

## FAUSTUS AND PROSPERO: TWO OUTCOMES OF FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE

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**Annotatsiya:** *Ushbu maqolada Kristofer Marlouning "Doktor Faustus" (1592) va Uilyam Shekspirning "Bo'ron" (1611) asarlarida taqiqlangan bilimning qarama-qarshi tasvirlari o'rganiladi. Ikkala pyesada ham sehrli bilimga intilayotgan olim-qahramonlar mavjud bo'lsa-da, ular butunlay boshqacha natijalarga olib keladi. Faustusning g'ayritabiyy kuch uchun intilishi abadiy la'natga olib keladi va bu intellektual takabburlik haqida ogohlantiruvchi hikoya bo'lib xizmat qiladi. Aksincha, Prospero o'zining sehrli qobiliyatlaridan ixtiyoriy voz kechish orqali najotga erishadi, bu esa donolik kuchdan voz kechish zaruratini anglashda yotishini ko'rsatadi. Qahramon motivatsiyasi, sehr amaliyoti va tavba rolini qiyosiy tahlil qilish orqali, ushbu tadqiqot Uyg'onish davrida bilim, hokimiyat va insoniy o'zgarishlarga nisbatan rivojlanayotgan munosabatlarni yoritadi.*

**Kalit so'zlar:** *taqiqlangan bilim, Uyg'onish davri dramasi, Kristofer Marlou, Uilyam Shekspir, Doktor Faustus, Bo'ron, najot, la'nat, sehr, takabburlik, tavba, hokimiyat va axloq, transgressiv bilim, intellektual ambitiya, g'ayritabiyy kuch, oq sehr, nekromantiya, insoniy cheklov, axloqiy transformatsiya, Uyg'onish davri tashvishlari.*

**Аннотация:** В данной статье рассматриваются контрастные изображения запретного знания в произведениях Кристофера Марло «Доктор Фаустус» (1592) и Уильяма Шекспира «Буря» (1611). Хотя в обеих пьесах представлены учёные-протагонисты, стремящиеся к магическому знанию, они приводят к радикально различным результатам. Стремление Фаустуса к сверхъестественной власти ведёт к вечному проклятию, служа предостерегающей историей об интеллектуальной гордыне. Напротив, Просперо достигает искупления через добровольный отказ от своих магических способностей, что указывает на то, что мудрость заключается в осознании необходимости отречения от власти. Посредством сравнительного анализа мотивации персонажей, магической практики и покаяния данное исследование освещает эволюцию ренессансных взглядов на знание, власть и человеческую трансформацию.

**Ключевые слова:** запретное знание, ренессансная драма, Кристофер Марло, Уильям Шекспир, Доктор Фаустус, Буря, искупление, проклятие, магия, гордыня, покаяние, власть и мораль, трансгрессивное знание, интеллектуальные амбиции, сверхъестественная власть, белая магия, некромантия, человеческие ограничения, моральная трансформация, ренессансные тревоги.

**Annotation:** *This article examines contrasting portrayals of forbidden knowledge in Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus (1592) and William Shakespeare's The Tempest (1611). While both plays feature scholar-protagonists pursuing magical knowledge, they*

present radically different outcomes. Faustus's quest for supernatural power leads to eternal damnation, serving as a cautionary tale about intellectual hubris. Conversely, Prospero achieves redemption through voluntary renunciation of his magical abilities, suggesting wisdom lies in recognizing when to relinquish power. Through comparative analysis of character motivation, magical practice, and repentance, this study illuminates evolving Renaissance attitudes toward knowledge, power, and human transformation.

**Keywords:** forbidden knowledge, Renaissance drama, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Doctor Faustus, The Tempest, redemption, damnation, magic, hubris, repentance, power and morality, transgressive knowledge, intellectual ambition, supernatural power, white magic, necromancy, human limitation, moral transformation, Renaissance anxieties.

The pursuit of knowledge has always been at the heart of human progress, but what happens when that pursuit crosses boundaries that shouldn't be crossed? Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus (1592) and William Shakespeare's The Tempest (1611) both explore this question through characters who seek power through magical knowledge. While Faustus falls into eternal damnation for his transgressive quest, Prospero finds redemption through renunciation. These contrasting outcomes reveal fundamentally different attitudes toward knowledge, power, and human limitation in the Renaissance period.

Doctor Faustus opens with a man who has already mastered every conventional field of study—logic, medicine, law, and theology. Yet none of these satisfy him. The Chorus describes how he became "swollen with cunning" and turned to necromancy instead [1, p. 1]. This isn't simple curiosity. Faustus wants to become "a mighty god," to transcend human limitations entirely. When he signs his contract with Mephistophilis, trading his soul for twenty-four years of supernatural power, he does so with full knowledge of the consequences. He's not tricked or deceived. He simply believes the power is worth eternal damnation.

What makes Faustus's story so tragic is how quickly his grand ambitions deteriorate. He imagined reshaping the world, but instead he uses his powers for petty tricks—playing pranks on the Pope, conjuring grapes out of season, summoning Helen of Troy for his own pleasure. The forbidden knowledge he pursued doesn't elevate him; it diminishes him into what one scholar calls a "clownish buffoon" despite his supposed mastery [2, p. 3]. His supernatural abilities become tools for entertainment rather than transformation.

Throughout the play, Faustus has multiple chances to repent. The Good Angel appears urging him to turn back to God. Near the end, an Old Man offers him a path to salvation. But Faustus can't take these opportunities. His pride won't let him admit failure, and his despair convinces him that God's mercy isn't available to someone who has sinned so greatly. By the time midnight comes and the devils arrive to collect his soul, Faustus finally understands what he's lost. He cries out, "I'll burn my books!" but the words come too late. Understanding without action means nothing.

Shakespeare's Prospero shares Faustus's obsession with knowledge but follows a very different trajectory. When he was Duke of Milan, Prospero tells his daughter Miranda that he was "rapt in secret studies" to the point of neglecting his political duties [3, Act 1]. This

allowed his brother Antonio to usurp his position and exile him to a remote island. In a sense, Prospero's story begins where Faustus's might have ended—already paying the price for choosing books over worldly responsibility.

But Prospero's magic operates differently. Renaissance audiences would have recognized the distinction between his "white magic" derived from natural philosophy and Faustus's demonic necromancy [4, p. 15]. Prospero's power comes from his books and staff, not from selling his soul. He commands spirits like Ariel through knowledge and past obligations, not infernal contracts. This matters because it means his magic isn't inherently damning. It's a tool that can be used for good or ill.

The play shows Prospero using his knowledge for justice, or at least what he considers justice. He creates the storm that brings his enemies to the island but ensures nobody is actually killed. He manipulates events to test people's true characters and force them to confront their guilt. Unlike Faustus with his circus tricks, Prospero orchestrates complex scenarios aimed at reconciliation and restoration.

Yet Shakespeare doesn't let Prospero off easily. His treatment of Caliban raises troubling questions about power and colonialism. He controls his daughter's life and uses magic to dominate everyone around him. Even with noble goals, the play asks whether possessing such power inevitably corrupts the person who wields it.

The critical difference between these characters comes in their final acts. Faustus, facing damnation, desperately wants to destroy his books but can't act on the impulse. His last words express the wish, but by then the devils are already dragging him to hell.

Prospero makes the opposite choice. While he still possesses his full powers, he deliberately renounces them. In one of the play's most famous speeches, he declares "But this rough magic / I here abjure" and promises to break his staff and drown his book deeper than anyone has ever measured [5, Act 5]. Nobody forces this decision on him. He chooses it.

Why? The immediate answer is that he's accomplished what he set out to do. His enemies have repented, his daughter's future is secure through her engagement to Ferdinand, and his dukedom will be restored. But something deeper happens to Prospero during the play. When Ariel mentions that the imprisoned nobles are suffering, Prospero responds with a line that captures the play's moral center: "The rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance" [6, Act 5]. He chooses mercy over revenge, recognizing that true strength lies in forgiveness rather than punishment. The renunciation also addresses Prospero's original failing. His obsession with magical studies cost him his dukedom in the first place. By giving up magic, he commits to returning to Milan as a ruler engaged with political reality, not as a sorcerer hiding in his books. The island becomes a kind of purgatory where he learns what matters most isn't power but human connection and responsibility.

These contrasting outcomes reflect deep anxieties in Renaissance society about the relationship between knowledge and power. The sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw unprecedented expansion in human understanding—new scientific discoveries, exploration of unknown continents, revival of classical learning. This created both excitement and fear. How much could humans legitimately know? Where was the line between proper inquiry and dangerous presumption?

Marlowe's play, written in the 1590s, expresses the darker side of these concerns. Faustus's desire to "be as God" echoes the original sin in Eden. His pursuit of knowledge becomes rebellion against divine order, and the play insists that such rebellion can only end one way [7, p. 14]. There's no redemption once the contract is signed, reflecting Calvinist ideas about predestination that were influential in Elizabethan England.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, written nearly twenty years later, offers a more complex perspective. Prospero's magic isn't inherently sinful. It's morally neutral—a tool that serves good or evil depending on how it's used. What matters is recognizing when to use it and, more importantly, when to put it aside. The problem isn't seeking knowledge but failing to understand its proper limits.

These different views might reflect changing attitudes. By 1611, England had James I on the throne, a king fascinated by magic who even wrote about it. The early seventeenth century showed more acceptance of natural philosophy and scientific inquiry as legitimate pursuits. Shakespeare could present a magician who achieves redemption and reconciliation with society in a way that might have been harder for Marlowe decades earlier.

Both plays ultimately ask the same fundamental question: what happens to our humanity when we transgress natural boundaries? Faustus's tragedy lies in his absolute refusal to accept any limitation. He wants infinite knowledge and infinite power, to be God's equal. This hubris destroys him completely. The play's epilogue warns scholars not to "practice more than heavenly power permits" [8, p. 89]. Some boundaries exist for good reasons, and crossing them carries an absolute price.

Prospero's story suggests a more hopeful possibility. His pursuit of magical knowledge does cause real harm—his exile, his daughter's suffering, his domination of the island's inhabitants. But unlike Faustus, he learns from his mistakes. He comes to understand that supernatural power doesn't make him more than human. If anything, it risks making him less human by separating him from natural order and human community.

The contrast in their endings says everything. Faustus is dragged screaming into hell by demons who tear his body apart—one of the most horrifying scenes in English drama. Prospero stands before the audience in the epilogue, stripped of his magic, simply asking for applause and forgiveness. He acknowledges his weakness: "Now my charms are all o'erthrown, / And what strength I have's mine own." It's humble and vulnerable and completely, finally human.

Doctor Faustus structures itself as a morality play with Good and Evil Angels literally appearing on stage to represent internal conflict. Faustus has repeated opportunities to repent throughout the play, but he consistently fails. Sometimes he despairs of God's mercy. Sometimes Mephistophilis distracts him. Sometimes he simply can't give up his powers. The play suggests his damnation comes not just from signing the contract but from these repeated refusals to repent when he still could.

*The Tempest* doesn't use explicitly Christian language about repentance, but it's deeply concerned with forgiveness and reconciliation. Prospero forces his enemies to confront their guilt. Alonso grieves for his supposedly dead son and comes to genuine remorse. Even Caliban, who plotted murder, declares "I'll be wise hereafter / And seek for grace."

Interestingly, Prospero himself undergoes something like repentance. He acknowledges that neglecting his duties as duke was wrong. He recognizes the moral problems in how he dominated the island's inhabitants, saying "This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine." By renouncing his magic, he does penance for pursuing knowledge at the expense of human connection.

Placing these two plays side by side reveals fundamentally different visions of transgressive knowledge. Marlowe gives us pure tragedy—the brilliant scholar who trades everything for power and loses his life and soul. It's a stark warning that some knowledge is forbidden for good reason.

Shakespeare offers something more nuanced. Prospero's pursuit of magical knowledge causes real harm, but it doesn't damn him because he learns to recognize his limits and chooses to return to human community. His redemption comes through the wisdom of knowing when to release power rather than wield it.

The deepest difference might be this: Faustus learns wisdom too late, crying for mercy when mercy is no longer available. Prospero learns in time, recognizing the cost of his power while he can still choose to put it aside. One is a warning about pride's wages. The other is a story about the genuine possibility of change.

Both plays ask us to consider what we're willing to sacrifice for knowledge and power. Four centuries later, we're still reading these works because the questions remain urgent. We still grapple with power's ethics, knowledge's limits, and the price of understanding. Faustus and Prospero offer two different answers—and we need both stories to understand the full scope of the question.

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