# Doctor Faustus

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

Born the same year as Shakespeare to a shoemaker and his wife, Marlowe attended Corpus Christi College at Cambridge on scholarship. He received his Bachelor of Arts in 1584 and his Master of Arts three years later, despite a controversy which almost robbed him of the Masters because of accusations that he converted to Catholicism, which it was illegal to practice in 16th century England. His first play performed on the London stage, *Tamburlaine*, was among the first English plays written in blank verse. Marlowe's plays were enormously popular, but his career was cut short by his death in 1593 – an event about which little is known for certain but much is rumored; he is said to have been a secret agent, and his death by stabbing (in the eye!) in some kind of bar fight may in fact have had more sinister or even political underpinnings. He is now considered one of England's most important playwrights, second in his time period to only William Shakespeare.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The play can be seen in terms of a variety of cultural changes occurring during the Renaissance, especially the newfound stress laid on the power and ability of the individual (as opposed to an overarching stress on religious obedience and piety). Conflict between the Protestant English church and Roman Catholicism doubtlessly influences the play's unflattering portrayal of the pope. At the time the play was being performed, Calvinism was on the rise within the Church of England but remained a source of controversy. According to Calvinism, people's status as either saved or damned was predestined. Readers and scholars have continually debated the stance Marlowe's play takes towards the Cavlinist doctrine of predestination: is Faustus fated to fall to hell?

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Marlowe likely learned of the Doctor Faustus story from *Historia von D. Iohan Fausten*, an anonymous volume in German from 1587, an English translation of which was published in 1592. Marlowe adds his own touches to the story to create an original tragedy. The story of Faustus and the general motif of a Faustian bargain (giving up one's soul for limitless knowledge or power) reappear frequently in modern literary, artistic, and folk traditions.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*
- **When Written:** Unknown. Possibly around 1592, when the English translation of a German version of the story is known to have surfaced.
- **Where Written:** Unknown.
- **When Published:** 1604 (A-text) and 1616 (B-text). Scholars debate the authenticity and relative merits of these two versions of Marlowe's play that survive.
- **Literary Period:** English Renaissance
- **Genre:** Elizabethan Tragedy
- **Setting:** Wittenberg, Germany; Rome, at the pope's court; the court of emperor Charles V.
- **Climax:** Scene 13. With tension mounting, the hour of Faustus's death and damnation draws near. His cries of regret for having sold his soul to Lucifer and his pleas for more time are unsuccessful, and devils drag him away to Hell.
- **Antagonist:** As is the case with any good tragic hero, Faustus is arguably his own antagonist. He certainly acts as a bad influence on his friends and acquaintances (like his servant Wagner) and with petty villainy towards his enemies (like the knight at Charles V's court). Ultimately, though, the title of antagonist should probably go to Lucifer. Not only does he claim Faustus' soul, but also, as the devil himself, he is ostensibly *everyone's* antagonist.

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Fake Beards, Real Fear.** The Puritan William Prynne reported that at a 17th century performance of *Doctor Faustus*, upon the apparition of the devil on the stage, the actors themselves broke character and fell to prayer in fear.

**Celeb Gossip.** Much of the popularity of Marlowe's play can be attributed to his star actor Edward Alleyn, who performed the title role in three of Marlowe's plays during his lifetime, and for whom the part of Faustus was written. Ben Affleck plays Alleyn in the movie *Shakespeare in Love*.

## PLOT SUMMARY

Doctor Faustus is a scholar living in Wittenberg, Germany. Feeling that he has reached the ends of all traditional studies, he decides to pursue magic, and has his servant Wagner bring him Valdes and Cornelius, two men who can teach him how to perform magic incantations. Two **angels** (a Good Angel and an Evil Angel) appear. The Good Angel tries to convince Faustus not to pursue unholy magic, but the Evil Angel encourages him

to delve into sorcery. Valdes and Cornelius give Faustus spell-books and Faustus is excited to begin casting spells and summoning spirits.

Two scholars, who know of Faustus for his reputation as a scholar, wonder what he is up to and, running into Wagner, ask him. Wagner tells them that Faustus is with Valdes and Cornelius, and the two scholars lament Faustus' interest in magic.

Faustus begins conjuring, and summons up a devil named Mephastophilis. Faustus orders Mephastophilis to do his bidding, but Mephastophilis informs him that he can do nothing that is not commanded by Lucifer. Faustus asks him questions about hell and its devils, and then tells Mephastophilis to bring an offer to Lucifer: he will give his soul to Lucifer, on the condition that he gets 24 years of unlimited power and knowledge, with Mephastophilis as his willing servant. Mephastophilis goes to Lucifer, and Faustus thinks that he has made a good deal.

Meanwhile, Wagner finds a clown and persuades him to be his servant, promising to teach him some magic in return. In his study, Faustus begins to hesitate about the deal he has proposed with Lucifer. As he debates repenting and turning back to God, the two **angels** appear again and try to persuade Faustus in their respective directions. Faustus renews his resolve to give his soul to Lucifer.

Mephastophilis returns and Faustus questions him about hell before officially agreeing to his deal with Lucifer. Mephastophilis demands that Faustus certify the agreement with a deed of gift written in Faustus' own **blood**. As Faustus attempts to sign the agreement, his **blood** congeals, as if refusing to sign. Mephastophilis fetches some hot coals to melt the congealed **blood**, and Faustus signs the agreement. Faustus immediately regrets the deal, but is distracted from his worries when Mephastophilis summons up a group of devils bringing various riches to him. Faustus then asks Mephastophilis more questions about hell. He asks Mephastophilis for a wife, but Mephastophilis cannot do anything related to marriage (a holy ceremony), so he summons a devil-woman instead.

Mephastophilis gives Faustus books containing all the knowledge of astronomy and the stars, as well as of all plants and trees. Faustus again begins to regret giving up his soul and considers repenting. At this, the **angels** re-appear and again make their cases to Faustus. Faustus again decides not to repent. Mephastophilis teaches him about the movement of the planets and the composition of the universe. Faustus asks who made the world, but Mephastophilis refuses to answer, as he does not want to say the name of God. This makes Faustus want to repent again and turn to God. The angels appear again, and Faustus says that he wishes to repent. At this, Lucifer appears with other devils, telling Faustus not to speak of God and Christ. Faustus apologizes and assures Lucifer that he will reject God. Lucifer entertains Faustus by summoning up personifications of the **Seven Deadly Sins**, which parade past Faustus for his enjoyment. Lucifer gives Faustus another book to learn from, before leaving.

A stable-hand named Robin steals one of Faustus' spell-books and tells his friend, the inn-keeper Rafe, that they should try to cast some magic spells. Wagner informs the audience that Mephastophilis has taken Faustus on a grand tour of the world in a chariot drawn by dragons, in order to learn all the secrets of astronomy. The pair is now headed for Rome.

Once in Rome, Faustus wants to see all the city's monuments, but Mephastophilis tells him to stay in the pope's private chambers and play a joke on him. Mephastophilis makes Faustus and himself invisible, and they conduct mischief as the pope and his cardinals attempt to have a banquet. A group of friars attempt to sing a dirge to drive away malevolent spirits.

Back in Germany, a vintner (wine merchant) confronts Robin and Rafe about a goblet they have stolen. The pair uses Faustus' spell-book to summon Mephastophilis in order to scare the vintner away. Mephastophilis comes, but is frustrated that he has been summoned by two lowly “slaves” (VIII, 39) for such a banal task. Meanwhile, after some more traveling, Faustus returns to Germany. His fame as a conjurer has spread far and wide. The German emperor Charles V has invited Faustus to his court, having heard about his magic skills.

At the emperor's court, Faustus indulges the emperor by calling up the spirit of Alexander the Great, essentially Charles' hero. Charles V is exceedingly impressed, but a knight of his is uncomfortable with the devilish magic and is skeptical of Faustus. Faustus repays the knight's rudeness by making horns appear on his head.

After Faustus' visit to the emperor, a horse-courser (horse-trader) finds him and asks to buy his horse. Faustus agrees but tells him not to ride the horse into water. Thinking that Faustus is trying to trick him, the horse-courser rides the horse into a pond. In the middle of the pond, the horse vanishes, plunging the horse-courser into the water. Angry, he attempts to confront Faustus, who is sleeping. He yanks on Faustus' leg to wake him up, but the leg comes right off Faustus' body. He runs off, scared, while Faustus' leg is instantly replaced by magic. Wagner informs Faustus that his company is requested at the court of a nobleman, the Duke of Vanholt.

At the Duke's court, Faustus entertains the Duke and Duchess with his magic. The Duchess asks for him to make grapes appear (it is the middle of winter and grapes are unavailable). Faustus does so, to the delight of the Duchess.

Wagner tells the audience that he is worried Faustus will die soon, as he has given his property to Wagner. In any case, Faustus continues to impress people with his magic. A group of scholars asks him to call up the spirit of Helen of Greece, the

most beautiful woman in the world, which he does. An old man appears and urges Faustus to repent. Faustus is troubled and says that he wants to repent. Mephastophilis calls him a traitor and threatens to tear his flesh "in piecemeal" (XII, 59) for his disobedience. Faustus apologizes and resolves not to repent. He asks Mephastophilis to send demons after the old man, for making Faustus doubt himself. Faustus asks Mephastophilis to make Helen his lover, so that her beauty can distract him from his impending doom.

As Faustus' death draws nearer, he begins to despair and the group of scholars with him asks what is wrong. He finally tells them about the deal he has made with Lucifer and they are horrified. They go to pray for his soul. Alone on stage, Faustus realizes that he has only an hour left to live. He begs time to stand still and goes back and forth as to whether he will repent. He calls out to God, saying that one drop of Christ's **blood** would save him, but he is unable to commit to repenting. He tries to bargain with God, asking for salvation in return for a thousand or a hundred-thousand years in hell. The clock strikes midnight: Faustus' time is up. He cries out, making a last promise to burn his books, as devils surround him and drag him away.

The chorus delivers an epilogue to conclude the play, confirming that Faustus has fallen to hell, and telling the audience to learn from Faustus' example not to try to learn "unlawful things" (Epilogue, 6) beyond the limits of appropriate human knowledge.

## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Doctor Faustus** – A gifted scholar of humble origins living in Wittenberg, Germany in the 16th century, Doctor Faustus is the tragic hero of Marlowe's play. Having come to what he believes is the limits of traditional knowledge, he decides to sell his soul to the devil in exchange for twenty-four years of unlimited knowledge and power. To be *Faustian* is to be recklessly ambitious, and Marlowe's Faust uses his newfound power to travel around the world and attain all kinds of knowledge. However, he also uses his magic to engage in petty practical jokes (at the expense of the pope, for example) and to indulge his desire for a beautiful woman (summoning Helen of Troy to be his lover). Faustus begins to see the error of his ways early on in the play, and wavers in his commitment to his deal with Lucifer, but it is not until the final scene of the play that he realizes his doom. While he tries to repent at the end of the play, Christ is merely one out of a number of things he calls out to for help, and he still attempts to bargain with Christ, asking for salvation in return for a thousand or more years in hell. It is somewhat ambiguous to what degree Faustus actually repents, but in any case it is to no avail. As the chorus informs the audience at the play's conclusion, he ends up falling to hell.

**Mephastophilis** – Mephastophilis is the devil Faustus summons when he first tries his hand at necromancy, and he remains at Faustus's side for much of the rest of the play, doing his bidding, answering his questions, distracting him when he has doubts about his decision to sell his soul, and even taking him on an eight-day tour of the known universe on a chariot drawn by dragons. It is Mephastophilis who encourages Faustus to take a blood oath that Lucifer should have his soul when his twenty-four years are up. His motivations for pushing so hard to keep Faustus may seem ambiguous, since he admits to being miserable in Hell and to regret having forsaken God, but he basically explains himself with the now-famous proverb: *Solamen miseris socios habuisse doloris* (loosely translated, misery loves company).

**Wagner** – Wagner is Faustus's student and servant. Although he does not sell his soul to Lucifer alongside his master, he does dabble in the dark arts by borrowing Faustus's spell book. He is fiercely proud of his connection with such an infamous man, and in comedic scenes amongst the clowns, he takes a high-and-mighty tone with respect to information and authority. At the end of the play, Faustus bequeaths to Wagner a generous share of his wealth.

**Lucifer** – Marlowe's Lucifer is distant. His interests in Faustus's affairs are usually represented by Mephastophilis, who does his bidding above all else, and who does not have the authority to make a deal for Faustus's soul without Lucifer's permission. This Lucifer may be powerful, but he is also a practical businessman who is aware of his weaknesses. He is offended when Faustus calls out to God, and he insists on an official blood oath from Faustus as a guarantee of loyalty.

**Chorus** – A traditional figure in Greek tragedy, the Chorus delivers the Prologue, a monologue in the middle of the play, and an Epilogue that ends the play. Unlike traditional Greek choruses, though, this chorus is a single person. Removed from the action of the play, the chorus helps introduce and set the scene for the main plot, and concludes the play, confirming for the audience that Faustus was damned to hell.

**Good Angel and Evil Angel** – A pair of angels who appear onstage every time Faustus wavers in his resolve or considers repenting. They usually deliver contradictory messages, one promising God's forgiveness and the other swearing that Faustus is irrevocably damned and so should embrace the powers and treasures of dark magic. One can see these two spirits as representing the two conflicting impulses of Faustus's conscience, but in the religious world of the play (in which actual devils appear on the stage), they should also be seen as real, literal angels.

**Robin** – Robin is a stable-hand who steals a spell-book from Doctor Faustus. He reappears in comic scenes throughout the play. His foolish attempts at magic act as a counter to Faustus'

serious, ambitious sorcery. However, at times one may question how different the two uses of magic are: Faustus ends up using his magic to do parlor tricks for wealthy noblemen and to summon a beautiful woman (Helen of Troy); in some ways, then, the ambitious Faustus is really not so different from the lowly Robin.

**Horse-courser** – A horse-trader who buys a horse from Faustus. Faustus warns him not to ride the horse in water. The Horse-courser assumes Faustus is trying to cheat him and rides it in water; the horse promptly melts. The angry Horse-courser confronts Faustus (whom he finds sleeping) and pulls on his leg to wake him up. The leg comes apart from Faustus' body (through a magic trick), terrifying the trader, who flees.

**The Pope** – Faustus and Mephastophilis visit the pope in his private chambers in Rome. They annoy him and play practical jokes on him. This antagonizing of the head of the Catholic church is an example of Faustus' rejection of religion, but the duped pope may also have been a source of comedic amusement for Marlowe's Protestant, anti-Catholic audience.

**A Knight at Charles' Court** – Charles V's knight is skeptical of Doctor Faustus and does not want to see him perform his magic. Faustus makes horns appear on his head in return for his skepticism and snide remarks. (In the B-text, the knight is named Benvolio and has a slightly expanded role, attempting to exact revenge on Faustus by killing him.)

**Three Scholars** – Scholars in Wittenberg who gossip about and bemoan Faustus's interest in necromancy, rise to power, and damnation. They are emblems of a wider public reaction to Faustus's meteoric rise and fall, and also serve as examples of the scholarly, academic world in which Faustus lives. While devoted to the pursuit of knowledge, they do not put their desire for knowledge ahead of their devotion to God (unlike Faustus) and they pray for Faustus' soul at the end of the play.

**Helen of Troy** – In Greek mythology, Helen is the most beautiful woman in the entire world and the cause of the Trojan War (the Trojan prince Paris stole her from her Greek husband Menelaus). The scholars ask Faustus to summon Helen and Faustus later asks Mephastophilis to make Helen his lover, so that her beauty can distract him from his impending doom.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Valdes and Cornelius** – A pair of magicians Faustus knows, Valdes and Cornelius have encouraged Faustus to try the dark arts in the past. They are more than happy to provide Faustus with reading materials and instruction in the basics of devil-summoning, and thus help instigate Faustus' fall from grace.

**Rafe** – Referred to as "Dick" in the B-text of *Doctor Faustus*, Rafe is a friend of Robin's. The two try to use Faustus' spell book to learn incantations, but generally botch the process.

**The Seven Deadly Sins (Pride, Covetousness, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth, Lechery)** – Lucifer summons up these spirits to entertain Faustus. Faustus is delighted by the show, but doesn't seem to realize that his own sins (including excessive pride, which prevents him from repenting) may turn out to be truly deadly for him.

**Emperor Charles V** – Charles V is the powerful emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Faustus visits his court and entertains him with magic. While his magic thus brings him into the most powerful court in Europe, Faustus uses his sorcery for mere courtly entertainment.

**Old Man** – This unnamed man attempts to convince Faustus to repent, telling him that God is ready to forgive him and grant him mercy. He makes Faustus momentarily consider repenting, but Faustus ultimately ignores his advice.

**Martino and Frederick** – These two men at Charles V's court appear only in the B-text, where they discuss the fame of Doctor Faustus and help Benvolio try to kill Faustus.

**Belzebub** – A devil whom Faustus sometimes summons, and who sometimes accompanies or assists Lucifer and Mephastophilis.

**Duke of Vanholt** – Having heard of Faustus' powers, the Duke invites Faustus to his court. There, Faustus delights the Duke and Duchess by making fresh grapes appear in the middle of winter. The Duke promises to pay Faustus for his marvelous trick.

**Duchess of Vanholt** – The wife of the Duke, the Duchess asks Faustus to make grapes appear in the middle of winter. She is astonished and delighted by Faustus' magic.

**Alexander the Great** – The great general from Macedon who conquered the entire Mediterranean world, Alexander is summoned by Faustus for the delight of Charles V, who admires Alexander's power.

**Alexander's Paramour** – Alexander's lover, who appears with Alexander when summoned by Faustus.

**Cardinal of Lorraine** – A cardinal in the Catholic church, who is with the pope when Faustus and Mephastophilis visit.

**Clown** – Wagner finds this rustic peasant and makes him promise to be his servant, in return for which he will teach him magic.

**Vintner** – The vintner is a wine merchant, who demands that Robin and Rafe return or pay for a goblet they have stolen from him. Robin and Rafe summon demons to scare him off, though Mephastophilis is annoyed that he has been summoned by two lowly clowns for this unexciting task.

**Bruno** – The pope's rival, who is supported by Charles V. The pope has him as a prisoner, but Faustus and Mephastophilis help him escape back to Germany. Bruno only appears in the B-text.

**Two Cardinals** – Two cardinals are with the pope when Faustus

visits the pope's chambers. In the B-text, Faustus and Mephastophilis disguise themselves as these cardinals.

**Carter** – A carter, or cart-driver, who encounters Faustus on the road. He sells Faustus some hay and is amazed when Faustus eats his entire wagon-load of hay. The carter appears only in the B-text.

**Benvolio** – A knight who is skeptical of Faustus's magical powers. Faustus, in revenge, gives him a horn on his head.

## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

### TEMPTATION, SIN, AND REDEMPTION

Deeply immersed in Christianity, Marlowe's play explores the alluring temptation of sin, its consequences, and the possibility of redemption for a sinner like Doctor Faustus. Faustus's journey can be seen in relation to the possible trajectory from temptation to sin to redemption: Faustus' ambition is tempted by the prospect of limitless knowledge and power, he sins in order to achieve it, and then he rejects possible redemption. He is so caught up in his desire for power that he neglects the consequences of his deal with Lucifer. Giving into his temptations, he rejects God in favor of Lucifer and Mephastophilis, a sin if there ever was one.

In portraying Faustus' sinful behavior, Marlowe reveals the negative effects of sin on Faustus himself. Despite his originally lofty ambitions, Faustus ends up using his magic for practical jokes, parlor tricks, and the summoning of a beautiful woman (Helen of Troy). As the play's scholars lament, Faustus was once an esteemed scholar but after his deal with the devil he seems a mere shade of his former self.

While Faustus hurts himself and others through sin, he still has the possibility of redemption throughout the play. As the Good Angel tells him, it is never too late to repent and thereby gain God's mercy. But Faustus is persuaded by the Evil Angel not to repent, primarily by convincing Faustus that he's so damned already that he would never actually be able to return to God. These two **angels** can be seen as representing the opposing pulls of redemption and the temptation to sin even more. Faustus listens to the Evil Angel for the most of the play, but seems to repent in the final scene. Or does he? The question of whether Faustus really repents at the end of the tragedy is debatable and has important implications for whether the play suggests that at some moment it really is too late for a sinner like Faustus to repent and be redeemed. In any case, whether because he repented too late or didn't repent truly, Faustus rejects the possibility of redemption and is ultimately damned for his sins.

### THE BARGAIN

Faustus' bargain with Lucifer is the most famous part of ***Doctor Faustus.*** The so-called "Faustian bargain" has become a standard way of referring to some kind of "deal with the devil," a motif that recurs throughout Western literary and cultural traditions (from a version of the Faust story by the German poet Goethe to the blues musician Robert Johnson, who legend says sold his soul to Satan for his skill on the guitar). But the importance of the bargain extends beyond this famous plot device. The idea of some kind of economic exchange or deal pervades the tragedy. Just as Lucifer cheats Faustus in their deal, Faustus cheats the horse-courser who buys a horse from him and Wagner gets a clown to agree to be his servant in return for learning some magic. These deals might be taken to suggest that bargains are often simply occasions for one individual to exploit another.

However, there is another system of bargaining in the play, related to Christianity. The very word "redemption" literally means "a buying back." In Christian thinking, Jesus redeems mankind by "buying back" their sins at the expense of his own death. If Faustus' bargain with Lucifer is sealed with **blood**, God's agreement with mankind is, too—with the very blood of Jesus, shed on the cross. Moreover, Faustus can strike a deal with God at any point in the play, gaining eternal salvation by simply repenting his sins. Lucifer may hold Faustus to his original agreement, threatening him when he thinks about repenting, but God is willing to take mercy even on sinners who don't uphold their end of the divine bargain. Faustus, however, refuses to make this ultimate deal. At the end of the play, he is desperate but still attempts to haggle with God, begging for salvation in return for a thousand or a hundred-thousand years in hell.

Thus, one could see the play as ultimately about good and bad deals. And through this profusion of deals and exchanges, Marlowe is able to raise questions of value: what is worth more, power in this world or salvation in the next? How much is a soul worth? Can it even be put in terms of money and profit? As a tragic hero, Faustus is done in by his excessive ambition and pride, but he is also doomed by his tendency to under-value the things he bargains with and over-value the things he bargains for.

### THE RENAISSANCE INDIVIDUAL

Marlowe lived and wrote during the English Renaissance, and his play has much to say about the transition from a more medieval society to the Renaissance. Greatly simplified, this means a shift in a variety of ways from reliance on some kind of authority figure to reliance

on one's own individual self. Humanist scholars of the Renaissance refocused their studies on the individual human subject, while the Protestant reformation affirmed the individual's prerogative to interpret scripture instead of relying on the pope and the hierarchical Catholic church. A flourishing of education and other social changes made it more and more possible for people to rise up through society through their own hard work and ambition.

Faustus embodies many of these changes: he is a self-made man, from humble origins, who has risen through education. He is ambitious and constantly desires to learn and know more about the world through various forms of scholarly inquiry. But Faustus also demonstrates some possible dangers in the Renaissance stress on one's own individual self. His self-reliance shades into selfishness and excessive pride. After making his deal with Lucifer, Faustus is too proud to admit that he was wrong and repent. He rejects the authority (and the help) of God and tries to handle things himself. While some resistance to authority and celebration of the individual may be a good thing (the play has no problems poking fun at the pope and the Catholic church, for example), Marlowe demonstrates the pitfalls of excessive individualism. Not only does Faustus serve as an example of excessive individualism. So does Lucifer himself, who originally rebelled against the authority of God. The tension between the Renaissance notion of the power and importance of the individual and the Christian stress on obeying God fills and animates ***Doctor Faustus***. Although Faustus suffers for erring too far in the direction of the individual, Marlowe's tragedy leaves the question of how to balance these opposing values unresolved (some may, after all, sympathize with the fiercely ambitious Faustus), forcing readers to come to their own answers.

## FATE VS. FREE WILL

In addition to the Renaissance more generally, the Protestant reformation and questions surrounding the changing nature of European Christianity in Marlowe's time have a profound influence on ***Doctor Faustus.*** One such question that the play tackles is the issue of predestination. According to Calvinism (a branch of protestant Christianity started by John Calvin), people are predestined to be either saved in heaven or damned in hell. In other words, they are born fated to go to one or the other and there's nothing they can do to change that.

One overarching question in Marlowe's play is whether Faustus' fall from grace is his own fault or whether he is fated to be damned. (The question can be extended also to Lucifer and his renegade angels-turned-devils: were they fated to fall from heaven to hell?) Faustus seems to choose his own path, voluntarily agreeing to his deal with Lucifer. And he appears to have the choice to repent at any moment in the play. But, according to a Calvinist interpretation, such free will is an illusion, as these "choices" are already predetermined by God. Even the two versions of the play can't seem to agree on an answer. In a crucial line, the A-text has the Good Angel tell Faustus it is "Never too late, if Faustus will repent," (V, 253). The B-text reads, "Never too late, if Faustus can repent." In one version, the only question is whether Faustus "will" or will not repent. In the other, it is questionable whether Faustus even has the option ("can" or can't he repent?). Regardless, that the play engages in this kind of questioning at all suggests that there may be limits to and constraints upon free will.

## EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE, AND POWER

Faustus is identified as a character by his status as a doctor (that is, someone with a doctoral degree), and the backdrop of much of the play is the university environment in which Doctor Faustus lives. It is thus no surprise that issues of formal education are of great importance to the play, in which even magic spells are learned from a kind of text-book. Systems of education obviously exist to help people learn, but Marlowe also explores the associations of formal education with power and social hierarchy. Education helps people position themselves in higher social classes. It is through education that Faustus rises from his humble origins and that the play's scholars differentiate themselves from lowly clowns like Robin and Rafe. And when Wagner promises to teach a clown magic, he uses his superior knowledge as a way to gain power over the clown, getting him to agree to be his servant.

But not everything can be learned in school and from books. In his opening soliloquy, Faustus rejects traditional areas of study and, although his magic does rely on a spell-book, what he seeks from Mephastophilis is knowledge that he can't attain in traditional ways. For the ambitious Faustus, even beyond the implications of educations affect on social hierarchy, knowledge means power. He desires limitless knowledge largely because of the massive riches and power that come with it. And indeed whatever power Faustus possesses with his magic is due entirely to his knowledge of certain magic incantations. This close connection between knowledge and power can be contrasted with the idea of knowledge for its own sake, which ideally characterizes learning in universities.

Ultimately, Marlowe's play suggests that there are limits to proper knowledge and education. The desire to learn is not inherently bad, but Faustus goes too far and seeks to know too much. He himself seems to recognize this, as his last line in the play contains a promise to burn his books (XIII, 113) and thus repudiate his ambition for learning. The chorus that delivers the final lines of the play sums up the moral of Faustus' story: "Regard his hellish fall, / Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise / Only to wonder at [i.e. be amazed at but don't seek to understand] unlawful things," (Epilogue, 4-6). But even if this

moral is clear-cut, where to draw the line between appropriate subjects of study and "unlawful things" that we shouldn't seek to know is unclear. Knowledge is power, but how much is too much?

## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

### THE GOOD AND EVIL ANGELS

These two angels appear on-stage when Faustus wavers in his decision to give his soul to Lucifer and considers repenting. The Good Angel encourages him to seek God's mercy and tells him that it is never too late to do so. The Evil Angel persuades Faustus not to repent, arguing that he is too damned to ever be able to return to god and so he should just keep indulging his desire for knowledge, power, and enjoyment. The angels can be seen as symbolizing the opposing pulls of sin and repentance, or the opposing sides of Faustus' own conscience. However, they also have a presence as actual entities, real angels on the stage.

### BLOOD

Mephastophilis is very clear that Lucifer will only make a deal with Faustus if he signs a formal deed of gift signed with his own blood. Faustus' blood thus symbolizes some true essence of himself, which Lucifer desires as a sign of his commitment. When Faustus tries to sign the agreement, the blood congeals, and Faustus interprets this as a sign that his own body is reluctant to make the bargain with Lucifer. As Faustus' death draws near and he considers repenting, he says that a single drop of Christ's blood would save him. Christ's blood also serves as a symbolic guarantee of a bargain, though a holy one in contrast to that between Lucifer and Faustus. Christ's blood is shed through his crucifixion, the sacrifice by which Jesus redeemed mankind's sins. While the imagery of blood is thus an important symbol throughout the play, there is also a tension between blood as a physical part of Faustus' body, of which he is aware (he fears devils tearing his flesh and causing him pain), and blood as a symbol of someone's inner essence or soul, which Faustus entirely neglects.

### THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Lucifer entertains Faustus by calling up the Seven Deadly Sins, personifications of Pride, Covetousness, Wrath, Envy, Gluttony, Sloth, and Lechery. These figures rather obviously symbolize the sins for which they are named, but they also serve to reveal Faustus' foolish neglect of sin. He takes pleasure in seeing them parade past him, but does not seem to make the connection between these sins and his own (including his own excessive pride and, with Helen, lechery), which will turn out to be quite deadly for him.

## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. edition of *Doctor Faustus (Norton Critical Edition)* published in 2005.

> ...Till, swollen with cunning, of a self-conceit,
> His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
> And melting heavens conspired his overthrow.
> For falling to a devilish exercise,
> And glutted more with learning's golden gifts,
> He surfeits upon cursed necromancy. (20-25)

**Related Characters:** Chorus (speaker), Doctor Faustus

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** Pro.20-25

**Explanation and Analysis**

In the Prologue, Chorus gives a brief introduction to Doctor Faustus, telling his history before the start of the play. Faustus, like Marlowe himself, was of low birth, and his rise to power and scholarship are an echo of the playwright's own career. He says that the play will merely contain the subject of "Faustus's fortunes, good or bad." The Chorus then details how Faustus rose as an academic and became lifted up by his excellence in divinity, until, as the quote asserts, Faustus became prideful and obsessed with learning more and more. Compared to the Greek myth of Icarus (who flew too close to the sun, which melted his wings and caused him to fall to his death), Faustus flies too high, reaching above what is natural and normal, and then he falls, committing himself to the "devilish exercise" of necromancy (black magic dealing with death).

Already we are made aware of Faustus's sinfulness: he is prideful (self-conceit) and devotes himself to the cursed, sinful arts. We see another one of the seven deadly sins in his desire for knowledge, power, and learning: gluttony. His excessive search for knowledge and books is the source of his temptation, and when he falls prey to it he "surfeits" (overindulges) on the new, dark knowledge he achieves. The Chorus tells us that Faustus will turn to magic, which is sweeter to him than his "chiefest bliss," but the Prologue does not tell us what Faustus's fate will ultimately be (though the appearance of "Tragical" in the title is a good indicator that it will not be a good one).

Why then belike we must sin,
And so consequently die.
Ay, we must die an everlasting death.
What doctrine call you this? *Che sara, sara*
What will be, shall be! Divinity, adieu!
These metaphysics of magicians,
And necromantic books are heavenly! (44-50)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 1.1.45-50

**Explanation and Analysis**

Faustus has gone through many of his books of various subjects but remains unsatisfied by their content; he has achieved the peak of human academia and is bored by it. Reading Jerome's Bible, Faustus recites and translates Latin phrases. The passages immediately preceding the quote can be summarized as "If you sin, you die" and "everybody sins." Rather than giving the interpretation that his divinity training might suggest, Faustus concludes that we *have* to sin, and we *have* to die "an everlasting death." From this logic he concludes that the doctrine can be further simplified to "What will be, shall be." Everyone sins, everyone dies, and everything is predetermined. Thus Faustus decides to depart from divinity, instead focusing on magic and necromancy.

Here Faustus makes the critical inversion that results in his damnation. "Necromantic books are heavenly." He has replaced the holy book of God, the Bible, with the most unholy books he can find. Throughout the play, we will see Faustus reach the ultimate heights of the profane by substituting or perverting the sacred. For now, Faustus substitutes unholy books for a holy one, but soon he will use the holy book itself for his evil doings.

O Faustus, lay that damned book aside,
And gaze not on it, lest it tempt thy soul,
And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head. (70-72)

**Related Characters:** Good Angel and Evil Angel (speaker), Doctor Faustus

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 1.1.70-72

**Explanation and Analysis**

Having decided to pursue magic, Faustus has invited magicians to help him in his quest. As he awaits their arrival, two angels appear: The Good Angel and the Evil Angel. These two figures are prototypes for the modern (and usually cartoonish) conception of a competing angel and devil on one's shoulders. Here, the Good Angel tells Faustus to resist temptation and refuse to look at the necromantic books he so desires. The angel warns that such a sin will "heap God's heavy wrath upon" his head. The Evil Angel encourages Faustus to proceed, promising power and treasure. The two angels will return throughout the play to advise and tempt Faustus respectively. As Faustus has already accepted that "What will be, shall be," and decided to pursue magic, the Good Angel's attempt to dissuade him here is unsuccessful.

How am I glutted with conceit of this!
Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,
Resolve me of all ambiguities,
Perform what desperate enterprise I will?
I'll have them fly to India for gold,
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,
And search all corners of the new-found world
For pleasant fruits and princely delicates. (78-85)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 1.1.78-85

**Explanation and Analysis**

After the Good and Evil Angels depart, Faustus makes clear his intention to proceed. In this soliloquy he acknowledges the gluttony that the Chorus described in the Prologue, but does not seem to understand or care about the consequences of this deadly sin. Faustus instead imagines what he will do when he conjures spirits: make them get things for him, make them tell him everything he wants to know, make them fetch him gold and riches and find all of the "princely delicates" of the world. While he imagines here that he will receive the fruits of education and material objects, Faustus soon reveals that his biggest desire is power. He is focused on his personal glory, and the powers he can amass as an individual, both politically and other-worldly.

Philosophy is odious and obscure,
Both law and physic are for petty wits;
Divinity is basest of the three,
Unpleasant, harsh, contemptible, and vile.
'Tis magic, magic that hath ravished me. (106-110)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 1.1.106-110

**Explanation and Analysis**

Here Faustus is talking to the magicians he has invited, Valdes and Cornelius. Faustus explains what we saw in his opening soliloquy: the usual pursuits of knowledge have become boring to him. Philosophy, Law, and Divinity all seem stale and unworthy, even "unpleasant, harsh, contemptible and vile." Faustus reveals his intentions by explaining that it is the new pursuit of magic that has "ravished him." Note that he repeats the word *magic* for emphasis, supporting his claim that he has been "ravished" by it. Faustus has been overtaken by his gluttonous desire for knowledge, books, wealth, and power, and now that he has decided it, he wishes to move extremely quickly. As *ravish* suggests, he has been carried away forcefully, even sexually taken by magic and necromancy.

## Scene 3 Quotes

I am a servant to great Lucifer,
And may not follow thee without his leave;
No more than he commands must we perform. (40-42)

**Related Characters:** Mephastophilis (speaker), Lucifer, Doctor Faustus

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 1.3.40-42

**Explanation and Analysis**

Doctor Faustus has conjured devils by profanely writing God's name backwards and by uttering incantations. Such a scene would have been extremely shocking to Renaissance audiences, who in general believed wholly in Christianity and would have perceived the performance itself as blasphemous and even dangerous. There are stories of audience members fainting during the play, and even of extra, unaccounted-for devils appearing on the stage. Mephistophilis first entered as a hideous devil, but Faustus instructed him to leave and return dressed ironically as a Franciscan friar. When Mephastophilis asks what is desired of him, Faustus gives the instruction to obey all commands.

In the quote, Mephastophilis responds that he is a servant to Lucifer, and that he cannot obey Faustus unless he is given permission. In this way, Mephastophilis introduces Lucifer and initiates the tempting conversation that will even lead to Faustus signing away his soul.

For when we hear one rack the name of God,
Abjure the Scriptures, and his savior Christ,
We fly in hope to get his glorious soul. (47-49)

**Related Characters:** Mephastophilis (speaker), Doctor Faustus

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 1.3.47-49

**Explanation and Analysis**

After learning that Mephastophilis must obey Lucifer, Faustus asks if Mephastophilis came out of obedience or his own accord. Mephastophilis responds that he came because of Faustus's conjuring, though not because the spells had any magical effect. Instead, as he says in the quote, devils fly up whenever they hear someone take God's name in vain, profane the scriptures, or deny Christ—in the hope that they will be able to obtain his soul. Note that even Mephastophilis describes the soul as "glorious." It is clearly a thing to be desired and kept sacred and safe. Yet Faustus, blinded by his pride and gluttonous desire, is immediately willing to trade away his soul. It is also significant that thus far Faustus's magic is powerless. Though magic has "ravished" him, it is most truly his sinfulness and denial of Christianity that affects his fate and summons Mephastophilis.

Go bear these tidings to great Lucifer,
Seeing Faustus hath incurred eternal death
By desperate thoughts against Jove's deity:
Say, he surrenders up to him his soul
So he will spare him four and twenty years,
Letting him live in all voluptuousness,
Having thee ever to attend on me,
To give me whatsoever I ask,
To tell me whatsoever I demand,
To slay mine enemies, and aid my friends,
And always be obedient to my will. (87-89)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker), Mephastophilis, Lucifer

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 1.3.87-97

**Explanation and Analysis**

Pressed by his thirst for knowledge, Faustus has learned about hell and Lucifer's fall from Mephistophilis. Now, he instructs the devil to bring a deal proposal to Lucifer. Here Faustus speaks as though his death and damnation are secured and fated, speaking of them as a matter of fact. The bargain he offers Lucifer is that he will give up his soul if Mephistophilis will be his servant for 24 years, doing whatever he demands, even killing for him, "ever obedient to [Faustus's] will." Faustus wants power over Mephistophilis, and through him, immense necromantic power and knowledge. He is so willing to part with his soul that he proposes the terms to Lucifer, believing that the 24 years of power will be well worth the price of his eternal soul. Striking evidence that Faustus believes this bargain is a good one can be found in the quote below.

Had I as many souls as there be stars,
I'd give them all for Mephastophilis.
By him I'll be great emperor of the world. (102-104)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker), Mephastophilis

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 1.3.102-104

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Mephastophilis leaves, planning to go to Lucifer with the bargain terms and to return at midnight, Faustus delivers another brief soliloquy, which begins with this quote. He claims that if he had "as many souls as there be stars," he would still trade all of them for Mephastophilis's service. The reason? Power: with Mephastophilis's help Faustus can become "great emperor of the world." These lines reveal the extent of Faustus's perversion and vast underestimation of the worth of his soul. Though devils flock to any opportunity to obtain a "glorious soul," Faustus devalues his soul. In conjunction with the shift he made above, switching necromantic books for heavenly ones, he now lives for this black magic instead of living for God.

## Scene 5 Quotes

Now Faustus, must thou needs be damned,
And canst thou not be saved.
What boots it then to think of God or heaven? (1-3)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 2.1.1-3

**Explanation and Analysis**

Waiting for Mephastophilis to return with Lucifer, Faustus seems to consider repentance, thinking of God and heaven and questioning his deal. But he begins the scene by suggesting that he *has* to be damned, and will be damned no matter what he does. He claims that he cannot be saved, and so it is useless for him to think of God or heaven. Here he exposes a huge misunderstanding, both of God and of Fate. His claim that he is fated to be damned seems reasonable, since he does ultimately go to hell. But the claim that he cannot be saved is preposterous, suggesting a limit to God's power and forgiveness. This is a crucial detail that Faustus constantly forgets. He *can* be saved, if he repents. It is his own free will and his refusal to repent that causes his damnation, not any predetermined fate or fault of God's. At any point during the play, Faustus can repent and receive Christ's mercy. The problem is that he won't.

But Faustus, thou must bequeath it solemnly,
And write a deed of gift with thine own blood,
For that security craves great Lucifer. (34-36)

**Related Characters:** Mephastophilis (speaker), Doctor Faustus, Lucifer

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 2.1.34-36

**Explanation and Analysis**

Though the Good Angel has tried to convince him to turn back towards heaven, faustus has resolved to continue with his deal, excitedly imagining all the wealth and power he will gain. He summons Mephistophils, and asks whether Lucifer has accepted the deal. Mephistophilis tells Faustus that Lucifer has in fact accepted, and in the quote he describes the gruesome detail that will make the bargain official. Faustus must "write a deed of gift" with his "own blood." Only this step will make the deal secure enough for Lucifer to accept it. Faustus stabs his arm and begins writing, though there are a few opportunities for him to stop. His blood congeals, and he receives a divine warning, "Homo Fuge"—"flee, man"—in his very flesh. But ultimately, he still signs away his soul.

This bargain brings up the question that Faustus himself asks: is your soul your own? Can a person even sign it away? Ultimately, it may be that the deal is meaningless, and it is Faustus's refusal to repent that brings about his damnation, not any signature or bargain. Also note the intense, ironic symbolism of blood: Faustus uses his own blood to sign away his soul and secure his own damnation, but even one drop of the most powerful blood of all, Christ's saving blood, would be enough to bring Faustus mercy and salvation.

> Thanks, Mephastophilis, yet fain would I have a book wherein I might behold all spells and incantations, that I might raise up spirits when I please. [...] Nay, let me have one book more, and then I have done, wherein I might see all plants, herbs, and trees that grow upon the earth. (163-173)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker), Mephastophilis

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 2.1.161-171

**Explanation and Analysis**

Faustus has signed the contract and now officially has the service of Mephistophilis, who has provided a show of devils and fireworks and informed Faustus that he will have the powers of a spirit. When Faustus asks for a wife, Mephistophilis denies him, saying that marriage is a holy sacrament. Instead Mephistophilis provides a devil dressed as a woman, but when this does not please Faustus, Mephistophilis instead provides magic books. This quote shows Faustus asking for more and more texts, unsatisfied and always wanting more. Though he appears unsatisfied, is is interesting to note the way that his desire has been diverted: his desire for a woman and sexuality has been replaced with the desire for books and intellectualism. Recall that magic "ravished" Faustus; books and dark knowledge are what he desires most, and are intimately connected to lust and sexuality for him.

> When I behold the heavens, then I repent,
> And curse thee, wicked Mephastophilis,
> Because thou hast deprived me of those joys. (177-179)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker), Mephastophilis

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 2.3.1-3

**Explanation and Analysis**

After mentioning his desire for books that contain information about the heavens, Faustus considers repentance. Here he says that when he thinks about heaven, he repents and curses Mephastophilis, saying that it's his fault that Faustus will be deprived of the joys of heaven. Mephastophilis tries to argue that Faustus is greater than heaven, since heaven was made for men, but Faustus concludes that since he is a man, he *will* repent and go to heaven. Now that he desires to repent, the Good and Evil Angels re-enter. Faustus says that he will repent, and even acknowledges that if he does repent, God will forgive him. But, as the Evil Angel predicts, Faustus does not. This moment is exemplary of the numerous opportunities Faustus misses to save himself. Even when he makes the right conclusions about what he needs to do, and seems to correctly understand the limitless power of God's love and forgiveness, Faustus continuously makes the wrong choice and sins again.

Why should I die then, or basely despair?
I am resolved! Faustus shall ne'er repent.
Come, Mephastophilis, let us dispute again,
And argue of divine astrology. (207-210)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker), Mephastophilis

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 2.3.31-34

**Explanation and Analysis**

Though he has just decided to repent and seek heaven, and the Good Angel has convinced him that repentance will bring God's pity and forgiveness, Faustus almost immediately decides that he "shall ne'er repent." He believes his heart too hardened to be capable of repentance, and then decides that his power is so great that he has no reason to die or despair. The same insistence on fate as opposed to free will and the implied limitation on God's forgiving love leave Faustus stuck: he won't repent because he thinks it's too late and he is predestined to go to hell. But it is only too late because he thinks it is, and he only goes to hell because of his refusal to repent. Resolved in this faulty logic, he goes back to his obsession with knowledge and begins asking Mephastophilis questions about the universe.

Never too late, if Faustus will repent. (254)

**Related Characters:** Good Angel and Evil Angel (speaker), Doctor Faustus

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 2.3.76

**Explanation and Analysis**

As the discussion turns to the universe and astrology, Faustus asks who made the world. The answer, of course, is God, and so Faustus begins to think on Creation and heaven once again. These thoughts cause him to curse Mephastophilis for damning him, at which point Faustus asks up to heaven, "Is't too late?" The Evil Angel responds with devastating brevity: "Too late." But the Good Angel responds with the essential truth in the quote above. It is never too late, if only Faustus is willing to repent. At this profound statement, Faustus makes a leap and shouts out to Christ in a moment of earnest repentance.

If the play ended at this moment, it is likely that Faustus would have been saved. Instead, Lucifer himself enters and tries to convince Faustus that Christ cannot save him. Lucifer, unsurprisingly, lies to Faustus, and convinces him to think about the devil instead of God. Ultimately, Faustus promises never to turn back to God in repentance again, and after a fantastical show of the Seven Deadly Sins, Faustus wishes for hell and continues to sin, damning himself once again.

Ah stay, good Faustus, stay thy desperate steps!
I see an angel hovers o'er thy head
And with a vial full of precious grace
Offers to pour the same into thy soul!
Then call for mercy, and avoid despair. (42-47)

**Related Characters:** Old Man (speaker), Doctor Faustus

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 5.1.52-56

**Explanation and Analysis**

It has been years now, and Faustus and Mephistophilis have done lots of magic and mischief, including terrifying the Pope and prompting an exorcism attempt. Faustus recently showed off for several scholars by conjuring Helen of Troy. Now an Old Man has entered and is attempting to convince Faustus to repent, telling him that only Christ's mercy can save him. Faustus becomes enraged and grabs a dagger from Mephastophilis, when the Old Man speaks the quote above.

The Old Man tells Faustus to stop, and that he sees an angel hovering above (most likely, the Good Angel which Faustus can no longer see). The Old Man describes a "vial full of precious grace" held by the angel, which could be poured into Faustus's soul to save him. This grace fluid undoubtably refers to Christ's saving blood, for which Faustus will eventually cry out in his final soliloquies.

Accursed Faustus, where is mercy now?
I do repent, and yet I do despair:
Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast! (53-55)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 5.1.62-65

**Explanation and Analysis**

Faustus struggles with the ideals that the Good and Evil Angels argued, though he cannot experience them in the same way he used to. Here he describes their arguments with "Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast." In this moment, though he calls himself "accursed" and is in "despair," Faustus utters the key lines "I do repent." Despite his confusion, his genuine desire to repent and these words are also enough to save him, so much the case that Mephastophilis threatens Faustus and calls him a traitor in order to convince him to turn back to Lucifer and sin once more.

> Sweet Mephastophilis, entreat thy lord
> To pardon my unjust presumption;
> And with my blood again I will confirm
> My former vow I made to Lucifer. (60-63)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker), Mephastophilis, Lucifer

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 5.1.70-73

**Explanation and Analysis**

As mentioned above, Faustus has uttered the words "I do repent," causing Mephastophilis to rage against him and threaten to tear him to pieces. Seeing how angry Mephastophilis is, Faustus speaks the lines in this quote, saying he will reaffirm his vow to Lucifer. Sacred and profane are inverted for Faustus, so repentance is "unjust," and he asks the devil to "pardon him." The extremity of this quote demonstrates the power that his above "I do repent" carried. To cancel out the repentance, Faustus must confirm the vow he made to Lucifer with "blood again." All of his sins are washed away by the simple utterance of repentance, and he must be made to make more deadly sins if Lucifer hopes to retain his soul.

> One thing, good servant, let me crave of thee,
> To glut the longing of my heart's desire:
> That I might have unto my paramour
> That heavenly Helen which I saw of late,
> Whose sweet embracings may extinguish clean
> These thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow:
> And keep mine oath I made to Lucifer. (72-78)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker), Mephastophilis, Lucifer

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 5.1.81-87

**Explanation and Analysis**

Having reaffirmed his vow to Lucifer, once again in blood, Faustus now requests that Mephastophilis fulfill his usually gluttonous desire with an unusual object. Instead of asking for more books, Faustus asks Mephastophilis to produce again the Helen of Troy that he recently conjured to impress the Scholars. He reasons that Helen's "sweet embracings" will distract him from his thoughts of repentance and allow him to keep the oath he made to Lucifer. When Mephastophilis brings forth Helen, Faustus utters the play's most famous line (and possibly the best-known line that Marlowe ever wrote): "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?" Faustus then delivers a famous, seemingly romantic monologue about Helen.

This famous scene, however, should not be taken at face value. Recall that this is *not* Helen of Troy, but is instead a devil in her shape. This fact would be easy to remember during a contemporary performance of the play, as theatrical productions had all male casts during the English Renaissance. Thus a male actor would have played a male devil dressed as Helen of Troy. And Faustus have been as aware of this strange, demonic cross-dressing as the audience. Recall that when Faustus asks for a wife, Mephastophilis produces a devil dressed as a woman, which Faustus immediately rejects with disgust. His response to Helen here can then be seen as indicative of his dramatic change from the start of the play. He is now so steeped in necromancy and sin that he no longer cares what or who the false Helen really is.

> Yet Faustus, look up to heaven; remember God's mercies are infinite. (13-14)

**Related Characters:** Three Scholars (speaker), Doctor Faustus

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 5.2.13-14

**Explanation and Analysis**

Faustus's contract with Lucifer is nearing its end; he is about to die and lose his soul forever. He speaks with Scholars, lamenting his sins and telling them about his deal with Lucifer. The Scholars are shocked about the deal, and attempt to help Faustus. They tell him that he should repent, and that all is not lost. In the quote, they remind him of the crucial detail he keeps forgetting or denying, and that the Good Angel and the Old Man kept trying to tell him: "God's mercies are infinite." They assure Faustus that if he repents, he will be saved. It is extremely simple and powerful, but it is also exactly what Faustus cannot hear.

> But Faustus' offense can ne'er be pardoned! The serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus. (15-16)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 5.2.15-16

**Explanation and Analysis**

This profound line is offered in response to the above, "God's mercies are infinite." Faustus responds with extreme pride, suggesting that his offense is so horrible that it is beyond all salvation. He believes he cannot be pardoned, and says that Lucifer himself (who in Christian tradition is associated with the serpent that tempted Adam and Eve) might be saved, "but not Faustus." This prideful belief is much of the reason that Faustus is in this position in the first place. He dared to reach beyond the bounds of normal humans, believing himself to be superior and deserving of special powers and wonderful gifts. Now, he is prideful even in his evil, claiming to be worse than the greatest villain of all. In reality, Satan has no chance of salvation, but Faustus could at any moment be forgiven if he wasn't blinded by pride, fear, and lack of faith.

> On God, whom Faustus hath blasphemed? Ah my God—I would weep, but the devil draws in my tears! gush forth blood, instead of tears—yea, life and soul! O, he stays my tongue! I would lift up my hands, but see, they hold them, they hold them! (27-31)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 5.2.28-33

**Explanation and Analysis**

Continuing to try and help Faustus, the Scholars tell him to call on God. This quote is in Faustus's response. He believes that since he has blasphemed God, he will not be saved. His sins are so great to him that he believes he *cannot* repent, and that the devils are literally holding him back from doing so. He can't weep, since the devil draws back his tears. He cries out about blood, presumably Christ's, along with regret for using his own blood to sign the bargain, but here he does not formally repent, since the devil "stays his tongue." Similarly, he cannot lift his hands to the heavens, since the devils (his sins and fears) hold them down.

Faustus continues to believe that his agency and free will are meaningless, or simply less powerful than the forces of fate and of the devil. He expresses the desire to repent, but his fear and his constant misunderstanding of God prevents him from doing so. In the end, Faustus is willing to do everything but the thing needed to save himself.

> O I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?
> See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
> One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah my Christ. (69-71)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 5.2.73-75

**Explanation and Analysis**

The Scholars have left the stage, and Faustus is alone soliloquizing; there is one hour left before the deal expires. After feeling his hands pulled down (in the quote above), here Faustus wants to leap up to God, but cries out "Who pulls me down?" He then sees visions of Christ's blood in the sky. The image overwhelms him, and he recognizes that "One drop" would save his soul, even "half a drop." Faustus recognizes God's saving power and what he needs to do to be saved, but he still does not do it. His cry to Christ is an

acknowledgement of power, not of wrongdoing; he has not repented and begged for mercy. Recall also how much of Faustus's own blood was required to damn himself, while even half a drop of merciful Christ's blood will save him.

> Ugly hell gape not! Come not, Lucifer!
> I'll burn my books—ah, Mephastophilis! (112-113)

**Related Characters:** Doctor Faustus (speaker), Mephastophilis, Lucifer

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 5.2.115-116

**Explanation and Analysis**

These are Faustus's final lines in the play, after which he is carried off to hell. He has cried to Lucifer, to the earth, and to God himself, but he has not repented, and thus he is damned. He now cries out to hell, begging it not to open, and asks Lucifer not to come, offering even to burn his books, the treasures for which he offered his soul in the first place. Filled with regret and fear, he seems to recognize what a terrible mistake he has made, and how foolish he was to sell his soul for any price. We also have seen some evidence that he understands that such a sale was preposterous, and that God's mercy and power could overwrite any deed, written in blood or no. But for a final time, Faustus does not take the final step. If his last lines were, "I repent!" his fate might have been different, but instead he is carried to hell to be tortured as the sinner that he is.

> Regard his hellish fall,
> Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise
> Only to wonder at unlawful things:
> Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits
> To practice more than heavenly power permits. (4-8)

**Related Characters:** Chorus (speaker), Doctor Faustus

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** E.4-8

**Explanation and Analysis**

These lines spoken by the Chorus conclude the Epilogue and the play. The Chorus warns viewers to "regard [Faustus's] hellish fall," encouraging them "only to wonder at unlawful things" but not to act upon them. This lesson is a strange one, as it suggests that it is okay to wonder and think about unlawful things like necromancy and deals with the devil, and even to consider them for yourself; it is only bad to act on base desires and to "practice more than heavenly power permits."

This lesson also stands out because they do not emphasize Faustus's misunderstanding of God's power or crucial error of not repenting. We are left with the question, are some sins so great that they cannot be forgiven? Logic and much of the play suggest that the answer is no— even Faustus could have been forgiven if he repented—but the Epilogue still warns us to stay away from his dark practices, which made repenting for Faustus all but impossible.

# SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## PROLOGUE

The Chorus enters and delivers the Prologue. He begins by assuring the audience that the play will deal with neither epic, nor heroic, nor courtly matters, but merely with "the form of Faustus' fortunes, good or bad" (Prologue, 8).

*The chorus's modest claims contrast with Faustus's soaring ambition. The tragedy will focus upon the fortune of a single individual.*

The Chorus summarizes Faustus's biography, including his humble origins, precociousness as a student, interest in necromancy, and eventual fall from grace, comparing him to Icarus, whose "waxen wings" (Prologue, 20) melted when he flew too close to the sun.

*Faustus's humble origins exemplify the Renaissance individual's ability to rise to power from nothing. But at the same time, the allusion to the myth of Icarus brings to light the folly of excessive ambition for an individual.*

## SCENE 1

Alone in his study (in Wittenberg, Germany), Faustus delivers his first soliloquy. He professes to have sounded the depths of each major field of study and to have found each undeserving of his full attention: logic, because he has already mastered its "chiefest end," (I, 8), which is to dispute well; medicine, because even an excellent doctor cannot make men live forever or rise from the dead; law, because it "aims at nothing but external trash" (1, 33-4); and theology, because sin is unavoidable and its consequences too hard to face.

*Faustus is very well-learned and confident in his intelligence and ability as an individual. Paradoxically, his dismissal of ordinary areas of study such as logic is dependent upon his mastery of logic and argumentation. His detached examination of sin foreshadows his future inability to avoid sinning, but also shows that Faustus does not realize how relevant the nature of sin is to his own life.*

Faustus decides instead to devote himself to gaining power through a mastery of magic. He praises the "necromantic books" (1, 48) filled with "lines, circles, letters, characters" (1, 49) from which he will learn the dark arts and obtain immense profit and power.

*Faustus is attracted to magic because he craves knowledge of the occult, but he desires knowledge largely for the power and profit that will come with it, not for its own sake.*

Wagner, Faustus's servant, enters. Faustus tells him to invite the magicians Valdes and Cornelius to visit him. Wagner agrees and exits, and Faustus says, "Their conference will be a greater help to me / Than all my labors, plod I ne'er so fast" (1, 65-6).

*While Faustus is a rather self-reliant individual, confident (even arrogant) in his own abilities, he still relies heavily on the help of others to teach him.*

As Faustus waits for Valdes and Cornelius to arrive, the Good Angel and Bad Angel enter. The Good Angel begs Faustus not to be tempted by the dark arts, and to read Scripture instead. The Bad Angel encourages him to go forward with it, hinting that he stands to gain both treasure and power. Both Angels exit.

*The angels symbolize Faustus' tempting desires and his potential for redemption. Faustus appears to be free to choose which angel to listen to. At this point, before he has made the deal, the bad angel lures him toward sin with promises of power and wealth.*

Alone again, Faustus delivers another soliloquy, imagining the "pleasant fruits and princely delicates" (1, 82) his devil servants might fetch for him, the secrets and "strange philosophy" (1, 83) they will share with him, and the glory they will help him bring to Germany (and Wittenberg in particular) by both political and military means – not to mention his own possible ascent to the throne.

*Again, Faustus' desire for knowledge is revealed to be, at its core, a desire for power. While he wishes to bring glory to Germany, he is mostly focused on what he can attain for himself as an individual person. At this point his ambitions extend all the way to becoming king.*

The magicians Valdes and Cornelius arrive, and Faustus welcomes them, revealing his intention to listen to their past encouragement to study necromancy and asking for their help.

*Despite his confidence in his own abilities, Faustus relies upon Valdes and Cornelius to learn magic.*

Valdes and Cornelius are excited that Faustus is going to try magic. Valdes compares the power he'll have to Spanish lords, lions, German cavalrymen, and even giants. Cornelius assures Faustus that he has all the background in minerals, languages and astrology he needs to excel in the dark arts and obtain limitless riches. Faustus, Valdes and Cornelius make plans to dine together, and afterwards to hold Faustus's first magic lesson. All three exit.

*Faustus is tempted by Valdes' description of immense power. But this power is dependent upon a knowledge of minerals, languages, astrology, and magic spells. It is not that Faustus' desire for knowledge is merely a red herring, when what he really wants is power. The two concepts are inevitably entangled, and Faustus wants both.*

## SCENE 2

Two Scholars enter and linger outside Faustus's house. One wonders what became of Faustus, who was once was famous for his passion for logic.

*The scholars stand in for the academic university environment within which Faustus lives, where knowledge and argumentative skill are prized.*

The Scholars catch sight of Wagner, who enters. They question him as to Faustus's whereabouts, and Wagner hedges, mocking their academic language before finally revealing that Faustus is at dinner with Valdes and Cornelius. Wagner exits.

*The scholars' educated status allows them to feel superior to the servant Wagner. Wagner mocks them by aping their academic language, showing that he too can talk like a scholar when he wants.*

The Scholars bemoan Faustus's turn towards necromancy, and resolve to inform the head of the university of this development. They both exit.

*Like Faustus, the scholars value knowledge and learning. But, unlike him, they will not resort to necromancy to gain knowledge.*

## SCENE 3

Faustus enters, looking up at the night sky as a thunderstorm rages. Faustus describes how he has prayed and sacrificed to the devils, drawing circles, signs and anagrams. (In the B-Text, Lucifer and some devils are on-stage to hear this.) He begins his Latin incantation, calling a number of devils by name, including Mephastophilis.

*Faustus' incantation is a complicated matter, requiring knowledge and time spent studying spells. Magic is thus not some innate ability, but a field of study that requires specific knowledge, in some ways similar to the subjects Faustus has spent his life studying at university.*

One devil, Mephastophilis, appears before Faustus, who immediately commands him to leave and come back in a different shape: "Thou are too ugly to attend on me" (3, 26). He jokingly suggests a Franciscan friar, since "that holy shape becomes a devil best" (3, 28). The devil exits, and Faustus marvels at how obedient he is.

*The joke at the expense of friars is both a cheap shot at Catholics (unpopular in 16th century England) and an example of Faustus' skepticism toward religion, a sign of his Renaissance individualism. Faustus exults in the power he has over Mephastophilis.*

Mephastophilis re-enters and asks Faustus what he wants him to do. Faustus commands him to wait on him, to do whatever he tells him to do, but Mephastophilis replies that he can't obey without Lucifer's permission. Faustus asks if Mephastophilis came because Lucifer ordered him to. Mephastophilis says no. Faustus then asks if his conjuring made Mephastophilis appear. Again, Mephastophilis says no. He explains that devils go to anyone who renounces God and Christ in the hopes of getting the person's soul. This is what has drawn Mephastophilis to Faustus.

*Faustus at first has trouble understanding the hierarchy of hell. Initially Faustus seems to believe that his knowledge of necromancy has made Mephastophilis into his servant. But Mephastophilis answers'—that he came neither at Lucifer's nor Faustus' command, but rather because he comes to anyone who seems ready to renounce God—turns that idea on its head. Mephastophilis is there, and willing to give Faustus power, in order to get Faustus to damn himself.*


Faustus asks Mephastophilis about Lucifer and the fallen angels: why they fell, where they are damned, and how they can be outside Hell. Mephastophilis explains that Lucifer and other angels were expelled from heaven for their pride and insolence. Hell follows them; it is a state of mind rather than a literal place. He begs Faustus to stop questioning him, since the memory of being cast out of heaven is painful, and Faustus cruelly mocks him for his misery.

*Faustus' first concern is to expand his knowledge and learn more about hell. Mephastophilis' pain at speaking about Lucifer's fall from heaven shows the suffering caused by sin without redemption, an example that Faustus is not only too arrogant to heed but actually mocks. Faustus cannot comprehend what hell is like at this point. He can only imagine the power he is to gain.*


Faustus tells Mephastophilis to propose a deal to Lucifer: Faustus will give Lucifer his soul in return for 24 years with Mephastophilis as his servant. Mephastophilis vows to confer with Lucifer and return with news. Faustus delivers a soliloquy, reaffirming that he thinks the deal is worth the power he will get through Mephastophilis and saying, "Had I as many souls as there be stars / I'd give them all for Mephastophilis" (3, 101-2).

*Faustus himself comes up with the idea of the bargain. But is his supposedly free will really just predetermined by God? Regardless, Faustus is pleased with the deal; he clearly does not know the value of his own soul.*


## SCENE 4

Wagner enters and calls out to a Clown, calling him "boy" – which the clown, entering too, takes as an insult. Wagner opines that the poor clown would give the devil his soul for some mutton, and the two trade some wordplay.

*While Wagner disliked the scholars' sense of superiority in Scene 2, here he himself uses his knowledge and relative social clout to talk down to the rustic clown.*

Hoping to enlist the clown as his servant, Wagner threatens to turn all of his lice into demons if he doesn't go into service for him for seven years, and he even offers several coins, but the clown refuses.

*Like Faustus' bargain with Lucifer, this deal is simply an attempt for one party (Wagner) to exploit the other (the clown).*

Insisting that the clown has no choice, Wagner calls up two devils to prove his point. The clown says he isn't afraid of devils, but when two devils enter, he is terrified. Wagner sends the devils away, and they exit.

*Wagner continues to try to exploit the clown through a bad bargain. He uses his knowledge of magic and what little power he has to exert influence over the clown.*

After the devils exit, the clown asks Wagner if while he's in his service he can teach Robin magic. Wagner agrees, but reminds the clown to call him "Master Wagner" and to walk attentively behind him at all times. Thus, they exit.

*Wagner seems most concerned with establishing a clear hierarchy, with him as the clown's master. Again, it is his knowledge (of magic spells) that gives him this power over the clown.*

## SCENE 5

Faustus begins to doubt whether he has made a good deal. He considers turning back to God, but ultimately rejects the idea, telling himself, "The god thou servest is thine own appetite," (5, 11).

*Faustus considers the path of redemption, but continues to give into his own temptations and desires. Here he is literally saying that his own desire—that he himself—will be his god.*

The Good Angel and Evil Angel appear. The Good Angel tries to convince Faustus to repent and seek God again, asking him to think of heaven. The Evil Angel counters by telling Faustus to think of wealth, which excites Faustus. The angels leave.

*The angels again make their cases to Faustus. Faustus values material wealth over the spiritual wealth of heaven. In continuing to follow the Evil Angel, he is essentially exchanging one for the other.*

Faustus resolves to go with his deal, thinking of all the wealth he will amass. He summons up Mephastophilis and asks if there is news from Lucifer. Mephastophilis announces that Lucifer has accepted the deal, and that Faustus must sign an agreement with his own **blood** to finalize the deal.

*All of this deliberation seems to imply that Faustus is making decisions based on his own free will. Lucifer insists on a formal, legalistic document for their bargain, with Faustus' blood symbolizing his total commitment to the agreement.*

Faustus asks what Lucifer wants with his soul. Mephastophilis informs him that Lucifer seeks to enlarge his kingdom and make others suffer as he does. Faustus eagerly cuts his arm and prepares to sign a deed of gift to give his soul to Lucifer. His blood congeals almost immediately, though, and Faustus wonders, "What might the staying of my blood portend?" (5, 64)

*Faustus realizes that his congealing blood does not bode well. It seems to signify that his body, and to the extent that his blood represents his very essence, his soul, are trying to stop him from damning himself. He has another opportunity to freely repent and seek redemption.*

After Mephastophilis brings hot coals to warm his blood back into liquid, Faustus signs the agreement. Immediately, he sees written on his arm the words *homo fuge* (Latin for "Flee, man"). He panics and wonders where he could flee to: "if unto God, he'll throw me down to hell." (5, 77)

*The critical moment has passed, and the agreement is signed. Note how Faustus' reasons for not repenting now change: before signing the agreement he followed the bad angel because of the temptation of wealth and power. Now that he has signed the agreement, now that he is a damned sinner, he finds it hard to believe that God would actually take him back. This is a classic torment of the sinner, who (with the same sort of aggrandizement of himself that led him to sin in the first place) believes that his sin is so uniquely awful that repentance is impossible. Put another way, he loses faith in God's infinite love.*

Mephastophilis leaves and re-enters with more devils, bringing Faustus crowns and expensive clothing. Mephastophilis promises Faustus that he now has access to riches and the ability to call forth spirits. This comforts Faustus' anxieties about the deal, and he gives Mephastophilis the signed agreement. He reads the contract, which states that, in return for his soul, Faustus will have the powers of a spirit, while Mephastophilis will be at his service, doing and bringing him whatever he wants. Mephastophilis will appear whenever Faustus calls him and will be invisible. Mephastophilis accepts the agreement.

*Faustus' anxieties are assuaged by his desire for riches and power, for the ability to order Mephastophilis around. The contract is read out in full, emphasizing its status as a binding, legal document to which Faustus willingly assented.*

With his newfound power, Faustus first seeks to increase his knowledge. He asks Mephastophilis exactly where hell is. Mephastophilis answers that hell "hath no limits" (5, 120) and is wherever devils are. Faustus says he doesn't believe in hell and is therefore not worried that he has given his soul to Lucifer and will be damned to hell. Mephastophilis says that he himself is proof of hell's existence, since he is damned and in hell.

*Faustus immediately sets about acquiring knowledge. Once again, he does not heed the example of Mephastophilis and other devils, who demonstrate the painful consequences of unrepentant sinning.*

Faustus orders Mephastophilis to get him a wife and he returns with a devil in women's clothing, which Faustus angrily rejects. Mephastophilis gives Faustus a book filled with magic spells. He tells Faustus that the book contains spells to raise up spirits, as well as knowledge of the planets, the heavens, and all plants, herbs, and trees.

*The spell-book is almost like a text-book for magic. The realm of magic thus seems just like the other things Faustus has studied over the course of his life. The book contains a wealth of knowledge for the eager Faustus.*

The mention of the heavens causes Faustus to think of heaven and he debates repenting and renouncing magic. At this, the Good Angel and Evil Angel appear. The Good Angel encourages Faustus to repent and promises God's forgiveness, but the Evil Angel says that God would not pity Faustus. The angels leave and Faustus says he cannot repent.

*Faustus continues to have opportunities to repent, but he continues to listen to the Evil Angel, who claims that it is too late. There are two alternate but related paradoxes at work here. First: it is only too late for Faustus to repent because he* thinks *it's too late. At the same time, if Faustus was predestined to go to hell, then he thinks it's too late and can't repent because he's fated not to be able to repent.*

After resolving not to repent, Faustus continues asking Mephastophilis questions. He asks him about astronomy, the planets, and the universe. He asks who made the world and Mephastophilis refuses to answer, saying that giving the answer would be "against our kingdom," (5, 245). Mephastophilis leaves and Faustus again questions whether he should repent.

*Faustus continues to seek more knowledge from Mephastophilis. Mephastophilis can tell him all about the universe, but will not mention God. Again, Faustus' seems unable to take a hint from Mephastophilis' suffering and repent.*

As soon as Faustus mentions possibly repenting, the angels appear again. The Evil Angel tells him it is too late to repent, but the Good Angel says that it is never too late. The angels leave and Faustus cries out for Christ to save his soul.

*This is one of the moments where Faustus is the closest to actually repenting his sins and voluntarily seeking redemption through God.*

At Faustus' invocation of Christ, Mephastophilis appears with Lucifer and Belzebub (another devil). Lucifer tells Faustus that Christ cannot save him and that his talk of Christ "injures" the devils. He tells Faustus not to think of God, but rather of the devil, with whom he has made his agreement. Faustus vows not to speak of God or heaven anymore.

*However, Faustus' about-face is quickly reversed, as Lucifer convinces him to continue sinning. Is Lucifer right that Christ cannot save him now that he has given away his soul, or is he merely lying to keep Faustus in tow? He is, after all, the devil. Note how Lucifer resorts to a kind of legalese here, reminding Faustus of his agreement, of the bargain. The thing about repentance, in contrast, is that it isn't the same sort of bargain. Instead it is total, complete—you give yourself freely to God, and God gives you grace (i.e. everything) in return. There is no exploitation in the "deal" with God.*

Lucifer announces that he has come to show Faustus the Seven Deadly Sins "in their proper shapes," (5, 274) for which Faustus is excited. As each personified sin enters, Faustus questions them. The sins are Pride, Covetousness, Wrath, Envy, Gluttony, Sloth, and Lechery. Each describes the qualities of their own sin.

*Faustus is entertained by seeing these sins right in front of him, but still does not think of his* own *sins. It seems not to register that he is committing the same sins.*

Faustus is pleased at seeing the sins, and eagerly asks Lucifer to see hell. Lucifer says that he will send for Faustus at midnight and encourages him to peruse the book of spells in the meantime, from which he can learn how to change his shape.

*Faustus' insatiable desire to know includes even a desire to see hell. Lucifer keeps playing into Faustus' desires by encouraging him to learn more and more spells.*

## SCENE 6

A stablehand named Robin enters and announces that he has stolen one of Faustus' conjuring books. He is eager to learn some magic, but is interrupted by Rafe, another stablehand, who comes to tell Robin that a gentleman needs his horse and things looked after. Robin tells Rafe that he has a book of spells and claims that he can do all sorts of fantastic things with magic. They leave to attempt some magic.

*Robin and Rafe offer some comic relief. Without Faustus' education, their awkward attempts at magic seem like a counterpoint to Faustus' lofty ambitions of power and knowledge. (But how different their ridiculous motivations really are from Faustus' "lofty" ambitions of gaining knowledge, wealth, and power will soon become more ambiguous.)*

## CHORUS 2

Alone on the stage, Wagner announces that Faustus has ridden in a chariot drawn by dragons through the sky to learn the secrets of astronomy and is now flying around the globe. Wagner guesses that Faustus will go to Rome first.

*Faustus continues to gather knowledge far beyond the normal human scope of experience. He is, in a sense, taking the ambitions of a Renaissance individual to their extreme, reaching literally soaring heights.*

## SCENE 7

Faustus enters with Mephastophilis. Faustus recounts how they have traveled throughout Europe and asks Mephastophilis if they are now in Rome, where he had ordered Mephastophilis to bring him. Mephastophilis answers that they are in the pope's "privy chamber," (7, 24). Faustus is eager to see the monuments of the city of Rome. Mephastophilis suggests that they stay in the pope's room, instead, and play some tricks on the pope. Faustus agrees and Mephastophilis casts a spell that makes Faustus invisible.

*Upon arriving in Rome, Faustus seeks to expand his cultural and intellectual horizons, visiting the city's monuments. But Mephastophilis easily persuades him to use magic for cheap tricks and pranks at the expense of the pope. Faustus's lofty ambitions are sliding a bit as he uses his power to indulge his baser instincts.*

In the B-text, the pope enters along with attendants and Bruno, a rival for the office of pope who was supported by the German emperor. The pope humiliates and ridicules Bruno for opposing him. Mephastophilis and Faustus disguise themselves as two cardinals and the pope gives Bruno to them to be executed. Instead, they help Bruno escape to Germany. When the actual two cardinals return to the pope, he asks them whether Bruno has been executed but they are confused and swear they were never given Bruno. All of this is only in the B-text and does not occur in the A-text.

*This scene from the B-text furthers the unflattering portrayal of the pope in the A-text. The pope is characterized as power-hungry and more concerned with himself than the church. Marlowe's audiences would have gladly seen this critical portrayal of the leader of the Roman Catholic church, which was seen as standing in opposition to the new Renaissance ideals of individual ambition (exemplified by both Faustus and Bruno) and also, more importantly, as being hostile to England.*

In the A-text, the pope enters with a cardinal and some friars, ready to eat at a banquet. Faustus and Mephastophilis, invisible, curse loudly and snatch dishes from the table. The pope and the friars think that a ghost is harassing them. The pope crosses himself, and the friars sing a dirge to drive the spirit away. Faustus and Mephastophilis beat the friars, fling fireworks everywhere, and then leave.

*Faustus' use of magic has now deteriorated to pulling cheap pranks. In fulfilling his desires, he seems to have lost some of his noble motivations, and his own sinning seems to have affected himself, hurting his character. (Still, Protestant members of Marlowe's audiences might not have thoroughly enjoyed some slapstick comedy at the expense of the pope.)*

## SCENE 8

Robin and Rafe enter with a silver goblet they have stolen. They are attempting to use Faustus' book to conjure. A vintner (wine merchant) interrupts them, demanding they pay for the goblet. They deny that they have the goblet, and Robin casts a spell to conjure up Mephastophilis, who scares the vintner away. Mephastophilis is angry at being summoned by the lowly Robin and Rafe and being called away from Faustus (who is in Constantinople). He threatens to transform Robin and Rafe into animals and leaves.

*Robin and Rafe continue to offer a counterpoint to the educated Faustus. Mephastophilis is irritated at being summoned for such an unimportant task. But how different is this from Faustus and Mephastophilis' own pranks in Rome? Regardless of education and social status, both groups' use of magic seems motivated by simple desires. Faustus is just pulling pranks on important people like the Pope, while Robin and Rafe are doing the same to a lowly wine merchant.*

## CHORUS 3

The chorus enters and tells the audience that Faustus has returned home from his travels, amazing his friends with what he has learned of astrology and the world. As word of his knowledge has spread, Faustus has now been invited to feast with the German Emperor Charles V.

*Faustus' newfound knowledge has indeed brought with it great power and prestige. Magic has allowed him to rise even further through societal ranks, gaining an invitation to the royal court.*

## SCENE 9

In the B-text, two men at the court of emperor Charles V, named Martino and Frederick, discuss Bruno's escape from the pope and the now-famous Doctor Faustus. A knight named Benvolio arrives. He is not impressed by Faustus' devil-inspired conjuring and says that he will not go to court to see Faustus. This entire scene is not in the A-text at all.

*In this B-text scene, Martino and Frederick are evidence of Faustus' meteoric rise to fame, while Benvolio (simply an unnamed knight in the A-text) offers a critical point of view on Faustus' sinful magic.*

At the court of the emperor, Charles V eagerly asks Faustus to prove his skills in magic by performing a spell, though a knight (the same character as Benvolio in the B-text) at court is skeptical of Faustus. Faustus agrees and the emperor asks him to bring forth the spirit of Alexander the Great, since the emperor greatly admires the famous conqueror.

*Faustus employs his magic not for lofty goals but for petty parlor tricks. The knight, much like the scholars from earlier, is critical of Faustus' sinful turn to demonic magic.*

The skeptical knight doesn't believe that Faustus can bring Alexander forth, and leaves, not wanting to be present for the conjuring. Faustus has Mephastophilis leave and return with the spirits of Alexander and Alexander's paramour. The emperor examines the spirits and remarks that he thinks they are the true bodies of Alexander and his lover. (In the B-text, Alexander appears with his rival Darius, king of Persia, whom he then defeats.)

*Alexander represents the epitome of a powerful individual. Faustus too has achieved much power through his magic, but again there is a disconnect between the grandness of his original ambition to become a king (much like Alexander the Great) and his behavior here as a mere court entertainer. Perhaps fulfilling his wildest desires has made Faustus stop desiring things and has thus robbed him of ambition.*

The spirits leave, and Faustus asks for the emperor to call the skeptical knight back to court. The knight re-enters and now has horns on his head, the result of a curse from Faustus in return for his rudeness. The emperor asks Faustus to take the horns away; Faustus relents. The emperor promises Faustus a reward for his display of magic, before leaving. Faustus tells Mephastophilis that he wants to return to Wittenberg.

*Faustus continues to play tricks through his magic. His indulgence in sin seems to have deteriorated his character as a respectable scholar.*

In the B-text, after Faustus leaves, Martino and Frederick re-enter with Benvolio. Irritated by Faustus' prank, Benvolio plots to kill Faustus. Martino and Frederick reluctantly agree to help. They hide to ambush Faustus, unaware that he has a false (prosthetic) head to trick them. Benvolio decapitates Faustus and celebrates his victory. The three men plan to disfigure the head, when they realize that Faustus is still alive. Faustus sends devils to punish Benvolio, Frederick, and Martino for their attempted ambush, tormenting them and putting horns on all their heads. Again, none of this occurs in the A-text.

*This B-text addition further emphasizes themes already in the A-text version: the knight's disapproval of Faustus and Faustus' great power but cheap application of it. Sinning seems to have made Faustus a more wicked character, driven more by basic desires for revenge and entertainment than by a quest for knowledge.*

## SCENE 10

Back in Wittenberg, Faustus meets with a horse-courser (horse trader) and sells him his horse. He warns the trader not to ride the horse into water. Faustus begins to worry about his impending death and damnation. He falls asleep.

*Though less significant than Faustus' bargain with Lucifer, this deal (which we will soon learn is a bad one) furthers the play's exploration of bargains, deals, and exchanges as potential chances for exploitation.*

The horse-courser returns, completely wet, and angrily calls for Faustus. He had ridden the horse out into the middle of a pond (thinking that Faustus' warning was an attempt to hide some magic skill of the horse), at which point the horse turned into a pile of hay and he fell into the water. The horse-courser shouts in Faustus' ear and pulls on his leg to wake him. Faustus' leg comes off, and the shocked horse-courser flees. Faustus' leg is instantly restored, and he laughs at the horse-courser. Wagner arrives to tell Faustus that his company is requested by the Duke of Vanholt, "an honorable gentleman," (10, 74).

*Faustus uses the bargain to cheat the horse-courser, but doesn't seem to realize that Lucifer may be cheating him in their own deal. With the fake leg, Faustus continues to use magic for essentially cheap jokes, further evidence of his degraded character.*

In the B-text, Robin and Rafe have a drink at a tavern. At the bar, a carter (a cart-driver) tells them that he ran into Faustus on a road and Faustus paid him to give him all of the hay from his wagon, which Faustus then promptly ate. The horse-courser is also at the bar, and joins in the conversation, telling everyone about the horse he bought from Faustus and how it transformed on the water. The horse-courser acts as if he got revenge, though, by tearing Faustus' leg off, neglecting to tell the other bar patrons that this was only a fake leg. This tavern scene does not appear in the A-text.

*This additional scene in the B-text offers more comic relief. The horse-courser's story, in particular, elicits laughs as the audience knows that he is lying. The courser's story shows the continued decline of Faustus, as this use of magic makes him simply grotesque.*

## SCENE 11

The Duke and Duchess of Vanholt entertain Faustus (and Mephastophilis) at court. Faustus asks the Duchess what he can conjure that would please her, and she asks him to make a plate of grapes appear, since it is the middle of winter (and grapes are only available in the summer). Mephastophilis leaves and brings back grapes. The Duke is intrigued and asks Faustus how he procured grapes in the middle of winter. Faustus answers that when it is winter in Germany, it is summer in opposite parts of the globe. He sent "a swift spirit that I have" (11, 21) to bring the grapes from afar. Faustus encourages the Duchess to eat the grapes, and she says they are the best she's ever tasted. The Duke and Duchess promise to reward Faustus for his display of magic.

*Once again, Faustus' great powers are put to lowly uses. Faustus was once a respected, wise scholar. Now he has gained much knowledge and power, but he spends his time currying favor by fulfilling the whims of the powerful. His sinning has hurt not only others, but also his own character.*

## CHORUS 4

In a brief interlude between scenes, Wagner thinks aloud to the audience that Faustus must be nearing death, because he has given Wagner all of his possessions. But Wagner is confused, because Faustus is feasting, carousing, and enjoying himself, which does not seem to Wagner like the behavior of someone about to die.

*Faustus seems to realize that his end is near, as he gives Wagner his possessions. But this does not seem to compel Faustus to repent, as he continues to enjoy himself and indulge in his life of sinning against God.*

## SCENE 12

Faustus and Mephastophilis are with several scholars. One of them asks Faustus to conjure up Helen, the mythical Greek woman who was supposedly the most beautiful woman in the world. Faustus summons her. Helen walks across the stage, to the awe and delight of the scholars, who leave after Helen disappears.

*While the scholars like to distinguish themselves from lower characters like Rafe and Robin, all they ask Faustus for is not anything noble or particularly learned, but simply a beautiful woman. Evidently, they are not so superior to the uneducated clowns.*

An old man enters and tries to attempt Faustus to repent. Faustus is enraged and shouts that he is damned and ought to die. Mephastophilis gives Faustus a dagger. The old man says he sees an angel over Faustus' head, offering him mercy. Faustus tells the man to leave him so he can think about his sins.

*The old man plays a similar role to that of the Good Angel, urging Faustus to repent and telling him that redemption is still possible. For his part, Faustus seems at once despairing (much as Mephastophilis describes himself as being in despair) and yet preferring to wallow in that despair than to repent or recognize the beauty and love of God—a state of being described by the deadly sin of Sloth.*

Faustus says he wants to repent. In response, Mephastophilis calls him a traitor and threaten to "in piecemeal tear thy flesh," (12, 59). Faustus apologizes and says he will re-confirm his vow to Lucifer. Faustus tells Mephastophilis to torment the old man for making him doubt his bargain, and then asks him to make Helen his lover, so that her "sweet embracings may extinguish clean" his anxieties about his deal with Lucifer.

*Faustus again comes close to seeking God's mercy and redemption. At the mention of repentance, Mephastophilis threatens him, holding tight to the agreed-upon bargain. In the face of the fear of torture (which one might characterize as the fine print of his bargain with Lucifer), Faustus gives in. His faith in God is not great enough to overcome his fear of pain. His asking for Helen shows the extent to which the formerly great scholar now simply distracts himself with simple pleasures. And even he knows it—as he explicitly describes Helen as something he wants to help ease his anxieties about his bargain.*

Helen appears and Faustus begs for her kiss, asking her to "give me my soul again," (12, 85). The old man re-enters. Faustus is obsessed with Helen's beauty, and the pair leave. The old man laments Faustus' miserable fate. A group of devils appear to torment the old man, who says that his faith in God will triumph over the devils.

*Faustus seeks a "soul" through physical pleasure with Helen, rather than simply repenting his sins, showing the extent of his fall from grace. The old man, by contrast, puts his trust in God even as devils come to harm him.*

## SCENE 13

Faustus enters with the scholars from earlier. Faustus is in despair, as the end of his deal with Lucifer is approaching. Faustus laments his sins, and the scholars tell him to seek God's mercy. But Faustus answers that God cannot pardon him. He reveals that he has given away his soul for all the knowledge he has acquired. The scholars are horrified.

*The scholars value knowledge just as Faustus does, but even they are horrified at what Faustus has sacrificed to get his knowledge and power. To them, Faustus' bargain was clearly a horrible deal. Like the Good Angel and the Old Man, they encourage him to repent.*

Faustus explains that he wanted to go back on his deal, but Mephastophilis threatened to tear him to pieces. The scholars leave to go pray for Faustus. The clock strikes eleven and Faustus realizes he has one hour left to live. Faustus cries out and begs time to stand still and for the day not to end.

*The scholars still think that Faustus may have a chance to repent. Faustus begs for time to stop—he's looking for some loophole in his deal—but still will not admit his mistake and ask for God's mercy. Is he simply too proud or foolish, or is he constrained by some force of fate?*

Faustus cries to God for help, but at the name of God he feels pain in his heart (because he has given Lucifer his soul). He begs Lucifer to spare him, then asks the earth to gape open and save him from hell. He asks the stars to carry him up to the sky.

*Faustus comes close to repenting, but feels pain at the very name of God. Perhaps it is too late for him, but it is also possible that he is not truly repenting. God is only one of many things he addresses, desperately seeking help.*

The clock rings out: Faustus has half an hour left. He begs God for mercy and asks to be in hell a thousand or a hundred thousand years and then be saved, rather than being eternally damned. He curses Lucifer and himself. Midnight comes, and Faustus despairs. Devils enter and carry Faustus off as he continues to cry out, promising to burn his books.

*Faustus now tries to strike a kind of deal with God, asking for salvation in return for time spent in hell, instead of openly and completely asking for mercy and giving himself to God. Whether he never really had a choice or whether his downfall was through his own will, he is ultimately damned. With his last line, he is even willing to burn his books, symbolically giving up his desire for learning and knowledge, but it is too late.*

## EPILOGUE

The chorus announces that Faustus is gone and tells the audience to see his downfall as an example of why they should not try to learn "unlawful things," (Epilogue, 6) that tempt wise men "to practice more than heavenly power permits," (Epilogue, 8).

*The chorus' moral encourages the audience to learn from Faustus and set limits to what they seek to learn and know. But while this moral may seem clear, the question of where to draw the line between appropriate and inappropriate knowledge and ambition is anything but clear.*

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