

Psychological Dimensions of Character Behavior in Goethe's *Faust* for Language and Literature Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Drama has long served as a powerful medium for representing human psychological struggle, and Goethe's *Faust* remains one of the most compelling explorations of desire, conflict, and moral ambiguity in world literature. Despite its global significance, limited research has examined the psychological dimensions of its characters through a literary psychology framework, particularly in the context of literature teaching. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the behavior of key characters in *Faust* using a qualitative descriptive method supported by content analysis. Data were collected from the play along with relevant theoretical sources, and were analyzed through reduction, categorization, and interpretation following literary psychological principles. The results reveal that Faust, Margaretha, Mephistopheles, and other characters embody complex psychological processes that reflect universal human conditions such as ambition, guilt, temptation, emotional vulnerability, and regression. Their conflicts illustrate the dynamic interaction between internal drives and external pressures, offering rich insight into the psychological realism represented in dramatic literature. The novelty of this study lies in its integration of psychological character analysis with pedagogical implications, particularly through the application of the Leslie Stratta approach for drama instruction. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how psychological interpretation can enrich literature teaching by promoting empathy, moral reflection, and critical awareness. In a broader context, these findings highlight the relevance of literary psychology for character education and for strengthening students' abilities to interpret human behavior through literary texts.

1. Introduction

Drama is an essential artistic medium that highlights human experience, emotion, and moral dilemmas. Waham notes that drama reflects human attitudes through concrete actions, enabling audiences to engage emotionally with stage conflicts (Waham, 2023). Characters are central to this process because they drive the narrative and embody the story's core conflicts (Kallenbach & Lawaetz, 2023). Accordingly, character analysis deepens thematic understanding by helping audiences connect with characters' struggles and motivations (Zulkarnain et al., 2024). In absurdist drama, themes such as loneliness and communication breakdown highlight internal conflict and the perceived futility of human connection, while role playing and improvisation, as discussed in drama-based pedagogy, can further intensify engagement and emotional involvement (Robinson & Crane, 2025).

The study of character becomes richer when characters are understood not only as narrative figures but also as psychological constructs. Stanton (1965) notes that the term character refers both to the person appearing in the story and to the attitudes, motivations, desires, emotions, and moral principles the person possesses. Nurgiyantoro (1994) reinforces that character and characterization form a unified whole, which means that the name of a character often brings immediate associations with the traits the character represents. Faust represents a restless seeker of knowledge, while Mephistopheles represents temptation and moral decay. Although fictional, dramatic characters often mirror real human struggles and moral dilemmas, offering sustained insight into universal dimensions of the human psyche and emotional life across cultures, contexts, generations, and lived experiences.

Goethe's *Faust. Der Tragödie erster Teil* offers a seminal exploration of inner conflict, existential anxiety, and moral ambiguity through Faust, a scholar tormented by dissatisfaction and an insatiable pursuit of ultimate truth. Schuhmann interprets Faust's contract with Mephistopheles as a pivotal moment in Western philosophical thinking, foregrounding the self-binding of an enlightened individual and the far-reaching implications of that choice (Schuhmann, 2025). These psychological tensions open a sustained inquiry into ambition, temptation, love, guilt, and despair, presenting a narrative that captures a universal human tragedy. At the same time, the work's translation and adaptation reveal strong intercultural resonance, as comparative readings show how its central concerns are rearticulated across diverse literary contexts (Güç, 2023). Taken together, *Faust* emerges not only as a literary landmark but also as a reflective lens on enduring human struggles and existential questions that continue to travel across cultures (Schuhmann, 2025; Güç, 2023).

Scholars have emphasized the psychological depth of Faust, noting that a psychological approach enables closer examination of behavioral motives, emotional tension, and inner conflict (Wahid, 2004). Literary psychology also positions literary works as expressions of the human soul and reflections of psychological processes, reinforcing the close intellectual relationship between literature and psychology because both center on human life (Endraswara, 2003; Tuloli, 2000; Jatman, 1985). Although *Faust* has often been studied through themes, symbolism, philosophy, or moral messages, fewer studies apply a structured psychological framework to analyze its characters in detail. Psychoanalytical readings further show that classic texts can embed complex psychological dimensions shaped by emotional conflict and unresolved trauma, and recent work stresses the importance of probing inner conflicts to clarify what drives characters' actions (Devi, 2023; Puspitasari et al., 2023).

Comprehensive analyses of Goethe's characters, especially in *Faust*, rarely integrate the three key literary psychology approaches, namely textual, receptive pragmatic, and expressive. Although *Faust* is widely recognized as influential, the connection between character psychology and literature education remains underdeveloped, despite drama's capacity to foster emotional development, ethical reflection, and social interaction through character analysis. Reception oriented perspectives help explain how readers' memories and emotions shape interpretations of motivation and conflict, yet Yanti et al. is not well aligned because it focuses on digital novel readers rather than classics like *Faust* (Yanti et al., 2022). Expressive syntax is relevant, but Shi's focus on literature limits its applicability to *Faust* (Shi, 2025). Psychological approaches help; references should better match *Faust*.

To address these gaps, the present study conducts a focused analysis of the characterization in Faust through the lens of literary psychology. The novelty of this research lies in its explicit combination of psychological theory, literary psychological methods, and educational implications. Unlike earlier studies that examine Faust primarily from thematic or philosophical perspectives, this study explores how psychological processes shape character behavior and how this understanding can be applied in literature teaching. The analysis includes the speech, actions, internal motives, emotional struggles, and symbolic roles of the main characters.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, this research advances the practical aims of literature teaching. Drama is especially effective in classroom settings because it allows students to observe characters, conflicts, and emotional transformations directly, and its integration into instruction can strengthen literacy development and student motivation (Pham & Long, 2024). The Leslie Stratta strategy, which emphasizes exploration, interpretation, and recreation, aligns with this approach by engaging learners with the psychological dimensions of drama while fostering critical thinking and emotional intelligence (Wardani & Adityo, 2021). Drama also supports language development alongside cultural awareness and sensitivity, which are increasingly important in diverse classrooms (Pham & Long, 2024). Accordingly, this study examines the psychological behaviors of characters in *Faust* and shows how these insights can enhance literature teaching practices (Pham & Long, 2024; Wardani & Adityo, 2021).

Finally, this introduction underscores that Faust's psychological complexity makes it a valuable text for literary psychological study. This research helps readers and students examine ambition, temptation, guilt, and the consequences of human choices while supporting literature education goals such as critical thinking, emotional sensitivity, and moral awareness. It also highlights the value of integrating literary and psychological perspectives to strengthen drama teaching and deepen literary appreciation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Characterization and the Rationale for a Literary Psychology Lens

Characterization is widely recognized as a core element in drama because it drives plot, conflict, and meaning through characters' choices and actions. Aminudin (1991:79) explains that events in literary works, as in everyday life, are carried out by specific actors, and these actors who weave the fictional story are called characters. This view supports a psychological approach to drama, grounded in the assumption that literature and psychology have an indirect and functional cross relationship through the representation of mental life in fictional form.

2.2 Psychological Frameworks for Interpreting Character Behavior in *Faust*

Psychoanalytic theory remains one of the most influential frameworks in literary studies, particularly after the wide dissemination of Sigmund Freud's works such as *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *Sexual Theory* (1905), and *The Case of Dorah* (1905). In *Faust*, psychoanalytic readings often interpret the protagonist's behavior as tension among id, ego, and superego, where the pursuit of pleasure and knowledge conflicts with moral restraint while the ego mediates imperfectly (Herman, 2007). Complementary perspectives broaden this account. Existential interpretation emphasizes freedom, responsibility, and authenticity, framing Faust and Gretchen as agents whose decisions shape identity rather than being fully determined by inner drives (Mamali, 2015). Humanistic interpretation highlights self-actualization as Faust's motivation to move beyond academic boundaries toward lived experience. Studies by Sadowski (2000) and Paris (1997) suggest that integrating psychoanalytic, existential, and humanistic perspectives yields a richer mapping of character behavior because it connects symbolism, moral choice, and personal growth in a single interpretive frame.

2.3 Ethical Conflict and Identity Transformation

Scholars also examine *Faust* as a site of moral and ethical conflict, showing that Faust is not only a seeker of knowledge but also a morally ambiguous subject who rationalizes ethically problematic actions, including the manipulation of Gretchen (Fei & Zhou, 2025; Rustum, 2022; Martín, 2025). Goethe's drama presents morality as a dynamic field of tension rather than a stable opposition between good and evil, with narrative moments such as the pact, social consequences of private actions, and the question of redemption functioning as ethical tests. Birhan et al. (2021) situate these dilemmas within tensions between Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic emotionalism. Feminist and postcolonial readings further show how patriarchal and hegemonic structures shape agency, moral perception, and power relations in the text (Huang et al., 2022; DeTienne et al., 2021; Obrenovic et al., 2025). Related work on transformation and identity formation emphasizes that development in *Faust* is progressive but not linear, moving through crises and reconstruction. Developmental psychology frames these shifts through coping, cognitive dissonance, and identification processes that may facilitate or obstruct change (Hasanah et al., 2023; Cornelissen et al., 2021). Comparative perspectives connect Faust's transformation to repentance motifs while noting Goethe's modernization through sustained ethical ambiguity and relatively open ended redemption (Seeliger & Sevignani, 2022). Despite their explanatory strength, these strands often remain

interpretive, with limited conversion into explicit pedagogical procedures for drama or literature teaching.

2.4 Pedagogical Scholarship and the Unresolved Need for a *Faust* Specific Model

Pedagogical research increasingly shows that character-based analysis can strengthen critical thinking, empathy, and emotional literacy when aligned with psychological frameworks such as motivation theory, Kohlberg's moral development, or Erikson's identity theory (Xu et al., 2022; Turetsky et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). At the same time, complex texts require scaffolding and cultural sensitivity to avoid misinterpretation and reductionist moral readings (Kamboj & Garg, 2021). Studies also highlight the value of multimodal, reflective, and dialogic approaches that combine discussion, performance, and writing for deeper engagement (Benoit & Gabola, 2021; Meng et al., 2025; Derakhshan et al., 2023). However, this work is generally broad in scope and rarely targets *Faust* or uses literary psychology as a systematic design principle for drama based instruction.

3. Method

This study adopts a qualitative method with a descriptive orientation. Bogdan and Biklen (1990:34) explain that qualitative research is descriptive, presenting data in words supported by quotations that substantiate interpretations. Moleong (1989:3) adds that qualitative methods produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken expressions and observed behavior. Consistent with these definitions, the present study interprets psychological elements and character behavior by grounding each interpretation in textual evidence from the drama *Faust*.

To examine the existence, development, and psychological dynamics of characters, this study applies observational principles that treat the drama as a naturally occurring textual world. As stated by Sarlito (1976:15 in Sukada, 1987:137), observation is anchored in naturally occurring situations rather than artificially constructed conditions. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on events, dialogues, and actions embedded in the script, treating verbal expression in dialogue and motoric or kinesthetic expression in movement as indicators of psychological states and conflicts.

The study employs content analysis. Moleong (1989:188) notes that content analysis is appropriate for library research because it enables systematic interpretation of documents, texts, and written data. Here, content analysis is framed as an interpretive procedure aligned with reception theory, which emphasizes the reader's role in meaning making, and hermeneutics, which focuses on careful reconstruction of textual meaning. Data are collected, classified, and described through close reading of the drama text and relevant supporting literature on psychological analysis.

3.1 Data and Data Sources

Data in this qualitative research consist primarily of spoken or written words that reflect behavior, as explained by Bogdan and Taylor (1998) and Miles and Huberman (1984). These data enable the researcher to trace the chronological flow of events in *Faust* and to identify psychological patterns, motives, and cause and effect relationships embedded in character behavior, including indications of mental conflict and character development.

The primary data source is the Indonesian translation of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's play *Faust*. Secondary sources include books, scientific journals, essays, and other documents relevant to characterization and literary psychology. Lofland and Lofland in Moleong (2004:157) note that secondary sources strengthen understanding by providing broader conceptual and theoretical perspectives that support interpretation.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through library research. First, the researcher compiled textual evidence from *Faust* through repeated close readings to identify scenes, events, dialogues, and character actions that explicitly or implicitly signal psychological issues. Second, the text was observed directly by documenting relevant behavioral evidence in context, linking each excerpt to its narrative situation to ensure that interpretations remained textually grounded.

Next, content analysis was conducted by identifying, categorizing, and interpreting the excerpts to evaluate their psychological relevance and coherence as representations of character behavior. The resulting categories were then aligned with the study's literary psychological orientation, enabling the findings to be presented systematically rather than as isolated impressions.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis follows Moleong's (2004:280) view that analysis involves organizing and sorting data into patterns, categories, and fundamental descriptive units before identifying themes and formulating working hypotheses. Accordingly, all notes, excerpts, and references were read repeatedly, compared across scenes, and interpreted based on their relevance to character psychology.

a. Data Reduction

Data from the drama text and reference materials were initially extensive. Reduction was conducted through selecting psychologically relevant excerpts, summarizing contextual information, and focusing attention on themes consistent with the research objectives, so the analysis remained concentrated on the most evidential indicators of character psychology.

b. Data Display

Reduced data were organized and displayed using computer tools to support pattern recognition, comparison across characters, and consistency checking across scenes. This step enabled the researcher to maintain analytic clarity and avoid being overwhelmed by unstructured excerpts.

c. Drawing Conclusions and Verification

Conclusions were developed iteratively. Initial interpretations were treated as tentative and were refined as additional textual evidence was examined. Verification was conducted continuously by rechecking the alignment between claims and textual facts, and by ensuring internal consistency across categories, themes, and narrative context.

3.4 Methodological Rigor

To strengthen credibility and transparency, the study maintained a clear audit trail of selected excerpts, category decisions, and interpretive notes. Repeated reading and constant comparison across scenes were used to confirm that interpretations were supported by consistent patterns in dialogue and action, not by isolated or decontextualized quotations.

4. Result

The analysis of Goethe's *Faust* reveals that human psychological struggle forms the central driving force of the drama. As indicated in the text, human beings inevitably face continuous problems that shape maturity and emotional resilience, and the characters in *Faust* reflect this condition vividly through recurring tension, despair, temptation, and moral conflict. The results show that the psychological burden experienced by *Faust* and other characters aligns with the theoretical claims of Freud, Jatman, Endraswara, and Tuloli, who emphasize that literary characters embody complex psychological realities that mirror real human experience.

Across the drama, crises repeatedly arise as characters attempt to negotiate personal desires, moral values, and external pressures. This finding supports the notion that literature is a psychological phenomenon because the conflicts and decisions represented in the characters are windows into the human mind and behavior.

4.1 Psychological Conflict and the Nature of Human Struggle

The qualitative descriptive analysis supported by content analysis reveals that psychological conflict is the primary force that drives the drama and shapes the behavior of its central figures. *Faust* in particular is portrayed as a human being whose intellect, emotions, and moral sense constantly collide, creating a pattern of restlessness, dissatisfaction, and self splitting that never fully resolves. Through systematic coding of key

speeches and dialogic exchanges, the data show that his inner struggle is not a single crisis but a continuous process that moves between yearning for transcendence and the painful recognition of human limits, and that this struggle radiates outward to affect other characters who become entangled in the consequences of his choices.

Faust's conflict first emerges as radical dissatisfaction with the life of the mind. In his opening monologue he declares:

*"I've studied now Philosophy
And Jurisprudence, Medicine,
And even, alas! Theology,
From end to end, with labor keen;
And here, poor fool! with all my lore
I stand, no wiser than before."* [E1]

This excerpt was coded as a cluster of intellectual exhaustion and existential frustration. It shows a character who has reached the top of academic achievement yet feels that all his learning has failed to provide inner orientation. The contrast between exhaustive study and the admission that he is "no wiser than before" exposes a gap between external status and internal emptiness. Qualitatively, this finding indicates that Faust's psychological conflict arises not from ignorance but from the perception that knowledge is powerless to fill the void at the center of his life. The analysis then highlights a deeper layer of conflict when Faust describes himself as divided between incompatible urges. In a later scene he confesses:

*"One impulse art thou conscious of, at best;
O, never seek to know the other!
Two souls, alas! reside within my breast,
And each withdraws from, and repels, its brother.
One with tenacious organs holds in love
And clinging lust the world in its embraces;"* [E2]

This excerpt was coded as an explicit statement of inner duality. Faust describes two souls in his breast that pull in opposite directions, one clinging to the world and the other striving beyond it. The metaphor of mutual repulsion captures the experience of being torn between earthly attachment and spiritual aspiration. Conceptually, this supports the finding that his psychological struggle is structured as a conflict of identities rather than a simple moral choice, since each "soul" claims legitimacy within the same person.

An important external perspective on this conflict comes from Mephistopheles, who reads Faust's unrest with a mixture of irony and precision:

*"Forsooth! He serves you after strange devices:
No earthly meat or drink the fool suffices:
His spirit's ferment far aspireth;
Half conscious of his frenzied, crazed unrest,
The fairest stars from Heaven he requireth,
From Earth the highest raptures and the best,*

*And all the Near and Far that he desireth
Fails to subdue the tumult of his breast."* [E3]

This passage was coded as an external diagnostic description of Faust's psyche. Mephistopheles notes that ordinary satisfactions can no longer reach him and that his "spirit's ferment" aims at impossible extremes. The phrase "half conscious" is central here, since it implies partial awareness of his own unrest. In interpretive terms, this partial insight makes Faust both responsible for and vulnerable within his conflict, and it also explains why he is so susceptible to manipulation. The data therefore suggest that psychological struggle in the play is not only internal but also social and relational, because other figures observe, interpret, and exploit it.

The ripple effects of Faust's turmoil are most visible in Gretchen, whose language marks the collapse of emotional stability under the pressure of intense attachment and moral crisis. Alone at her spinning wheel she laments:

*"My peace is gone,
My heart is sore:
I never shall find it,
Ah, nevermore!
Save I have him near.
The grave is here;
The world is gall
And bitterness all.
My poor weak head
Is racked and crazed;
My thought is lost,
My senses mazed."* [E4]

This excerpt was coded as evidence of anxiety, obsessive focus, and cognitive disorientation. The repetition of "My peace is gone" and the description of a "racked and crazed" head show how love, once entangled with deception and transgression, becomes a source of profound mental distress.

From a qualitative standpoint, Gretchen's experience demonstrates that Faust's unresolved inner struggle does not remain private. It spills into the life of another, who lacks his intellectual defenses and thus experiences the conflict as pure suffering. Her voice turns the abstract theme of human struggle into an embodied, gendered experience of heartbreak, shame, and fear.

Faust himself eventually recognizes the destructive direction of his life, yet this awareness does not free him from the drive toward ruin. In one of his most revealing self descriptions he admits:

*"I am the fugitive, all houseless roaming,
The monster without air or rest,
That like a cataract, down rocks and gorges
foaming,
Leaps, maddened, into the abyss's breast!"* [E5]

This excerpt was coded as a convergence of self loathing and irresistible impulse. Faust names himself a “monster” and imagines his existence as an uncontrollable plunge into an abyss, which conveys both guilt and inevitability. Qualitatively, this image confirms that his psychological struggle has reached a point where insight coexists with helplessness. He sees what he has become yet continues to move toward further destruction, which aligns with a pattern of conflict where acknowledgment of wrongdoing does not automatically produce change.

Taken together, the tagged excerpts [E1]–[E5] show a consistent pattern in which psychological conflict is articulated from multiple angles: Faust’s own voice, Mephistopheles’ ironic commentary, and Gretchen’s suffering all contribute different layers of data that enrich the picture of human struggle in the drama. The qualitative descriptive reading, supported by content analysis, suggests that the play presents human beings as divided, restless, and often overwhelmed by the very desires that define them. The nature of their struggle is not simply to choose between good and evil, but to live with the tension between aspiration and limitation, knowledge and emptiness, love and destruction, while bearing the consequences of choices that can neither be fully controlled nor undone.

4.2 Power, Desire, and the Contest of Control

The qualitative descriptive analysis, supported by content analysis, shows that power and desire in the drama operate on two intertwined levels: an inner contest within the self and an external struggle among higher forces that compete for influence over human life. Internally, Faust’s ambition pushes against his fragile moral boundaries, while externally he becomes the object of a wager and a contract that place his soul at the center of a cosmic negotiation. The data indicate that control in the drama is never absolute; instead, it shifts and circulates among God, Mephistopheles, Faust, and those around him, with desire functioning as the main instrument that redistributes power from one figure to another.

At the highest level, the wager in the heavenly scene frames Faust as a contested subject within a struggle for spiritual authority. The Lord and Mephistopheles do not merely challenge one another, but also debate Faust’s nature, moral capacity, and ultimate destiny, positioning him as the central stake in their opposing claims:

*“What will you bet? There’s still a chance to gain him,
If unto me full leave you give,
Gently upon my road to train him!”* [E6]

*“As long as he on earth shall live,
So long I make no prohibition.
While Man’s desires and aspirations stir,
He cannot choose but err.”* [E7]

These excerpts were coded as a foundational representation of power relations. Mephistopheles asks for permission to “train” Faust, implying a pedagogy of corruption, while the Lord accepts the risk on the assumption that human aspiration, though prone to error, still carries an intrinsic tendency toward the right path. From an interpretive standpoint, this scene frames the entire plot as a contest of control in which Faust is both agent and object; his own desires become the medium through which higher powers test and assert their influence.

On the human level, power shifts more explicitly once Faust enters into a compact with Mephistopheles. In their negotiation, Faust brusquely rejects moral instruction and asserts his claim to gratification:

*“Most Worthy Pedagogue, take heed!
Let not a word of moral law be spoken!
I claim, I tell thee, all my right;
And if that image of delight
Rest not within mine arms to-night,
At midnight is our compact broken.”* [E8]

This excerpt was coded as a clear articulation of desire as a condition for continued alliance. Faust demands that his “right” be understood as the immediate possession of Gretchen, threatening to terminate the pact if his wish is not fulfilled. Qualitatively, this shows how power and control are negotiated through desire: Faust appears to speak from a position of authority, yet he has already bound himself to a contract that places his fate in Mephistopheles’ hands. The data suggest that the more he insists on his rights, the more he reveals his dependence on the very force he tries to command.

Mephistopheles crafts control by promising Faust sensory pleasure and distraction. Although he offers to serve, he does so on terms that let him steer Faust’s experiences and keep him focused on immediate gratification rather than moral reflection throughout the unfolding drama and its consequences:

*“An’t please thee, also I’m content to stay,
And serve thee in a social station;
But stipulating, that I may
With arts of mine afford thee recreation.
My friend, thou’lt win, past all pretences,
More in this hour to soothe thy senses,
Than in the year’s monotony.”* [E9]

This excerpt was coded as an instance of seductive power, where service is a mask for domination. Mephistopheles offers “recreation” as a reward, yet the promise to “soothe thy senses” reveals a calculated attempt to manage Faust’s attention and weaken his capacity for critical reflection. Desire for novelty and pleasure becomes the channel through which control is exercised; instead of coercion, the devil uses gratification to steer Faust into situations that fulfill the pact on Mephistopheles’ terms.

The findings also highlight how the environment and material objects participate in this contest of control, especially in Gretchen's storyline. The jewel casket episode illustrates how social space marked by wealth and seduction can redirect a character's moral orientation:

*"How comes that lovely casket here to me?
I locked the press, most certainly.
'Tis truly wonderful! What can within it be? ...
Rich ornaments, such as a noble dame
On highest holidays might wear!
How would the pearl-chain suit my hair?
Ah, who may all this splendor own?"* [E10]

*"On gold depends
All, all! Alas, we poor!"* [E11]

These excerpts were coded as evidence of how external stimuli and socio economic inequality shape desire and vulnerability. Gretchen's wonder at the jewels blends admiration with a sudden awareness of her own poverty and social position. The line "On gold depends / All, all!" generalizes this perception into a broader recognition that value and status seem to hinge on material wealth. In interpretive terms, the jewel casket is not a neutral gift; it is an instrument through which Mephistopheles manipulates Gretchen's sense of self and subtly shifts her moral compass toward an alluring but dangerous world.

Overall, the tagged excerpts [E6]–[E11] indicate that power in the drama is never static. It moves from the divine realm to the infernal, from the supernatural to the social, and from public negotiation to private desire. Faust's internal ambition, Mephistopheles' calculated temptations, and Gretchen's attraction to symbols of wealth all demonstrate how environment and relationship shape the direction of human will. The qualitative descriptive analysis supported by content analysis thus concludes that power, desire, and control form an intricate web in which characters continually negotiate their positions, sometimes asserting their agency, sometimes surrendering it, and often discovering that the pursuit of power over others leads to the loss of control over themselves.

4.4 Transformation, Regression, and Mental Decline

The qualitative descriptive analysis supported by content analysis reveals a clear trajectory of psychological regression in Faust. He moves from a highly esteemed scholar who trusts his intellect, to a figure who increasingly surrenders agency to external forces and loses the ability to regulate his own impulses, emotions, and moral judgement. Earlier transformations such as the turn from scholarship to magic and the pact with Mephistopheles mark the beginning of this descent, but the later scenes show a more advanced form of regression in which he oscillates between frantic self accusation, helpless dependency, and emotional paralysis.

A first key indicator of this decline appears when, after the Walpurgis celebration, Faust confronts the consequences of his actions in relation to Gretchen. In the "Dreary Day" scene he cries:

*"In misery! In despair! Long wretchedly astray
on the face of the earth, and now imprisoned!
That gracious, ill-starred creature shut in a
dungeon as a criminal, and given up to fearful
torments! To this has it come! to this!"* [E12]

This excerpt was coded as a cluster of despair, belated moral insight, and loss of internal control. Faust now sees the causal chain that links his pact and desires to Gretchen's imprisonment, yet the repetition of "misery" and "despair" suggests that he experiences himself more as a victim of fate than as an agent capable of repair. Qualitatively, this supports the interpretation that his transformation is regressive: instead of integrating responsibility into a stable self, he collapses into anguished lamentation that does not yet translate into coherent action.

The degree of regression becomes even clearer when Faust approaches the dungeon. Confronted with Gretchen's confinement, he is overwhelmed by an almost physical sense of accumulated guilt and suffering:

*"A shudder, long unfelt, comes o'er me;
Mankind's collected woe o'erwhelms me, here.
She dwells within the dark, damp walls before
me,
And all her crime was a delusion dear!"* [E13]

This excerpt was coded as an index of emotional overload and moral belatedness. The phrase "Mankind's collected woe" shows that his empathy has expanded, but it also signals a grandiose and diffuse sense of burden that easily becomes unmanageable. He recognizes that Gretchen's "crime" grew out of an illusion that he himself helped to create, yet his response is dominated by shuddering and dread. In content-analytic terms, this reflects a regressive pattern in which the ego fails to mediate between guilt, fear, and the need for decisive action.

Faust's earlier enthusiasm at Walpurgis Night provides a sharp contrast to this later paralysis. There, surrounded by witches and revelry, he exclaims:

*"Let me not lose myself in all this pother!
This is a fair, as never was another!"* [E14]

This excerpt was coded as evidence of temporary euphoria and dissociative escape. He actively wishes to "lose" himself in the carnival atmosphere, embracing a sensory and social environment that distracts him from the moral implications of his conduct. Read alongside [E12] and [E13], this moment shows the oscillation that characterizes his decline. At one point he abandons reflection in favour of immersion in pleasure; at another he is crushed by the return of reality. The contrast supports the finding that his transformation is

not a linear path toward enlightenment, but a back and forth movement between indulgence and crisis that gradually weakens his psychological stability.

The most condensed sign of mental breakdown appears in his short, desperate question inside the dungeon:

"Shall I outlive this misery?" [E15]

This excerpt was coded as a fusion of self-reproach, exhaustion, and latent wish for self-annihilation. The question does not only ask whether he can survive Gretchen's suffering; it implicitly asks whether he deserves to. At this point Faust has moved far from his initial position as confident thinker and experimenter. He no longer directs events through intellect or will, but reacts in fragmented, emotionally overloaded ways to a reality that feels out of control. Taken together, the tagged excerpts [E12]–[E15] show a clear pattern of regression in which Faust's identity disintegrates under the weight of his own choices, leading to a mental decline marked by despair, oscillation, and an increasingly fragile sense of self.

4.5 Secondary Characters and Expanded Psychological Tension

The qualitative descriptive reading, supported by content analysis, shows that the secondary characters, especially Margaretha and Mephistopheles, intensify and complicate the psychological landscape of the drama. Margaretha embodies the cumulative impact of seduction, social judgement, and internalized guilt, while Mephistopheles functions as an externalized voice for Faust's more destructive wishes and rationalizations. Together, they extend the psychological conflict beyond Faust's inner life and transform it into a shared, multi layered tension that affects individual minds and social relations at the same time.

Margaretha's scenes in the dungeon offer the most striking portrayal of psychological disintegration. When Faust arrives, he first hears her singing, a fragile expression that signals both emotional fracture and the lingering struggle to make sense of her suffering:

*"My mother, the harlot,
Who put me to death;
My father, the varlet,
Who eaten me hath!
Little sister, so good,
Laid my bones in the wood,
In the damp moss and clay:
Then was I a beautiful bird o' the wood;
Fly away! Fly away!"* [E16]

This excerpt was coded as evidence of hallucination, symbolic displacement, and fragmented self-perception. Gretchen reimagines herself through a macabre folk song in which her family destroys and buries her body, yet she also imagines a transformation into a "beautiful bird". In interpretive terms, this

mixture of horror and fantasy shows how trauma and guilt are being processed in a childlike, story shaped form rather than through coherent reasoning, which indicates advanced psychological breakdown.

Her speech then turns to the child she has killed, and the analysis records a further deepening of this collapse:

*"Now am I wholly in thy might.
But let me suckle, first, my baby!
I blissed it all this livelong night;
They took 't away, to vex me, maybe,
And now they say I killed the child outright.
And never shall I be glad again."* [E17]

This excerpt was coded as an intense cluster of denial, partial recognition, and unbearable remorse. She simultaneously speaks as if the child were still present to be nursed and as if she has already accepted the accusation of murder. The oscillation between nurturing impulse and acknowledgement of killing reveals a mind that cannot hold both realities together in a stable way. Qualitatively, this supports the interpretation that Gretchen's psychological breakdown is neither purely imposed from outside nor purely self-generated, but the result of repeated collisions between social condemnation, inner love, and overwhelming guilt.

Her later confession to Faust makes this collision even more explicit:

*"My mother have I put to death;
I've drowned the baby born to thee.
Was it not given to thee and me?
...
Thy dear, dear hand! But, ah, 'tis wet!
Why, wipe it off! Methinks that yet
There's blood thereon.
Ah, God! what hast thou done?"* [E18]

This excerpt was coded as an articulation of shared culpability and transferred accusation. Gretchen names her acts plainly, but the sudden shift to the image of blood on Faust's hand shows that she perceives her crimes as inseparable from his influence. In content analytic terms, the passage demonstrates how secondary characters do not simply mirror Faust's inner world; they carry and reflect parts of his guilt back to him, thereby expanding the psychological tension across multiple subjectivities. Her request that he outlive them and tend their graves further underlines the extent to which she accepts punishment while also demanding that he bear the ongoing burden of remembrance.

Mephistopheles, by contrast, intensifies the drama's psychological tension through cold detachment and a sharp, mocking rationality that constantly exposes Faust's contradictions. In the same "Dreary Day" scene where Faust is overwhelmed, Mephistopheles responds:

“Why didst thou enter into fellowship with us, if thou canst not carry it out? Wilt fly, and art not secure against dizziness? Did we thrust ourselves upon thee, or thou thyself upon us?” [E19]

This excerpt was coded as the voice of instrumental logic and disavowed desire. Mephistopheles refuses Faust’s moral outcry and instead reminds him that the pact and its consequences are the result of his own earlier wish to “fly”. Psychologically, this speech functions like an externalized part of Faust’s own reasoning that seeks to sidestep responsibility by reframing everything as a freely chosen contract. In qualitative interpretation, Mephistopheles embodies those aspects of Faust that are willing to treat people and events as means to an end, thus personifying the drive for pleasure, mastery, and escape from constraint that Faust can no longer acknowledge directly.

Taken together, the tagged excerpts [E16]–[E19] demonstrate that the secondary characters do not merely support the plot; they are central to the play’s exploration of psychological tension. Margaretha makes visible the human cost of Faust’s decisions through her emotional devastation, fragmented perception, and acceptance of punishment, while Mephistopheles voices and enacts the cold, calculating side of Faust’s desires. Through their interactions with Faust and with each other, the drama presents a complex network of minds that suffer, rationalize, accuse, and collapse, revealing that inner conflict in this text is always distributed across a wider field of relationships, symbols, and social forces.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study show that the characters in Goethe’s *Faust* embody complex psychological dynamics that mirror universal human struggles. Faust, Margaretha, Mephistopheles, and other figures are not merely narrative agents but psychological constructs whose motives, emotions, and moral dilemmas reflect the inner life of real individuals, in line with the view that literary works express the human soul and its psychological processes (Endraswara, 2003; Tuloli, 2000; Jatman, 1985). The recurring tensions experienced by these characters illustrate how unresolved problems and accumulating pressures create fear, guilt, and emotional imbalance, confirming the argument that a psychological approach allows deeper examination of behavioral motives and inner conflicts in literature (Wahid, 2004).

Thus, Faust’s interpretive framework shows how literature and psychology converge on core human questions such as lived experience, conflict, and the search for meaning (Podungge et al., 2023; Ellemers et al., 2019; Syamsidar et al., 2023). Recent scholarship extends this synthesis by treating literary texts as sites of psychological inquiry and by using psychological concepts to clarify narrative processes (Podungge et al.,

2023; Syamsidar et al., 2023). Literary psychology as an interdisciplinary field analyzes character psyche, motivation, and affect within narrative form, including studies of cinematic and literary figures (Podungge et al., 2023; Syamsidar et al., 2023). Morality and value judgments in narrative worlds are explored through social psychological perspectives (Ellemers et al., 2019), while ecocritical readings highlight human–environment relations grounded in psychological and ethical concerns (Paradiba et al., 2024). Oral literature traditions, in turn, reveal communal meanings and spiritualities that support psychosocial well being (Ngarifah et al., 2023). Together, these strands confirm that literature and psychology jointly illuminate human life, conflict, and meaning across genres and contexts (Podungge et al., 2023; Ellemers et al., 2019; Paradiba et al., 2024; Ngarifah et al., 2023).

The analysis further confirms that the tragedy in *Faust* is driven by inner conflict and the consequences of unchecked desire. Faust’s transformation from an accomplished scholar into a restless seeker of limitless experience is portrayed as a psychological journey marked by ambition, temptation, and moral ambiguity. This pattern resonates with Baumann and Oberle’s portrayal of Faust as a striving yet erring figure whose pact with Mephistopheles leads to downfall for himself and for Gretchen (Baumann & Oberle, 1990) and with Goethe’s own dramatization of a character tormented by dissatisfaction and thirst for ultimate truth (Goethe, 1989). From the perspective of characterization, Faust and the surrounding figures exemplify Stanton’s and Nurgiyantoro’s conception of characters as unified configurations of attitudes, motivations, and moral principles that carry and shape the narrative (Stanton, 1965; Nurgiyantoro, 1994). Their choices make visible how internal drives and external pressures collide, producing actions that appear inconsistent, excessive, or morally compromised.

These findings also align with the understanding of drama presented in the Introduction as a medium that represents human will and behavior through concrete action (Hasanuddin, 2009). The conflicts and crises depicted in *Faust* exemplify how drama invites audiences and readers to observe, interpret, and emotionally engage with psychological struggle. As Matzkowski emphasizes, characters move the storyline, unfold conflicts, and mediate the relationship between text and audience (Matzkowski, 1997), a function clearly visible when Faust’s internal turmoil, Gretchen’s emotional collapse, and Mephistopheles’s manipulative strategies continually push the plot forward. This supports the view that literature may be treated as a psychological phenomenon, since the mental life of characters can be inferred from actions, speech, and symbolic roles (Jatman, 1985; Endraswara, 2003).

At the same time, the results reveal several gaps that situate this study within the existing body of research. The Introduction already notes that most

previous studies on Faust have emphasized thematic, symbolic, or philosophical aspects rather than systematically mapping character behavior through an integrated literary psychology framework (Wahid, 2004; Endraswara, 2003; Tuloli, 2000).

Research on character behavior in Goethe's *Faust* and its pedagogical implications in the local context remains limited. This study addresses that gap, although it focuses only on Part I and relies on an Indonesian translation, which may not capture key nuances of the original German text. This constraint points to the value of comparative work across translations and interpretations, alongside ethical, cultural, and sociological perspectives within literary psychology. Evidence also suggests that comprehensive methodological strategies in literature pedagogy can support psychological readiness in educational settings (Shamsidinovna, 2025; Anjura et al., 2024), and that multidisciplinary approaches may deepen insights into character development and moral education (Token et al., 2025; Banggor et al., 2024). Future interdisciplinary research could therefore strengthen both scholarship and teaching practice.

Nevertheless, the study offers clear novelty by operationalizing literary psychology into concrete analytical categories for the main characters in Faust and by directly linking these findings to literature teaching. Unlike earlier discussions that treat literary psychology mainly as abstract theory, this research shows how psychological conflict, regression, desire, and moral struggle can be translated into pedagogical activities. The integration of character analysis with the Leslie Stratta strategy developed by Wardani, which emphasizes exploration, interpretation, and recreation, exemplifies how drama can be used to foster empathy, moral reflection, and critical awareness in the classroom (Wardani, 1981; Hasanuddin, 2009). Students are encouraged not only to follow the plot but also to recognize the psychological roots of decisions, to reflect on the consequences of human choices, and to connect literary situations with their own experiences and values.

The implications of these findings extend to both literary scholarship and educational practice. Conceptually, the study strengthens the bridge between literature and psychology by demonstrating that psychological interpretation of character behavior can deepen the understanding of dramatic texts (Endraswara, 2003; Tuloli, 2000). Methodologically, it shows that qualitative descriptive analysis supported by content analysis is effective for uncovering layers of mental conflict and symbolic meaning in drama. Pedagogically, the study confirms the claim in the Introduction that drama is particularly useful for helping students grasp emotional development, ethical dilemmas, and social interaction through character study (Hasanuddin, 2009; Wahid, 2004). Future research can build on this work by comparing Faust with other tragedies that present similar psychological

patterns, examining how different translations affect the representation of mental states, and exploring the impact of character based psychological instruction on students' emotional intelligence and moral sensitivity. Studies that link literary psychology to specific classroom interventions, assessment tasks, and curriculum designs would further clarify how drama like Faust can support character education and holistic language and literature learning.

6. Conclusions

The findings of this study demonstrate that Goethe's *Faust* offers a rich landscape of psychological complexity in which characters embody deep internal conflict, emotional turbulence, and moral ambiguity that reflect universal human struggles. Through literary psychological analysis, the study reveals that Faust's transformation from an ambitious scholar into a conflicted individual illustrates the interplay between desire, conscience, and external temptation, while the experiences of Margaretha, Valentine, and Mephistopheles reinforce the drama's multidimensional exploration of human behavior. The novelty of the study lies in its integrated use of literary psychology and qualitative descriptive analysis supported by content analysis to map specific patterns of behavior in *Faust*, and in its explicit connection of those patterns to practical drama based teaching through exploration, interpretation, and recreation activities. This approach contributes to literature scholarship by demonstrating how psychological categories can deepen character interpretation, and it contributes to pedagogy by offering a structured model that uses drama to foster empathy, critical reflection, and moral reasoning in language and literature classrooms.

Future research could expand this work by applying similar analytical and pedagogical frameworks to other tragic dramas or narrative genres from different cultural and religious backgrounds, by incorporating alternative psychological perspectives such as feminist, cognitive, or trauma informed approaches, and by conducting empirical classroom studies that measure the impact of literary psychological activities on students' interpretive skills, emotional intelligence, and character development.

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