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CC202

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April 23, 2024

My essay will be on Goethe’s 19th century work, *Faust*. Specifically, I’m extremely interested in the concepts of duality presented in *Faust* and the dynamic between Mephisto and Faust as Faust develops through the story. The duality between the isolated intellectual and their active self-sabotage is not a new theme in literature, nor is the intense self-conflict that arises from it. However, Goethe manifests Faust’s unhappiness and self-doubt in the form of the Devil himself, Mephistopheles. The flesh and blood manifestation of one’s “second self” is not only unnervingly personal for Faust but also serves as a medium for his moments of self-indulgence, choosing to use Mephisto as a tool for his own worldly gain. Even so, Faust is never truly satisfied with life throughout the story, permanently existing in a state of moral obscurity. His usage of Mephisto for his own personal gain feels deeply wrong but he cannot overcome his human desires, and in his worst moments, he would rather sacrifice the subject of his passion for his own satisfaction. Within part 1 of the play, Faust is never able to find that which he longs for. Faust’s story, emblematic of the striving individual versus their almost self-destructive ambition, is not unique – there exist many literary parallels that have been well researched and explored. However, in my paper, I would like to claim that there exists a modern, but imperfect and lighthearted, retelling of the Faust legend in Fullmetal Alchemist. Fullmetal Alchemist is a Japanese manga by Hiromu Arakawa serialized between 2001 and 2010 that addresses the consequences of a boy who attempts to harness the powers of God (called Truth in the story). He is simultaneously blessed and cursed with his own Mephisto – the power of alchemy and physical transmutation. The main difference between Fullmetal Alchemist and Faust is that the power of alchemy is not a physical manifestation of Edward’s self-conflict – rather, it’s an ability granted to him after his attempt to transgress upon the realm of Truth. In this world, the ability to transmute objects based on their composition is a power inherent in all alchemists. However, the cost of human transmutation is always horrifically high and will always result in catastrophic failure for the attempting alchemist. After attempting to bring his mother back to life, Edward loses an arm, a leg, and his brother (whose soul he must seal into a suit of armor), and is endowed with the “gift” of alchemy. Faust begins his arc despondent and cynical about his own life, lamenting the escape of joy from his life due to his scholarly nature. Edward begins his arc similarly, searching for a way to regain what he’s lost, but stuck at a seemingly impassable dead end. Both do not value shallow, hedonistic happiness, but both are also ambitious and hopeful that they will find value in their existence in the future. There seem to be further promising connections between the two to be explored.

Tentative Bibliography

Porter, Laurence M. “The Devil as Double in Nineteenth-Century Literature: Goethe, Dostoevsky, and Flaubert.” Comparative Literature Studies, vol. 15, no. 3, 1978, pp. 316–35. JSTOR, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/40245865. Accessed 24 Apr. 2024](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40245865.%20Accessed%2024%20Apr.%202024).

This source looks useful as it addresses the duality between Mephisto and Faust. In a very literal sense, it explores the dynamics between the corporeal devil and the ambitious individual, and how the two play off one another in various pieces of literature. While the “devil” I address in my paper is not at all corporeal, I believe that there is still usefulness to be gained from this source in that we may observe the consequences of having such a powerful being by your side, and one can observe its parallels with being able to harness such god-like power yourself

Merkel, Gottfried F. “Goethe’s Faust. Man or Superman?” The German Quarterly, vol. 23, no. 1, 1950, pp. 9–25. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/401100. Accessed 24 Apr. 2024.

This source talks about Faust himself, and his ideal of striving. I hope that this source will allow me to draw some direct comparison between Edward and Faust as men who are going through similar arcs of striving while vulnerable to the corruption of the power they have besides them. Faust falls a little deeper into exploiting his power than Edward, but the comparison should hopefully still hold.