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Subject: Drama for Second Year Students

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Allusions in Dr. Faustus

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Introduction

Allusions are indirect references to well-known people, events, texts, or cultural ideas. In *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe uses a wide range of classical, Biblical, historical, and mythological allusions to enrich the text, support themes, and reflect the intellectual world of the Renaissance. These allusions serve to:

- Show Faustus's intellectual range
- Reflect Renaissance humanism
- Emphasize moral and theological concerns
- Connect the play to wider cultural and literary traditions.

1. Classical and Mythological Allusions

These references connect Faustus to ancient Greece and Rome, showing his admiration for pagan knowledge and ideals—a key Renaissance feature.

a. Icarus

“His waxen wings did mount above his reach / And melting, heavens conspired his overthrow.”

— Prologue

- Allusion to: Icarus from Greek mythology, who flew too close to the sun with wings made of wax and fell.
- Meaning: Foreshadows Faustus's overreaching ambition and tragic fall. A central metaphor for hubris.

b. Helen of Troy

“Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?”

- Allusion to: Helen, whose beauty caused the Trojan War (from *The Iliad*).
- Meaning: Faustus seeks idealized beauty and pleasure, even at the cost of his soul. The illusion of Helen symbolizes empty desire.

c. Alexander the Great, Dido, Achilles

- Faustus conjures or references many classical figures.
- Purpose: Reflects his obsession with legendary greatness and illusion over reality.

2. Biblical and Christian Allusions

Since Doctor Faustus is a Christian morality play at its core, Marlowe uses Biblical references to highlight Faustus's sin, guilt, and potential for salvation.

a. Lucifer, Mephistopheles, and Hell

- Lucifer: Fallen angel; leader of the rebellion against God.
- Mephistopheles: A demon sent to serve Faustus.
- Hell: Described not as a place, but a state of eternal separation from God.

“Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.”

- Allusions to the fall of the angels, symbolizing Faustus's own rebellion.

b. The Fall of Man / Original Sin

- Faustus, like Adam, seeks forbidden knowledge and falls.
- His deal with Lucifer parallels Satan's temptation in the Garden of Eden.
- Allusion reinforces: Knowledge without obedience leads to damnation.

c. Christ and Salvation

- Faustus often refers to Christ's blood, asking if it is enough to save him:

“See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!”

- These moments show his inner spiritual struggle and the possibility of repentance, even though he fails to act on it.

3. Historical and Contemporary Allusions

Marlowe also refers to figures from history to show Faustus's desire for worldly power and fame.

a. Pope and Emperor

- Faustus performs tricks on the Pope and is entertained by Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor.

- Allusion to political and religious power of the time.
- Faustus's behavior mocks these institutions, suggesting his arrogance and lack of reverence.

b. Bruno (Antipope)

- A minor plot includes Faustus helping an alternative Pope, reflecting anti-Catholic sentiment in Elizabethan England.
- Reinforces Faustus's role in subverting religious order.

4. Literary and Philosophical Allusions

Faustus refers to major fields of knowledge: theology, medicine, law, astronomy, and magic.

“Be a physician, Faustus; heap up gold,
And be eternized for some wondrous cure.”

- These are allusions to Renaissance learning, showing Faustus's humanist education.
- Yet he rejects them all in favor of necromancy, showing the corruption of knowledge.