1. Would you call the character of Dr. Faustus ‘heroic’? Give reasons for your answer.

Ans: Faustus is the protagonist and tragic hero of Marlowe’s play. He is a contradictory character, capable of tremendous eloquence and possessing awesome ambition, yet prone to a strange, almost willful blindness and a willingness to waste powers that he has gained at great cost. When we first meet Faustus, he is just preparing to embark on his career as a magician, and while we already anticipate that things will turn out badly (the Chorus’s introduction, if nothing else, prepares us), there is nonetheless a grandeur to Faustus as he contemplates all the marvels that his magical powers will produce. He imagines piling up wealth from the four corners of the globe, reshaping the map of Europe (both politically and physically), and gaining access to every scrap of knowledge about the universe. He is an arrogant, self-aggrandizing man, but his ambitions are so grand that we cannot help being impressed, and we even feel sympathetic toward him. He represents the spirit of the Renaissance, with its rejection of the medieval, God-centered universe, and its embrace of human possibility. Faustus, at least early on in his acquisition of magic, is the personification of possibility. But Faustus also possesses an obstinacy that becomes apparent during his bargaining sessions with Mephostophilis. Having decided that a pact with the devil is the only way to fulfill his ambitions, Faustus then-blind himself happily to what such a pact actually means. Sometimes he tells himself that hell is not so bad and that one needs only “fortitude”; at other times, even while conversing with Mephostophilis, he remarks to the disbeliefing demon that he does not actually believe hell exists. Meanwhile, despite his lack of concern about the prospect of eternal damnation, Faustus is also beset with doubts from the beginning, setting a pattern for the play in which he repeatedly approaches repentance only to pull back at the last moment. Why he fails to repent is unclear—sometimes it seems a matter of pride and continuing ambition, sometimes a conviction that God will not hear his plea. Other times, it seems that Mephostophilis simply bullies him away from repenting.

Bullying Faustus is less difficult than it might seem, because Marlowe, after setting his protagonist up as a grandly tragic figure of sweeping visions and immense ambitions, spends the middle scenes revealing Faustus’s true, petty nature. Once Faustus gains his long-desired powers, he does not know what to do with them. Marlowe suggests that this uncertainty stems, in part, from the fact that desire for knowledge leads inexorably toward God, whom Faustus has renounced. But, more generally, absolute power corrupts Faustus: once he can do everything, he no longer wants to do anything. Instead, he traipses around Europe, playing tricks on yokels and performing conjuring acts to impress various heads of state. He uses his incredible gifts for what is essentially trifling entertainment. The fields of possibility narrow gradually, as he visits ever more minor nobles and performs ever more unimportant magic tricks, until the Faustus of the first few scenes is entirely swallowed up in mediocrity. Only in the final scene is Faustus rescued from mediocrity, as the knowledge of his impending doom restores his earlier gift of powerful rhetoric, and he regains his sweeping sense of vision. Now, however, the vision that he sees is of hell looming up to swallow him. Marlowe uses much of his finest poetry to describe Faustus’s final hours, during which Faustus’s desire for repentance finally wins out, although too late. Still, Faustus is restored to his earlier grandeur in his closing speech, with its hurried rush from idea to idea and its despairing Renaissance renouncing last line, “I’ll burn my books!” He becomes once again a tragic hero, a great man undone because his ambitions have butted up against the law of God.

2. Discuss the play within the play in A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

Ans: In Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Bottom and the other mechanicals (tradesmen) go to the forest to avoid scrutiny to practice the play that they will present as part of the celebration for the wedding of Theseus, Duke of Athens, to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons. Their play is to be called The Most lamentable comedy and the most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe. Before they go into the woods, the tradesmen, who fancy themselves great wits and actors, discuss the play. Bottom, the weaver, says that he will play the lover Pyramus, who dies; he believes that he will be so good that the audience will cry. Flute, the bellows mender, who has been assigned the role of Thisbe, wonders how he will play a woman when he is growing a beard. Quince, the carpenter and director, tells him he will have a mask. Snug, the joiner, plays the lion and worries that he will not roar. He tells the troupe to memorize their lines by the next evening when he will meet them all in “the palace of the woods, sleeping, the tradesmen arrive and comically dispute their roles among themselves with Bottom telling Quince he will need two Prologues so that the ladies will not be frightened by the sword scene or the lion. The logistics of having a wall through which Pyramus and Thisbe can talk and of the moonlight are discussed. At this point, Puck enters to distract the men and to protect his queen.

3. What is the importance of Hamlet’s soliloquies in the play?

Ans: Shakespeare often has his characters speak in soliloquies during the course of his plays. Soliloquies are essential to the presentation of a story through the medium of a play because they provide the opportunity the chance to tell the audience specific