The Faust Figure’s Unattainable Utopia

Who is Dr. Faustus?
Faustus is an alchemist who relies on satanic knowledge and a fiend from hell to achieve his goals. To gain knowledge and power, he sells his soul to the devil.

How is Faust reimagined across three centuries?
In the late sixteenth-century, Marlowe’s Faust figure revels in his evil mischief where Shelley’s nineteenth-century adaptation expresses remorse for the pursuit of God-like power.

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This paper compares three manifestations of the Faust figure found within Christopher Marlowe’s The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Dr. Faustus (1592), Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe’s Faust (1808), and Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818) to explain why the Faust figure’s strictly individualized utopia will never reach fruition.

I argue that although Marlowe’s Faustus does not work to create a utopia, the later adaptations of the story that do attempt it are bound to the same failure of the original Faust figure. Therefore, Goethe’s Faust and Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein are doomed to the perpetual failure of their utopias because Marlowe’s model does not allow for success.

Why Faust’s utopia fails:

- Evil methods are used to attempt to appease the Faust figure’s desires.
- The Faust figure strives for a legacy for personal, selfish reasons.
- This utopia defies the religious order and is set in opposition to the defining characteristics of a utopia.