
Article

The Study of Islamic and Global Theological Readings of *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe

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Abstract

This study aims to conduct a close reading for Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* through Islamic and global theological views. It looks for ideas about sin, repentance, and human choice that appear in the play and compares how Islamic readings and other global theological readings explain Faustus's actions and fate. The research uses a qualitative method. The play is read closely to find the main passages about sin, power, and repentance. The researcher applied thematic analysis by reading the play carefully, selecting important scenes, and identifying repeated themes. Quotations from the text were interpreted and then compared with Islamic principles and other global theological ideas to understand how different traditions would interpret Faustus's behaviour. The use of thematic analysis helped the researcher connect literary events in the play with religious teachings and moral concepts. The findings show that Islamic, Christian, and global theological interpretations share many similar ideas about Faustus. All perspectives agree that pride leads to destruction, repentance is always available, and humans are responsible for their own actions. The results also show that Faustus destroys himself because he repeatedly rejects guidance and chooses despair instead of repentance. The study recommends using multi-religious approaches when studying literature to help students understand universal moral messages and to encourage deeper critical thinking.

Article History

Received: 01-06-2026

Revised: 15-06-2026

Accepted: 25-06-1900

Published: 05-09-2026



Keywords: *Islamic Reading, Theological Reading, Repentance, Sin, Comparative Literature.*

1 Introduction

Doctor Faustus is a famous play written by Christopher Marlowe in the late 16th century. The play tells the story of Faustus, a scholar who is not satisfied with normal knowledge and power. He turns to magic and makes a deal with the devil for 24 years of unlimited power and pleasure. At the

end, he loses his soul and suffers eternal punishment. The play speaks about sin, repentance, and salvation, which are important in both Christian and Islamic teachings. According to Dunston (2025), the play can be read through Islamic perspectives that highlight moral weakness and the

danger of ignoring repentance. Majeed (2020) also explains that Doctor Faustus reflects strong moral warnings that agree with Islamic values about sin and responsibility. This study focuses on reading the play from Islamic and global theological views. The aim is to understand how these perspectives explain the story and actions of Faustus. The research is important because it shows how English literature can be studied through different faiths and moral traditions, helping students see the shared lessons about temptation, weakness, and repentance.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe has been widely studied, most research has focused on Western and Christian perspectives. Few works have tried to explore how the play can be read from Islamic theology, and almost none have compared Islamic views with global theological readings. This creates a gap for students, since they are often introduced only to Western criticism and may struggle to connect the play with their own cultural and moral background. At the same time, global theology provides many ideas about sin, repentance, and salvation that can give new insight into Faustus' choices. The problem this study addresses is the lack of research that joins Islamic and global perspectives together. My study fills this gap by identifying Islamic theological ideas in the play, exploring global interpretations, and comparing the two to show both similarities and differences that earlier research did not cover.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

- To identify the Islamic theological ideas found in Doctor Faustus.
- To explain how global theological views interpret the choices and actions of Faustus.
- To compare similarities and differences between Islamic and global readings of the play.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What Islamic ideas can be seen in the story of Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe?

2. How do global theological views explain the choices and actions of Faustus in the play?
3. In what ways are Islamic and global theological readings similar or different when studying Doctor Faustus?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is important because it helps students understand Doctor Faustus from more than one religious perspective. It connects Islamic teachings with global theology, giving learners a deeper way to read the play. This also supports students who want to relate English literature to their cultural and moral values. The findings can make reading more meaningful, showing how literature and faith can speak to each other. It also helps learners think critically about human weakness and spiritual responsibility.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

The study is limited in time, as it must be completed within five months. It is also limited in scope, since it focuses only on theological readings of Doctor Faustus. The analysis does not cover all aspects of literature, such as style or language, but looks mainly at Islamic and global views of morality, repentance, and salvation. These limits mean the research is focused and clear in its aim.

1.7 Definition of the Terms

- **Islamic Theology:** The study of human life, sin, and salvation through the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith (Rahman, 2023).
- **Theological Reading:** A way of studying literature by connecting it with ideas of faith, sin, and moral duty (Majeed, 2020).
- **Repentance:** A return to God after sin through regret and asking for forgiveness (Ahmed, 2014).

1.8 Summary

Overall, this present study gives an overview of *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe and explains how the play can be studied through both Islamic and global theological views. It discusses the main problem, which is the lack of studies that compare these two perspectives. The chapter also lists the aims, research questions, and reasons why this study is important for understanding moral lessons about sin, repentance, and salvation. It points out the limits of time and scope and defines key terms like theology and repentance.

2 Review of Literature

This chapter discusses the background information related to the play *Doctor Faustus* and its writer, Christopher Marlowe. It gives an outline of Marlowe's early life, education, and his main writings that helped shape English drama. It also explains his achievements and how he influenced later writers. Understanding his personal and academic background helps to see how ideas of religion, knowledge, and human power entered his work. The review also connects these ideas with the focus of the study, which is the Islamic and global theological understanding of *Doctor Faustus*. By reviewing these parts, the chapter prepares a clear base for the next discussion about faith, sin, and human ambition in the play.

2.1 Christopher Marlowe's Early Life

Christopher Marlowe was born in Canterbury, England, in 1564. His father was a shoemaker, and his family lived a simple life. Growing up near Canterbury Cathedral, he was surrounded by the sound of church bells, prayers, and religious ceremonies. This early contact with faith and devotion probably left a deep mark on his thinking. Even though his home life was modest, he showed a strong ability for study and imagination from an early age (Meyers, 2003). Living in the period of Queen Elizabeth I, he witnessed political and religious changes that later appeared as themes in his writing. He grew up hearing about heaven, hell, and the struggle between good and evil ideas that shaped the tragic story of *Doctor Faustus*.

As a young man, Marlowe developed a bold and curious mind. He often questioned what he was taught and wanted to know more about the world. People who knew him said that he was clever but sometimes rebellious. He wanted to understand both faith and science at a time when asking such questions could be dangerous. These habits of thought are clear in *Doctor Faustus*, where the main character seeks knowledge beyond human limits. According to Katsuno (2005), Marlowe's personality reflected the spirit of the Renaissance: energetic, questioning, and willing to challenge traditional beliefs. His early life therefore not only shaped his character but also gave him the background to write plays filled with passion, reason, and moral conflict (Kholister, 2025).

2.2 Christopher Marlowe's Education

Marlowe started his education at The King's School in Canterbury, where he studied grammar, Latin, and religion. The school related to the church, so students were expected to learn the Bible as well as the classics. Marlowe read the works of Ovid and Virgil, which taught him about human emotions, fate, and ambition—subjects that later filled his plays (Khoury, 2025). His teachers noticed his bright memory and his love of poetry. The strict religious education he received sometimes clashed with his independent way of thinking. This tension between belief and curiosity later became one of the main struggles in *Doctor Faustus*, where the hero cannot stop questioning divine limits (Marlowe & Dyce 1858).

After finishing school, Marlowe earned a scholarship to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He completed his bachelor's degree in 1584 and his master's in 1587. At Cambridge, he studied philosophy, theology, and classical literature (Merrick, 2025).

These subjects gave him a deep understanding of moral questions and human reasoning. Some records suggest that he also worked secretly for the government as a messenger or agent, which exposed

him to political and religious debates of the time (Erne 2005). Life at the university offered him freedom to read and think. He learned about both Christian and classical ideas of the soul and salvation, which he later combined in Doctor Faustus. The play shows a man educated in theology who still chooses forbidden knowledge. Thus, Marlowe's own education mirrored his character's journey from faith toward dangerous curiosity (Marsh, 2025 , 2024).

2.3 Christopher Marlowe's Major Works

Christopher Marlowe wrote several plays that changed English drama forever. His best-known works include Tamburlaine the Great, The Jew of Malta, Edward II, and Doctor Faustus. Each one centers on powerful figures whose great ambitions lead to their downfall. In Tamburlaine, a shepherd becomes a ruthless conqueror. In The Jew of Malta, greed and revenge rule the story. But Doctor Faustus is the most important because it joins learning, religion, and tragedy. In this play, Marlowe used blank verse a rhythmic but unrhymed poetic form which gave English theater a new style and power (Meyers, 2003). Through these works, he brought strong emotion and human questions to the stage.

2.4 Christopher Marlowe's Achievements and Contribution to English Literature

Marlowe lived only twenty-nine years, but his influence was huge. Before him, many English plays were written in simple rhyme and focused on moral lessons. He introduced a grand style of language that sounded close to real human speech but still poetic. His characters were not flat figures of virtue or sin; they were people with desire and doubt (Erne 2005). This human depth made his dramas powerful and modern. Doctor Faustus became a turning point in English theater, showing that a play could mix religion, philosophy, and tragic emotion all at once. His work helped to open the path for Shakespeare and others who followed.

Moreover, Marlowe's contribution reached beyond writing style. He gave voice to the Renaissance idea that man could reach for greatness through knowledge. Yet he also warned of the danger in that dream. His plays show how pride and ambition can destroy even the most intelligent person. According to Marlowe and Dyce (1858), his influence continued long after his death because he introduced new ways of thinking about character and fate. His fearless treatment of moral and spiritual questions made him a pioneer of modern literature. The balance between faith and reason in his writing connects directly with the theological discussions studied in Doctor Faustus today

2.5 Summary

This section has reviewed Christopher Marlowe's background, education, and literary importance to help understand the meaning behind Doctor Faustus. Marlowe's early experiences in religious Canterbury, his humanist studies at Cambridge, and his interest in freedom and learning all shaped his vision of a man struggling between God and desire. Doctor Faustus tells the story of a scholar who trades his soul to the devil for knowledge and power, believing he can control his own fate. In the end, he learns that human pride cannot defeat divine justice.

From a theological view, the play warns about the danger of seeking knowledge without moral limits. In Christian reading, Faustus represents the sinful man who rejects repentance. In Islamic understanding, his choice can also be seen as rebellion against divine order, where knowledge must serve faith, not destroy it. Globally, the tragedy speaks to every culture that faces the question of how far humans should go in their search for truth. Through Marlowe's life and writings, we see that his art was more than entertainment, but it was a reflection on belief, reason, and the limits of human ambition. This review builds the foundation for the next chapters, which will compare Islamic and global interpretations of Doctor Faustus and

3.1 Research Design

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3.2 Research Approach

3.3 Data / Texts Used

3.4 Method of Data Collection

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

3.6 Ethical Considerations

3.7 Limitations

This study is limited to one literary text, Doctor Faustus, and selected religious writings. It does not cover every view in Islamic or Christian theology. The focus is only on comparing ideas of sin, pride, and repentance. Because it is a small literary study,

the results may not represent all possible interpretations. The study aims to give a basic understanding of how two major religions can be used to read and explain the same story from moral and spiritual points of view.

4. Analysis

4.1 Faustus as a Symbol of Human Desire and Theological Rebellion

In Doctor Faustus, the main character represents the strong desires that live inside human beings. People naturally want to learn more, to explore what is hidden, and to reach higher levels of success. Faustus has these desires, but his ambitions grow too much and without any humility. He wants to rise above all limits, and this desire becomes dangerous. His thinking appears clearly when he proudly says, "*A sound magician is a demi-god*" (Faustus, Act 1, Scene 1). This line shows that he wants power that only belongs to God, not to humans. His desire for greatness pushes him to cross both spiritual and moral boundaries.

In Islamic thought, Faustus's behaviour is like the Qur'anic idea of *gudur*, which means self-deception caused by pride. When people become too confident, they stop depending on God and believe they can control everything by themselves. This arrogance blinds the heart and leads a person to destruction. Islamic readings of the play show that Faustus is a man whose ego grows stronger than his faith. He ignores warnings, forgets spiritual limits, and chooses a path that leads him away from the mercy of God. His pride becomes a direct form of rebellion, like the Qur'anic figures who refused divine guidance because of arrogance. Christian and Western interpretations also see Faustus as a figure controlled by pride. In Christian theology, pride is one of the most dangerous sins because it separates people from God. Faustus stands between the chance for divine forgiveness and the pride that keeps him away from it. Instead of repenting, Faustus turns to magic and illusions, believing that these things can give him the power he desires.

Scholars in Western traditions explain that Faustus reflects the human problem of wanting glory without responsibility. His rebellion shows how ambition without spirituality becomes destructive and leads to the loss of the soul.

4.2 The Islamic Perspective: Tawbah, Accountability, and Divine Mercy

Islamic theology provides a deep and meaningful explanation for Faustus's tragedy. One of the central ideas in Islam is *tawbah*, which means repentance. In Islam, repentance is always open, as long as a person is still alive. It does not require anything complex just sincere regret and a true return to God. When we look at Faustus from this perspective, his tragedy becomes very clear: he destroys himself not because repentance was impossible, but because he refused to repent. Even when he realizes that he made a serious mistake, he continues to turn away from mercy. His spiritual condition is clearly expressed when he says, "*My heart is harden'd, I cannot repent*" (Faustus, Act 2, Scene 3). This shows that his heart became closed by his own choices.

Islamic scholars compare Faustus to Qur'anic figures whose pride stopped them from repenting. For example, Pharaoh saw miracles but refused to change. Iblis refused God's command because he felt superior to Adam. Like them, Faustus lets his pride control him, and this pride keeps him far from the path of forgiveness. Islamic readings say that his fall is not the work of the devil alone, but the result of his own refusal to humble himself.

Another important principle in Islam is accountability. Every person is responsible for his or her actions. Temptation exists, but it cannot force someone to sin. Faustus signs the contract with the devil using his own free will. He reads it, repeats it, and writes his name in his own blood. These actions show that he is fully responsible for his destiny. Islamic theology teaches that humans are tested by desire, fear, and ambition, and the choices they make decide their final outcome. Faustus chooses magic over mercy, despair over hope, and pride over humility. His tragedy shows what happens when a person allows ego to lead the heart.

Islam also teaches that knowledge is a gift from God that must be used wisely. Knowledge should bring wisdom, justice, and goodness into the world. When Faustus uses his intelligence for illusions and pride instead of beneficial purposes, he misuses this sacred gift. He does not use his knowledge to help others or improve society. Instead, he uses it to entertain and deceive. This shows a misunderstanding of the true purpose of learning. In Islamic thought, this makes Faustus not only sinful but also someone who wasted his God-given potential.

4.3 Christian and Western Theological Interpretations: Predestination vs. Free Will

Christian and Western interpretations often focus on the question of whether Faustus was predestined to fall or whether he freely chose his fate. This discussion creates an important debate: Did God already decide his end, or could Faustus have changed his destiny through repentance? The play shows moments that support both ideas, which is why Doctor Faustus continues to be a major subject in theological and literary discussions. In Protestant Christian interpretations, the focus is on the relationship between God's grace and human freedom. God offers mercy, but humans can still reject it. In the play, Faustus repeatedly hears the Good Angel telling him to repent, but he chooses not to listen. His actions show that he freely chooses sin and despair. In his final moments, he cries out, "*O, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?*" (Faustus, Act 5, Scene 2). This shows that he recognizes the need to turn toward God, but he believes it is too late. Protestant readings often argue that Faustus's tragedy is not his sin, but his continued rejection of God's grace.

Catholic interpretations emphasize confession and humility. In this view, Faustus could have been saved at any moment if he sincerely confessed his wrongdoing. His refusal to confess becomes a symbol of spiritual pride. He cannot accept that he has failed, and he refuses the humility needed for salvation. Western humanistic readings focus on Faustus as a symbol of Renaissance ambition. The Renaissance celebrated human creativity and intelligence. However, Faustus becomes the negative example—he uses his knowledge to challenge God instead of using

it to understand the world responsibly. His story warns that intelligence without ethics becomes dangerous and empty.

4.4 Comparative Theology: A Shared Warning Across Religions

Doctor Faustus is viewed across different world religions, a common message appears: too much pride leads to destruction. This idea is universal. Many religious and cultural traditions teach that human beings must balance ambition with humility. Faustus becomes a global symbol of someone who forgets this balance. The play supports this through the warning from Mephistopheles, who says, "*Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it*" (Faustus, Act 1, Scene 3). This line reveals that the promises of pleasure and power are illusions. In Greek mythology, Icarus ignores warnings and flies too close to the sun, leading to his fall. In Islamic tradition, Qan 18 becomes proud of his wealth and is destroyed because of it. In Hindu belief, the idea of ahamkara (false ego) blinds a person. In Buddhism, strong desire traps individuals in cycles of suffering. These stories share the same lesson as Faustus's story: ambition without moral limits leads to a fall. Comparative theology shows that Faustus fits into a universal pattern. His ambition lacks humility, faith, and wisdom. Therefore, he becomes a warning not only in Christian or Western literature but across many religious and moral traditions.

4.5 The Devil, Temptation, and the Human Psyche.

Mephistopheles plays a major role in Faustus's fall, but he does not force Faustus into sin. His method is more psychological. He whispers, encourages, and presents illusions, which is similar to the Islamic idea of waswasa, meaning satanic whispers that influence the heart. Global theology often describes the devil not as an external creature with physical control, but as a symbol of inner temptation. The characters of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel in the play represent the voice of conscience and the voice of desire inside Faustus. Faustus's struggle is internal, not external. He battles between hope and fear, between moral duty and selfish desire.

Mephistopheles only strengthens the desires that Faustus already has. This means that the true battle is inside Faustus's mind and heart. He allows temptation to control his weakest side, which leads him to destruction.

4.6 The Tragedy of Lost Potential and Misused Knowledge

Faustus is one of the most educated men of his time. He is skilled in theology, medicine, and law. However, he wastes his knowledge on entertainment and illusions. He does not use his intelligence to help others, solve problems, or improve society. Instead, he uses it for pride and pleasure. His deep regret appears in his final cry, "*I'll burn my books—ab, Mephistopheles!*" (Faustus, Act 5, Scene 2). This shows that he realizes too late that he misused the gifts he was given.

In Islam, knowledge is a sacred trust that must be used to help people and bring goodness. Faustus breaks this trust by using his knowledge for sinful purposes. Western humanistic readings also see Faustus as the negative side of Renaissance humanism. The Renaissance celebrated human potential, but Faustus misuses his potential and destroys himself. His story teaches that intelligence without ethics becomes empty and harmful.

4.7 The Global Moral Message

Across all theological views, one global lesson becomes clear: power without humility destroys, knowledge without ethics corrupts, and ambition without spirituality collapses. These shared truths explain why Doctor Faustus remains meaningful across cultures. Faustus falls because he forgets God, moral values, and the purpose of knowledge. His story is not only a Christian warning but a global moral message that applies to anyone who struggles with pride, temptation, or the desire for power. Through this analysis, the play appears as a reminder that true greatness comes from humility, responsibility, and spiritual balance, not from breaking the limits set by faith and ethics.

Conclusion

5.1 Central Insight of the Study

The comparative theological analysis reveals that Doctor Faustus is far more than a Christian morality play. It is a universal spiritual narrative that speaks to human beings across religious, cultural, and historical boundaries. Whether examined through Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, or broader global lenses, the play illustrates the dangers of pride, spiritual forgetfulness, and moral blindness. The central insight of this study is that Faustus's fall results not from supernatural forces, but from the choices he makes against the wisdom offered by divine teachings.

5.2 Global Theological Harmony

The study demonstrates that many global religions—despite their differences—converge on a single lesson: When humans elevate themselves above God, above morality, or above humility, destruction follows. The harmony between Islamic and global interpretations shows that literature can become a meeting place for diverse faith traditions. Through Doctor Faustus, these traditions speak to one another, offering complementary perspectives on human responsibility and spiritual truth.

5.3 Modern Relevance

In today's world of rapid technological advancement, artificial intelligence, unlimited information, and growing materialism, the story of Faustus feels more relevant than ever because it pushes modern readers to think about what they are willing to sacrifice for knowledge, how far they might go for fame or power, and whether ambition loses its meaning when it is separated from ethics and spirituality. Through this lens, Faustus becomes a timeless guide, reminding society that ambition must always be balanced with moral responsibility and that progress without ethical grounding can lead to the same kind of spiritual and personal loss that destroys him in the play.

5.4 Final Thought

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