

# **The Influence of Fatalism and absolute Power on *Doctor Faustus* and *The Lord of the Rings***

**Christopher Marlowe and J.R.R Tolkien**

<b>Teacher</b>	Yunya Huang (黃筠雅老師)
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<b>Content Introduction</b>	These books offer literature backgrounds for learning British Literature through medieval age and epic. Dr Faustus is a well-known story in which a man sells his soul to the devil for power and knowledge. The Lord of the Rings presents the epic depicting the Great War of the Ring, a struggle between good and evil in Middle-earth, following the odyssey of Frodo the hobbit and his companions on a quest to destroy the Ring of Power.

### Abstract

There are many major themes in Doctor Faustus and The Lord of the Rings. In this paper, I will focus on Fatalism and absolute Power, which are the most frequent topics appearing in the Doctor Faustus and The Lord of the Rings. Firstly, I will discuss the process of fatalism from Old English Period to Middle Age, the concept of God in Western culture, and how does it affect Doctor Faustus and The Lord of the Rings. By comparing some similarities in many aspects between Doctor Faustus and The Lord of the Rings, which included fatalism, power, and the Christian beliefs, to emphasise and to further discuss human natures. Later, we shall look back the ancient time and Medieval Age to and fro to exanimate the impacts of fate, Christian beliefs and power from the view of history. Finally, I will convey the influence of Power on men and give more examples from the characters in Doctor Faustus and The Lord of the Rings.

Keywords: J R R Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus, Fatalism, Power

## **The Influence of Fatalism and absolute Power on *Doctor Faustus* and *The Lord of the Rings***

As we know, both *The Lord of the Rings* and *Doctor Faustus* contained many fatal matters and symbols. That is because the author, J R R Tolkien, is the authority of Old English Period and Middle Age. As a professor of Literature and English, *The Lord of the Rings* was affected to consist of both concepts of Old English Period and Middle Age when we read it. Another author, Christopher Marlowe, studied the Bible and the Reformation theologians and prepared to be a clergyman in the beginning, yet he decided not to join the church. Basically, Marlowe's major works concern the Power. The idea of the protagonist selling his or her soul to the devil for knowledge is an old motif in Christian folklore. Since the education Marlowe received regard about Christian, undoubtedly there are many Christian beliefs and symbols in *Doctor Faustus*. In *Doctor Faustus*, the concept of god, and fate began to change in the Renaissance. People focused on themselves, which is 'right now' much more important than before. The Renaissance people paid much attention to 'the present era' than 'the world to come'. Instead of taking it seriously to prepare for the afterlife, they wanted to live a life of pleasures in this life. "To indulge in pleasures when they can seek amusement since nothing is certain but change" had become the motto of Renaissance people. Hence, the attitude toward God had altered as well.

In the first place, fatalism seemed unbreakable in Old English Period. Take *Beowulf* for example, *Beowulf* is a great hero. Yet, the Death takes his life eventually because "Death is just another path...One that we all must take" (Peter Jackson). Time and Death are the two unbreakable elements in the world. No matter *Beowulf* is a hero or a commoner; however he cannot defeat Time and Death because they are inevitable doom. That is the concept of fate in Old English Period. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Aragon is a great king and the hero of Middle-earth. However, he must indeed abide the Doom of Men, and that is also his fate—being a mortal man but an immortal elf, so he will eventually die. Death is the fate to Men. Although fatalism is unbreakable and sad, the ancient world also looks upon the brighter side. They thought that they will definitely die at last, yet they will face and accept it with calmness. After the end of all things in the world of mortals, the spirits of the heroes and the braves will enter the hall of gods. Nevertheless, things change with the passing of years, the concept of fate in Renaissance started to alter. People desired to break the rules because this time they did not want to die without confronting it first. In addition, they wanted to challenge Time, Death and God, which are the most powerful rulers of all. However, the fate in Renaissance still cannot be altered so easily, so fate became destiny that is people try to escape from their doomed fate but still they will die at last. *Doctor Faustus* and *Saruman* are the best examples. *Doctor Faustus* and *Saruman* try to achieve their goals such as to gain the

power and knowledge to control all living things in the world because they wish to enjoy staying in this world. They thought they will never regret to make a contract with Devil afterward, but they both regret it. Doctor Faustus begs Lucifer and God for sparing his life at the last hour of his life. And, Saruman regrets after he sees the Dark Ally is broken, however he frightens that he would be dead if he surrenders to the Good.

Furthermore, as stated above, the time of Doctor Faustus was a conflicting era; it was the period between old and newer thoughts. People concerned and interested in them in this world. Therefore, Doctor Faustus turns into dissatisfied with his study even if he is already a brilliant scholar at that time. He desires to be much greater and better. Gradually, he is more ambitious with his study, and he wishes for some more, which is Almighty's power. Furthermore, "the improvement in living conditions enabled people to pay more attention to the beautiful things around them (King, Gordon, and Frank Owen 106)." Renaissance artists tried to show every aspect of real life. All kinds of new discovery and theories enlighten Renaissance men as to new thoughts, that is throw off the restraints of convention as well as break loose from restraints. Fourthly, scholars saw man as more important than religious. Take Literature for example, writers were more interested in human affairs than in religious matter. Also, the influence of churches declined because they were not the only centres of education. There were more universities and schools provide education for commoners. Since they did not mind the religious affairs as significant as before, the restraint of Church on people was declining because people also began to question the idea and belief of God. After all, God is not that real as their material lives. Hence, the concept of fate and God become much powerless and weaker than before.

Thirdly, 'Power' is also the main theme which is repeating over and over again in Doctor Faustus and The Lord of the Rings. "The Lord of the Rings is, most basically, a timeless story about the pitiless corruption of the human spirit by the desire for power and a story about love and the need for freedom, the only forces which are stronger" (Hardy 59). In The Lord of the Rings, almost all kinds of races desire to possess the One Ring, which is the Power to control all. For the reason that possess and keeps the Ruling Ring equals to possess and keeps the Power:

One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them

One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them. (Tolkien 49)

Furthermore, Doctor Faustus and The Lord of the Rings also mirror human nature such as Pride, Covetousness, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth, and Lechery (Seven Deadly Sins). For example, Doctor Faustus asks for Helen of Troy to be his partner after he sells his soul to

Lucifer. Moreover, he wishes to take God's position because he envies Him. Not only Seven Deadly Sins reflect human nature but also they can regard as our 'necessity of life'. It is easy to say that 'I can refuse them' than do it wholeheartedly since none of us can refuse them as easy as we think. They are already parts of human being. In my view, Doctor Faustus is good in the beginning because all he wants is to gain more knowledge at first. He does not and does not want to do anything harmful and he also struggles being good or bad. He turns to Black Magic instead of good one. However, hearts of men are easily corrupted by power. Little by little, his heart turns into increasingly grasping, dissatisfies with his life. Unfortunately he submitted to his wishes for knowledge and power to be God at last. Thus, there is no doubt that he desires to be Faustus Almighty; after all, he can use magical power to do everything he fancies, which is indeed marvellous. It merely he uses the wrong way. We also see the struggle between Gollum, or called Sméagol, his good side, wants to be obedient to Frodo. Yet, Gollum, his bad side, desperately desires the ring. Sméagol temporarily wins out, and his desire for the ring eventually comes to control him. And this desire results the destruction of the One Ring and his death in the fire of Mount Doom. Likewise, Saruman turns into dissatisfies with his study even if he is already an outstanding scholar of his enemy and the history of Middle-earth. Gradually, he is more ambitious with his study when the desire and power seize him, and tempt his heart little by little. Hence, he is no longer content to be only the Head of Wizard. Instead, he wants to get the Power to be the only Ruler of Middle-earth. As a result, his pride, ambition and the dissatisfaction with his station of life are the reasons causing his fall.

In conclusion, although fatalism seems extremely unbreakable; still, we should move forward instead of holding back since that is the reason why we come to the world—to learn, and to receive. We learn from the history, and someday we will become part of the history as well. We will become the models for others to learn. In addition, Doctor Faustus and The Lord of the Rings teach us a lot indeed. Except for being the models of learning, we should take them as a warning when we are choosing or making a decision as well. Do 'look before you leap,' or it is no use crying over spilt milk. Besides, we should not be too proud of ourselves since we are not that outstanding as we imagine. "The Faust-myth is a warning against pride and presumption". We should be humble to do everything as well as to associate with people. These are also the main themes Marlowe and Tolkien tried to teach people. Excepting the poor side of Doctor Faustus and Saruman, I think they also teach us one thing very important that we must learn from them—never satisfy with learning and studying.

