do his bidding. Following the course of the pact in the play, before which Faustus is warned by several of his fellow scholars of impending damnation, Faustus seeks to expand the horizons of his knowledge with Mephistopheles's help. He achieves this by asking Mephistopheles various questions for which he is bound by the pact to supply answers. Faustus is however, not only motivated by his desire to learn, but also with the accruing of wealth and power. His twenty four years of unimpeded, luxurious living is thus spent largely in the pursuit of very petty ambition – he is seen to be entertained by a masque put up by various devils playing the role of the seven deadly sins, travels the world over only to carry out mischief with the Pope and his followers in Rome and to perform conjuring tricks for the Emperor in Germany. In exchange for his soul, Faustus has gained no more than the power to avenge petty skirmishes (portrayed through various comic interludes in the play) with very powerless opponents. As his twenty-four years are drawing to a close, Faustus is seen to feel a great anxiety about his inevitable damnation. His questions to Mephistopheles now take on an increasingly religious coloring and most of the knowledge he now desires is about the nature of heaven and hell and man's control over his path towards God or Satan. Finding himself physically unable to repent and too deeply mired in his demonic pact, Faustus is seen to descend into despair and anxiety. Faustus is shown visions of both heaven and hell by a good and bad angel and is made aware of the punishments and rewards that sinners and the faithful receive respectively. Faustus is now terrified because he has

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realized for the first time, the enormity and severity of the punishment that awaits him. The play ends as it began, in Faustus' study, where in stark contrast to the ambitious, zealous, confident and arrogant man we see at the beginning, surrounded by friends and supporters, there is now a cowardly, despairing and lonesome individual, unable to escape the terrible death that awaits him. The last moments of Faustus's life are given a great deal of attention and detail in the play to fully illustrate the horror of renouncing salvation and knowing the inevitable consequences. The short epilogue, which announces the play's end, sympathizes with the scholar who may have "grown full straight" but was thwarted from "proper" scholarly pursuits through his dalliance with the devil.

The character Faustus is based on a real historical figure, a man called Georguis of Helmstadt, who studied at the University of Heidelberg in 1483 and was a known practitioner of astrology. After Georgius' death, several legends, influenced no doubt by general hysteria about witchcraft, magic and religious propaganda at the time, attached themselves to the account of his life put forth in a "biography" and published in Frankfurt in 1587. An Englishman translated this book, published originally in German, in 1592 as *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus*. This is the source of the central character of Marlowe's play, whose pact with the devil and other feats of conjuring and necromancy are some of the many legends that are also a product of the "biography". Marlowe however, invests his Faustus with more scholarly merit than either of his two predecessors – the author of *The History* and its English translator, P.F Gent. The popularity of the Faust legend in England after its translation by P.F. Gent and Marlowe's addition of scholarly merit to this rebel of popular legend illustrates a few key characteristics of Renaissance England. The first is the presence of men like Faustus in Marlowe's age, men who were both valuable and dangerous. Sir Walter Raleigh, for instance, was one of several Renaissance men who had achieved a great perfection in learning and was popularly associated with witchcraft and devil worship. His meetings with a circle of friends who debated religion, cosmology and philosophy attracted a great deal of attention and were likened during the time to encouraging the study/pursuit of black magic. In an age where discoveries about the universe and man's place in it were

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expanding daily, it was seen as imperative for religious authority to emphasize the dangers inherent in the quest for knowledge.

Doctor Faustus poses certain editorial problems as well on account of two early texts that were published within a few years of each other, both of which make up the original manuscript of Marlowe's play. What is referred to as the A text appeared in 1604 and was reprinted twice with a few minor changes each time in 1609 and 1611. Subsequently, a B text was published in 1616 and this was reprinted five times before 1633. The many editions of *Doctor Faustus* make varying claims to originality ranging from arguments about the text being the product of an actor's "reporting" or "assembling" of a performance to a corrected version of the author's manuscript. This lesson follows the New Mermaid series edition of *Doctor Faustus* whose basis is the B1 text published in 1616.

Section IV
Doctor Faustus: Major themes

Education and Learning

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Doctor Faustus presents a sustained intervention on education and learning, the socio-historic contexts for which have already been discussed. The play opens with an illustration of the questioning, skeptical Renaissance mind with Faustus condemning the limits of various subjects. Faustus critiques logic for having no greater end than to learn to 'dispute' well, medicine or the profession of a physician he ridicules since this system of knowledge cannot "make men to live eternally" or "raise them to life again" if they were dead. Faustus also criticizes the finality of predestination and the inability of man to think of himself as anything other than a sinner within the study of Divinity. He comes to rest therefore on the "metaphysics of magicians" and "necromantic books" that are heavenly for the world of "profit and delight, of power, of honour, of omnipotence" that they promise. Thus begins Faustus' sojourn into magic, necromancy and eventual damnation. What is interesting to note here, in Marlowe's treatment of a student's interest in forbidden knowledge, is the space accorded to legitimate and illegitimate modes of

learning/acquiring knowledge. While the play begins with Faustus in his study, his association with the University space is first seen through the presence of the “scholars” at the end of Act 1, Scene 1, where his recent dabbling in condemned subjects is discussed. The 2nd Scholar remarks, having heard of Faustus’ recent entry into the study of the “damned” art, that he would grieve for his impending divine retribution even if he were just a “stranger” and not “allied” to him in any way. Here the scholars function as the means through which Faustus’ “alliance” or allegiance with a University space is performed. These scholars are representative of “permissible” modes of learning and the “Schools” they are associated with are, by extension, governed by religious doctrine and thus condemn Faustus’ pursuits. These scholars do not reappear until the end of the play, in Act V, Scene 2, where they are seen to believe in the possibility of Faustus’ redemption or at least continue to be “allied” to him. There is a marked hierarchy in Faustus’ exploration of magic and “necromancy”, his “deed” with the devil and his institutional “affiliation” with the sanctified “schools” of learning. Faustus remains a “scholar” even through his twenty-four years of “voluptuousness” following the deed he makes with Lucifer that guarantees his damnation. Faustus’ increasing isolation subsequent to his summoning of Mephistopheles (when the Scholars meet Faustus at the end of the play, they remark that he is perhaps unwell from being “over solitary”), is testimony to the lack of institutionally mandated spaces for the pursuit of learning “forbidden” by state and religious authority. Moreover, the learning accrued by Faustus at the University, which granted him the title of “doctor” is seen to be innate and unchanged by subsequent “demonic” modes of learning. The capacity for questioning, his skepticism and wide range of knowledge (logic, divinity, cosmology) are seen to be qualities that were an institutional heritage, transferred and imbibed even prior to his allegiance with the devil. This is perhaps why Mephistopheles is a “servant-teacher” to Faustus, he binds Faustus’ soul to Lucifer but is also himself bound – both to Lucifer and to Faustus, on account of his conjuring. At the start of the play, Faustus’ reference to the spirits he will conjure as “servile”, creatures that will do his bidding is telling for what it reveals about a magician’s status with respect to the demonic “forces” he commands. Valdes, Faustus’ magician-friend, for instance, describes “spirits” in clearly imperialist terms when he says, “As Indian Moors obey their Spanish lords, so shall the spirits of every element

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obey us three". Faustus is himself impressed by Mephistopheles' servility and he attributes this to his "learning" and scholarly skills – "How pliant is this Mephistopheles, Full of obedience and humility, such is the force of magic and my spells. Now Faustus, thou art conjuror laureate that canst command great Mephistopheles".

Faustus is seen to award himself status of "laureate" upon being able to wield scholarly prowess, even if in the pursuit of a condemned subject. Faustus' superiority to Mephistopheles and his belief, even prior to the act of conjuring, that spirits/demons are meant to do the scholar's bidding, are also products of his university heritage. Marlowe is perhaps meditating here on the inbuilt hierarchies in systems of knowledge where even when one is defying educational doctrines, exclusion and oppression continue to exist. Marlowe parodies Faustus' illusion of superiority, the result of indoctrination at the University that partly "created" him, through the exchange between Wagner (Faustus' servant and student) and the Clown in Act 1, Scene 4. Here, Wagner attempts to enlist the clown as his slave but fails initially to impress his status as "master" upon the clown. Since to be a master implies a position of some kind of social or economic advantage, the clown refuses Wagner's offer of money and food (although the clown, in Wagner's view is desperate and hungry enough to sell his soul even for a raw shoulder of mutton) and rejects his assumed superiority. It is finally fear and a display of Wagner's command over a few devils that pushes the clown into slavery. At the end of the scene, the clown is seen to be pacified when Wagner agrees to teach him the "conjuring occupation" and promises that he can learn to change himself into a dog, a cat or mouse or rat. This scene exposes the "performance" inherent in both an assumed superiority and a "required" servility – the clown is seen to accept his status as servant since he now knows that to move out of this position only requires the "learning" of conjuring. The learning he will acquire however, is sure to result in damnation and eternal slavery to Lucifer and this is how Marlowe exposes the flaw in an unproblematic association between education and social advantage. Faustus' exclamation at the end of his powerful speech in Act 5, Scene 2 that he will "burn my books" is the disappointing discovery that learning and one's status as "scholar" cannot guarantee agency or unhindered social advantage and recognition. Faustus' initial requests from Mephistopheles are motivated by "learning" – his dismissal of Mephistopheles' offer of a wife and request instead for "books" that teach spells and

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incantations, the character and motions of the planets, a compendium of all the plants herbs and trees that grow on the Earth – but he soon discovers the limits of demonic knowledge and the restrictive doctrines that govern it. In Act 2, Scene 2 for instance, Faustus asks Mephistopheles who created the world. Mephistopheles refuses to respond to this question in spite of being bound to say anything to Faustus. Faustus, who has now become disillusioned with Mephistopheles' stock responses to his questions on astrology and cosmology (Faustus exclaims that even his servant Wagner would be able to supply the kind of answers Mephistopheles gives him) pushes for a response. Mephistopheles explains to Faustus that he is only bound to tell him anything that is not against the kingdom of Lucifer – demonic knowledge is thus also bound by doctrine. A transgressive discipline, Faustus discovers, is thus also paradoxically governed by the fear of transgression and punishment.

Salvation, Damnation and the Corporeality of Punishment

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Marlowe also illustrates, in his *Doctor Faustus*, the language in which salvation and damnation is communicated and understood by individuals as the sole means of articulating one's faith/religion. Faustus is seen to perform his faith as a form of personal devotion to the pursuit of knowledge – he frequently reiterates the need to "stay resolute" in his study of necromancy especially since impending damnation was guaranteed to him even at the time of making the "pact". As discussed earlier in this section, Faustus is seen to have lost faith in "Divinity" as a mode of study on account of the rather fatalistic doctrine that one cannot choose to be a "sinner" or one's eternal subservience to God or Satan. One's actions or "work" in this life cannot in any way change one's path towards salvation or damnation. In the context of this religious skepticism introduced at the start of the play, it is interesting to see the parallel, alternative form of demonic faith and governance described subsequently. Mephistopheles, as one who has the experience of both "heaven" and "hell", is thus a unique choice of teacher for Faustus with the ability to offer a more studied and objective view on the subject than the good and bad angel. The good and the bad angel speak for heaven and hell respectively and resemble the universalizing doctrines of the Church and state Authority in the descriptions they offer

about their abodes. Mephistopheles, however, speaks from an "experience" of hell and heaven and presents a more individualistic view of religious faith/belief. For instance, when the good angel appears in Act 2, Scene 1 to speak against Faustus' solemnization of a pact with Lucifer, he questions her about the importance of "contrition, prayer and repentance". She responds that these are means to bring Faustus into "heaven" and urges him to think of "heaven" and "heavenly things". In contrast, the bad angel urges Faustus to think of "honour" and "wealth" and ridicules the "illusions" described by the good angel. The bad angel is seen here to speak of specific immediate goals and promises instant gratification in contrast to the vague absolutes alluded to by the good angel. Through Mephistopheles in the play, we are given a testimony about the nature of hell and heaven. Mephistopheles performs his role as an eyewitness when he declares to Faustus that he "tasted the eternal joys of heaven" and "saw the face of God". He "chooses" to "fall" with Lucifer, himself once an angel who was "dearly loved" by God. Mephistopheles exercises agency by "choosing" his affiliation with Lucifer and being forever damned with him. He is, however, "tormented with ten thousand hells, in being deprived of everlasting bliss". After he has signed the "deed", Faustus questions Mephistopheles about the nature of hell and confesses that he thinks it to be a mere "fable" Mephistopheles responds to Faustus' skepticism with the assertion: "Ay, think so still, till experience change thy mind". The emphasis on experience is significant for this new "teacher" of Faustus whose task is to convince him of a different order of faith. Mephistopheles describes hell in strikingly unique terms when he says, "Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed in one self place; but where we are is hell, And where hell is, there must we ever be".

Mephistopheles' descriptions of hell as an individualistic and internal experience, together with the concrete rewards promised with fealty to Lucifer are crucial for the understanding of Faustus' decision to forsake God and Divinity. Marlowe's critique of religion, specifically the universal and rigid doctrines of the Church of England perhaps emerges in the interest Faustus shows in the petty gifts he receives from Mephistopheles in exchange for his soul. Like in the case of Wagner and the clown, where the clown is seen as being desperate enough to exchange his soul even for a shoulder of meat, Marlowe's Faustus is desperately hungry to establish an individual mode of learning, of

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worship and faith. He finds the material rewards, the immediate gratification of desire and a hedonistic life more appealing than an external abstraction like "heaven", defined only in absolutes, that one can pass into at the end of mortal life. The immediacy and materiality of the rewards offered by Lucifer are what motivate Faustus to believe in an alternate/parallel form of worship. Lucifer and Mephistopheles are made more "human" and thus relatable to Faustus who is defined by his mortality – at the start of the play he declares, "Yet are thou still but Faustus, and a man". When asked if he has any pain, Mephistopheles responds with "As great as have the human souls of men". In addition thus, to feeling pain exactly as the souls of human men do, Mephistopheles also confesses to be tortured by the "choice" of falling with Lucifer and thus abandoning heaven. Mephistopheles is cast in a mold very familiar to Faustus and is thus a more convincing teacher than the old man and the good angel who offer distant rewards of eternal happiness after death and a burnished throne to sit on in heaven. Moreover, Mephistopheles is quick to offer rewards to Faustus – his display of magic tricks to "delight" Faustus' mind after he has signed the "deed" is one example gratifying immediate needs without a care for the overall consequences.

Faustus' punishment, described in great detail at the end of the play, also merits some analysis. Just like the material and tangible rewards of Satanic loyalty, the inevitable punishment for forsaking God is also very corporeal. The "deed" which secures power and wealth for Faustus and ensures Mephistopheles' service to him must necessarily be written in blood. Faustus is urged to cut his arm and draw his blood to formally write his commitment to Lucifer that in exchange for certain powers in the present, his soul can be taken in twenty-four years time. Faustus notices that his blood congeals and he is therefore unable to write the deed freely. This is the first indication of the looming corporeality of Faustus' punishment. His body, in its refusal to co-operate with the demonic ritual, also reminds Faustus that he is limited in his ambition by his corporeality. The deed allows Faustus to briefly transcend the confines of his body – the first condition of the deed is that "Faustus may be a spirit in form and substance". This allows Faustus to evade death and injury during the twenty-four years of "voluptuousness" that he enjoys. A horse-courser cheated by Faustus' trickery avenges this wrongdoing by pulling off Faustus' leg while he was sleeping. The horse-courser is

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subsequently shocked to find Faustus walking, with the use of both his legs and is puzzled at not having caused any physical injury to him. At the end of his twenty-four years however, Faustus' "limbs" are "all torn asunder" when several devils arrive to claim his soul. Faustus as "spirit" who enjoys superhuman privileges must thus eventually return to his status as "man", possessing a body of flesh and blood that feels pain.

Section V

Conclusion: *Doctor Faustus* in the Present

The 'faustian bargain' has a certain universal appeal in terms of how well it captures the human dilemma of trading integrity momentarily for short term goals only to regret the eventual consequences of reaching too far above one's ability. Several great works of literature since Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* have meditated on the taboos associated with the pursuit of knowledge and learning. The gothic novel in particular, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* being the most illustrative instance, examines the consequences of reaching above "human" capabilities and attempting to unravel the secrets of life and the universe. The 'faustian bargain' becomes a popular means of representing the hedonism of the 20th century consumerist American society and finds expression in popular Hollywood films like *The Devil's Advocate* (1997) and *Bedazzled* (2000). Here again, the devil functions as an allegory for the great 'vices' of urban life – rapid social mobility, unscrupulous professional practices and a decline in personal integrity, all in service of the devil and an unquenchable personal ambition. Scottish poet Carol Ann Duffy's "Mrs. Faust" examines the character of Faust through a gendered lens and is a unique adaptation of the Faustus story to serve the interest of a largely ignored perspective – that of the woman.

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Storyboard

Section I

Introduction: Christopher Marlowe and Renaissance England

- Biographical contexts for Christopher Marlowe
- Marlowe's unique contributions to Renaissance Drama – the power infused into dramatic blank verse for instance.
- The importance of education and learning in Renaissance England
- The religious and political climate in Renaissance England as a crucial context for Marlowe's life and works

Section II

Christopher Marlowe: Major Works and Key Themes

- Overview of Marlowe's major works
- Survey of major themes and debates in Marlowe's plays – predestination, ambition and power, education and social mobility
- The socio-historic contexts of Marlowe's major themes

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Section III

Doctor Faustus: Summary and Significance

- Summary of the play *Doctor Faustus*
- Historical context for the story of "Faustus" – the German Faust books and other origin stories and their illustration of the popularity of folktales and legends about witchcraft and devil worship in Marlowe's England
- The various editions of the play's text

Section IV

Doctor Faustus: Major themes

- A discussion of major themes in *Doctor Faustus*
- Education and Learning – Marlowe's examination of hierarchical relationships inherent in any institutionalized system of knowledge/learning

- Marlowe's critique of the University space in England as being governed by religious doctrines and state authority
- Religion – Salvation and Damnation and the corporeal nature of punishment for forsaking God. Representation is seen as essential for communicating and understanding heaven and hell.
- Hell and Lucifer are portrayed in concrete, immediate and familiarly 'human' terms while heaven is seen as an abstraction that is not relatable.
- Punishment is inscribed on the body – the play presents a corporeal "realizing" of destiny/fate/damnation

Section V

Conclusion: *Doctor Faustus* in the Present

- Continuing relevance of the Faust legend
- Subsequent interpretations/adaptations of the Faustus story

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Points to Ponder/Trivia

1. How can we define the form of *Doctor Faustus*? It is titled as a tragical history but offers only a particular 'tragic moment' or episode in the life of Faustus rather than a sustained enquiry into his life. In addition, the comic subplots further problematize the form of the play. The play also preserves certain traditions from Medieval English drama like allegorical characters (The Seven Deadly Sins, the "Good" and "Bad" angel) and the Chorus.
2. Cambridge and Oxford University were seen in Marlowe's time as spaces where the pursuit of religious and political subversion was encouraged and the State kept a close eye on the scholars who studied there through a network of spies and informers.
3. It is significant that *Doctor Faustus* comments on the bounded/controlled realm of knowledge in an age of exploration, learning and discovery. Does Marlowe's story of ambitious dabbling in 'forbidden arts/practices' failing against a backdrop of religious

autocracy find echoes in modern science fiction where the pursuit of scientific/technological advancement is checked by a need for ethics and a quest for 'humanity'?

4. Is Marlowe commenting on the very 'constructed' nature of one's experience/perception of hell? Given Mephistopheles 'eyewitness' accounts and his declaration that "Where we are is hell", can it be asserted the Faustus had a truly 'uncontaminated' vision of the damnation he is about to experience? The old man, the good angel and Mephistopheles all provide the raw material necessary for Faustus to change his mind about 'hell' being a fable. By saying that 'Hell hath no limits', is Marlowe suggesting that one's imagination is always already colonized by religious and state authorities that define and thus create ideas of salvation and damnation in very specific and material ways. We don't see Faustus' actual torment in hell but instead receive a very detailed insight into how he *imagines* this hell to be – his agony at imminent punishment is thus given far more importance than the visualizing of this punishment.

5. By placing so much importance on "received" notions of hell and Faustus' thirst for knowledge from "books" bequeathed to him through a "deed of blood", is Marlowe commenting on the importance of travellers' accounts of the world outside Europe during the Renaissance? For those who never left England, these travellers' "eyewitness" reports in a sense "created" the world outside often through a negative lens. These "other" worlds were evidence of non-Christian customs and practices that the European travellers were quick to describe as "devil worship". Devil worship was thus one of many ways to mark an "other" in Marlowe's time, a way of defining a non-Christian worldview or even a way of rendering alien elements familiar. Those that existed like Faustus on the fringes of knowledge, religious belief and State authority were thus brought back to the center by defining their contexts in Christian terms.

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