



# Doctor Faustus

Study Guide by Course Hero



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## 👁 Book Basics

### **AUTHOR**

Christopher Marlowe

### **YEAR PUBLISHED**

1604

### **GENRE**

Tragedy

### **ABOUT THE TITLE**

The title *Doctor Faustus* refers to the play's protagonist as well as the historic figure Dr. John Faustus—an English version of the name Johann Fausten—who was a self-proclaimed

magician and wizard at a time when witchcraft was feared and condemned by Catholics and Protestants alike. The play was first published in 1604 with the more lengthy title *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*. The extended title calls attention to the play's genre but also provides a contrast. Doctor Faustus is not the typical well-to-do hero of a tragedy. In fact, he's a commoner, which suggests that no one is immune to tragedy.

## 🕒 In Context

### The Renaissance

In the 1300s European civilization began its transition out of the church-dominated Middle Ages into a period that embraced a secular, more humanistic view of the world. This period, called the Renaissance, was a cultural, intellectual, and artistic movement beginning in Italy and spreading across western Europe over the next few hundred years. It ended with the religious Thirty Years' War in central Europe (1618–48). The era's passion for classical-based art and learning was sparked by rediscovery of the literature of Greece and Rome.

The Renaissance reached England around 1550 and hit its peak during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth (1558–1603) and King James I (1603–25). Christopher Marlowe was born in the early years of the English Renaissance. His life and work were profoundly influenced by its historic wave of new ideas and discoveries in science, art, religion, and philosophy. He became a Free-Thinker, part of a group of intellectuals—noblemen, courtiers, and commoners—who formed an underground club, the School of Night, that embraced new ideas and rejected old ones. Passionate in pursuit of knowledge often dangerously in conflict with church dogma—for example, pointing out inconsistencies in the Bible—the Free-Thinkers were labeled *atheist* and targeted for suppression and death. *Doctor Faustus* was written in and for this time, reflecting this darker

side of the period's boundless pursuit of knowledge. In the spirit of the Free-Thinkers, Faustus is a skeptic and intellectual who goes too far to acquire forbidden knowledge, violates heaven's laws, and is damned for it.

## The Religious Climate

*Doctor Faustus* reflects contemporary controversies over religious faith. During the Renaissance in Europe, there was a great upheaval within the Roman Catholic Church called the Protestant Reformation. Throughout the Middle Ages (5th century to the Renaissance), the Catholic Church governed the lives of people throughout western and central Europe. The calendar year revolved around religious rituals and observances, and church teachings were the sole guide in matters of ethics, the meaning of life, and what to expect in the afterlife. Heresy, or disagreement with church teachings, was dealt with harshly.

However, in the swiftly changing world of the Renaissance, the Roman Catholic Church struggled to maintain a stable and unifying framework for people's spiritual and material lives. Individuals within the church were questioning certain practices and doctrines. Among the most outspoken and influential was a German theologian named Martin Luther. He was deeply troubled by church doctrine that accepted money in exchange for traditional acts of penance performed by a sinner as atonement. These exchanges were called indulgences. In 1517 Luther tried to spur debate on the issue in his famous document the *Ninety-five Theses*. To spread his ideas, he made clever use of a new device: the printing press. Unexpectedly, his protest against church doctrine snowballed into a zealous call for reform that split the church into warring factions: Protestants and Catholics.

In Marlowe's England this split was keenly felt by the majority of people. Catholicism had held sway in England until 1534, when King Henry VIII launched his own religious revolution, broke with the Roman Catholic Church, and established himself as the head of the Church of England. Between Henry's death in 1547 and Elizabeth I's rise to the throne, England first tilted violently toward Protestantism and then as violently toward Catholicism. At last Queen Elizabeth cast the church as an independent, "middle-ground" entity. It leaned toward Catholicism in structure but blurred the doctrinal lines between Protestantism and Catholicism and recognized the monarchy—not the pope in Rome—as its leading authority. As a

result, numerous plots were hatched, backed by Rome, to dethrone the queen by force. This included excommunication from the church by the pope in 1570—a grave step that made supporters of the papacy automatic enemies of the queen.

Reflecting England's religious climate in the latter part of the 16th century, *Doctor Faustus* takes humorous aim at Catholicism and the pope. Most notably, in Act 3, Scene 1 Faustus visits Rome—seat of the Roman Catholic Church—after selling his soul to Lucifer for limitless power and knowledge. The doctor proceeds to use magic to torment the pope, which would have delighted his Protestant audience.

*Doctor Faustus* also explores the weighty consequences of rejecting religious beliefs and the merits of holding fast to conventional values. Despite Queen Elizabeth's attempt to establish a religious middle ground upon which all English Protestants might stand, religion was not exempt from the spirit of skepticism at the heart of the Renaissance. Though, questioning religious doctrine often invited accusations of blasphemy. In his pursuit of knowledge, Faustus rejects reliance on earlier, accepted authorities, including the Bible and divine revelation. He strikes out on his own, to discover dark, hidden knowledge. However, in the play's closing moments, Faustus realizes that his skeptical questioning of sacred doctrine and rejection of religion have damned him to a fate he cannot escape.

Also woven into the play is the issue of human free will versus predestination—a hot subject of religious debate, advanced by Protestant theologian John Calvin (1509–64). Calvin preached that salvation comes through divine grace alone and that, for each person, the outcome is predetermined by God. An individual's choices and actions merely fulfill what has already been divinely fixed. In the character of Faustus, Marlowe hints at the possibility that the doctor is unable to choose a different path, that his God-given nature shapes his choices and actions. For example, in Act 2, Scene 3 the Evil Angel states with certainty, "Faustus never shall repent." Yet Marlowe keeps the fundamental question open by inviting sympathy for a man who may have chosen his own wicked path but refuses to repent. He states in the epilogue, "Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight."

# Full Character List

Character	Description
Doctor Faustus	Faustus, a doctor of theology, sells his soul to Lucifer in exchange for unlimited knowledge and the services of the devil Mephistophilis for 24 years.
Mephistophilis	Mephistophilis, a devil and collector of damned souls for Lucifer, serves Faustus for 24 years, until the doctor's soul is claimed and he is sent to hell.
Lucifer	Lucifer, once an angel and dearly loved by God, rebelled and was thrown out of heaven. He is the prince of devils and collects human souls, including the soul of Faustus, to populate his kingdom of hell.
Alexander the Great	Alexander the Great is a famous Macedonian king and conqueror from the 4th century BCE. Spirits who resemble him and his paramour, or mistress, are conjured by Faustus at the request of Emperor Carolus the Fifth.
Belzebub	Belzebub is Lucifer's companion prince in hell and appears with Lucifer to bolster Faustus's resolve to pursue his study of magic.
Baliol	Baliol is one of two minor devils conjured by Wagner to scare the clown.
Belcher	Belcher is one of two minor devils conjured by Wagner to scare the clown.
Cardinal of Lorraine	The cardinal of Lorraine is an attendant to the pope. He is present when Faustus plays several pranks on the pope while invisible.
Chorus	The chorus provides commentary that helps the audience interpret the play.

Clown	The clown is a simple peasant victimized by Wagner's amateur conjuring.
Cornelius	Cornelius is a learned magician and friend to Faustus. Along with Valdes, he helps tutor Faustus in the rudiments of magic.
Covetousness	Covetousness is one of the Seven Deadly Sins personified and shown to Faustus. Covetousness represents an excessive desire to possess wealth, material goods, or power.
Duchess of Vanholt	The duchess of Vanholt is wife of the duke of Vanholt, a patron of Faustus. Faustus delights her by making grapes appear in winter.
Duke of Vanholt	The duke of Vanholt is Faustus's admiring patron and husband of the duchess of Vanholt.
Emperor Carolus the Fifth	Emperor Carolus the Fifth, also known as Emperor Charles V, is Faustus's admiring patron for whom he conjures Alexander the Great and his paramour.
Envy	Envy is one of the Seven Deadly Sins personified and shown to Faustus.
The Evil Angel	The Evil Angel argues in favor of Faustus's continued pursuit of black magic, which ultimately sends Faustus to hell.
Friar	The friar leads several other friars in singing a dirge to drive off the invisible Faustus and Mephistophilis as they torment the pope.
Gluttony	Gluttony is one of the Seven Deadly Sins personified and shown to Faustus. Gluttony is the sin of greed, especially for food and drink.
The Good Angel	The Good Angel argues in favor of Faustus's repentance and the salvation of his soul.

Helen of Troy	Helen of Troy is the unparalleled beauty whose abduction sparked the Trojan War. Faustus conjures her at the request of the three scholars and takes her for his lover.
Horse-courser	The horse-courser, or horse trader, is cheated and abused by Faustus, using magic.
Knight at the emperor's court	The knight attends the emperor's court. After he expresses skepticism about Faustus's conjuring abilities, Faustus causes horns to appear on the knight's head.
Lechery	Lechery is one of the Seven Deadly Sins personified and shown to Faustus. Lechery is the sin of excessive lust.
Old man	The old man is a godly elder troubled by Faustus's continued pursuit of dark knowledge. His pleas that Faustus repent and save his soul are rebuffed.
Paramour	The paramour is the mistress of Alexander the Great, a famous Macedonian king and conqueror from the 4th century BCE. Spirits who resemble them both are conjured by Faustus at the request of Emperor Carolus the Fifth.
Pope	The pope is the leader of the Roman Catholic Church. Faustus, while invisible, embarrasses him with mean-spirited pranks in front of his banquet guests.
Pride	Pride is one of the Seven Deadly Sins personified and shown to Faustus.
Rafe	Rafe is one of two stablemen to clumsily employ magic as a prank and, to their dismay, accidentally summon Mephistophilis.
Robin	Robin is one of two stablemen to clumsily employ magic as a prank and, to their dismay, accidentally summon Mephistophilis.

First scholar	The first scholar is one of three scholars who are admiring friends of Faustus. They ask him to conjure Helen of Troy, and in Faustus's final hours, he tells them of his pact with the devil.
Second scholar	The second scholar is one of three scholars who are admiring friends of Faustus. They ask him to conjure Helen of Troy, and In Faustus's final hours, he tells them of his pact with the devil.
Third scholar	The third scholar is one of three scholars who are admiring friends of Faustus. They ask him to conjure Helen of Troy, and In Faustus's final hours, he tells them of his pact with the devil.
Sloth	Sloth is one of the Seven Deadly Sins personified and shown to Faustus. Sloth is the sin of apathy.
Valdes	Valdes is a learned magician and friend to Faustus. Along with Cornelius, he helps tutor Faustus in the rudiments of magic.
Vintner	The vintner is the victim of a prank by Rafe and Robin that ends with the appearance of Mephistophilis.
Wagner	Wagner is Faustus's faithful servant. He uses what he grasps about magic to torment the clown. He also provides commentary that helps the audience interpret the play.
Wrath	Wrath is one of the Seven Deadly Sins personified and shown to Faustus. Wrath is the sin of excessive anger.

## Plot Summary

## Act 1

Doctor John Faustus is introduced by the chorus, whose role is to both explain and to facilitate transitions in the play. Here the chorus explains that his story is not a sweeping tale of warfare or love at court. It is the tale of a man of lowly birth who in later years is raised by a kinsman while attending school in Wertenberg. The young man proves to be a brilliant religious scholar but, swollen with pride, turns away from traditional areas of study to explore necromancy, or black magic.

As Faustus sits in his study, he pages through various texts on logic, medicine, law, and religion. Dismissing them one by one, he turns at last to a book of magic. The power and authority promised by mastering this art appeals to Faustus. In spite of warnings from the Good Angel that appears, he resolves to study magic. He engages his German friends Valdes and Cornelius to teach him all the basics he needs to know about the "damned art" of necromancy.

Sometime later, in a demonstration of his conjuring skills, Faustus summons up the devil Mephistophilis—"an unhappy spirit that fell with Lucifer," the prince of devils, when God threw him out of heaven. Mephistophilis explains that by dabbling in magic, Faustus risks corruption of his soul. He then warns of the torments of hell that await him if he allies himself with Lucifer. Undaunted, Faustus sends the devil back to his master with an offer: the soul of Faustus in exchange for 24 years of service from Mephistophilis.

## Act 2

Mephistophilis returns to Faustus with the news that Lucifer has agreed to the deal, provided Faustus will write and sign the deed for his soul in blood. Faustus proceeds as instructed, but the moment it is done, the words *Homo fuge* appear like a brand on his arm. Latin for "Fly, O man!" they seem to be a warning. Unsettled, Faustus tries to imagine where he could run—certainly not to God, who would throw him into hell for what he has done. To distract Faustus and strengthen his determination, Mephistophilis showers him with rich gifts and devilish entertainment and then provides all the books Faustus desires on spells and incantations.

A while later, Faustus wavers in his decision and considers renouncing magic and repenting. Then, recalling that he is

most certainly damned already, he hardens his heart and begins questioning Mephistophilis on the nature and movement of heavenly bodies. However, when he asks, "Who made the world?" the devil refuses to answer, stirring up Faustus's doubts once more. Just as the doctor calls upon Christ to save his soul, Lucifer appears, accompanied by Belzebub, his companion prince in hell. To draw Faustus back from the brink of repentance, they appeal to his thirst for knowledge and enthrall him with a display of the Seven Deadly Sins.

## Act 3

Faustus has studied diligently and now uses his dark powers to travel to Rome, where he visits the pope. Bidding Mephistophilis to make him invisible, he harasses the pope as he entertains guests, flinging fireworks among them, stealing food and drink, and boxing the pope's ears.

## Act 4

In the years that follow, Faustus travels throughout Europe, appearing at the courts of kings and earning an impressive reputation for wit and knowledge of the black arts. Eventually Emperor Carolus the Fifth invites Faustus to his court and begs him to conjure up Alexander the Great. While the emperor is duly impressed by the feat, a knight mocks the doctor's skill. In retaliation Faustus gives him a pair of horns on his head, a sure sign that the knight has been cuckolded by his wife.

Continuing his travels, Faustus performs further feats of magic, including a dishonest and cruel prank on a horse-courser (a dealer in horses). Later, he entertains the duke and duchess of Vanholt at court by producing grapes in winter.

## Act 5

As the final act opens, Faustus is conjuring beautiful Helen of Troy for a group of admiring scholars. However, the 24 years allotted to the doomed doctor are winding down, and soon it will be time to forfeit his soul. An old man appears and begs him to repent and ask God's forgiveness. Though briefly tempted, Faustus instead reaffirms his vow to Lucifer in blood.

# Scene Summaries

## Prologue

### Summary

Introducing the play, the chorus announces that no tale of warfare, romance in a king's court, or heroic deeds will be presented. Instead the audience will witness the story of Faustus, a common man of low birth from a town called Rhodes, in Germany. Coming of age, Faustus went to live with relatives in Wertenberg, attended the university, and studied theology. He excelled in his studies and soon earned his degree along with the title of "doctor." Then pride and ambition led him down the path of black magic. Like mythological Icarus who soared too near the hot sun on wings of wax and feathers, Faustus went too far in his pursuit of limitless knowledge.

This man, the chorus concludes, feeds upon and craves what magic has to offer. He now sits in his study.

### Analysis

Christopher Marlowe's use of a chorus to introduce the play reflects the Renaissance era's deep interest in classical Greek drama. In that tradition, the chorus is a group of actors that, with singing, dancing, and choral odes, describe and comment on the play's unfolding plot. They also serve as the voice of the everyday citizen passing judgment on the tragedy playing out before them. As in *Doctor Faustus*, this tragedy would likely spring from the protagonist's defiance of the gods and the limitations their divine laws impose on humankind.

Over time the role of the chorus decreased in Greek drama. The group provided less commentary and was less important to the plot. Eventually, the choral interludes became a pleasant diversion for playgoers to enjoy between acts. During the Renaissance the dramatic role of the chorus was revived, but its participants were reduced to a single person, as in *Doctor Faustus*.

Marlowe's chorus introduces Doctor Faustus, sketches out his personal history, and states that he is doomed by pride and

ambition. Again, Marlowe—through the chorus—draws on the tradition of Greek mythology, comparing Faustus's downfall to that of the boy Icarus. The boy's father, Daedalus, makes him a pair of wings from feathers and wax. He warns Icarus not to fly too close to the sun, as the heat will melt the wax. Forgetting his father's wise warning, Icarus recklessly flies higher and higher. The wax melts, the feathers scatter, and Icarus falls to his death. Similarly, Faustus will fly too high and be destroyed for it.

Besides looking back to antiquity, the prologue spotlights the humanistic values of the Renaissance that the play will explore. In contrast to the Middle Age's God-centered view of existence, the Renaissance placed the human at the center of importance. Humanists stressed the individual's potential for self-direction, goodness, and rational existence without divine oversight. The chorus states that Faustus, in his self-conceit, will turn away from "heavenly matters of theology" to focus upon "cursèd necromancy." This pursuit involves speaking with the dead in order to predict the future. As the chorus states, he prefers this to "his chiefest bliss," meaning his hope of salvation—the deliverance from sin. And so the stage is set for a confrontation between a Renaissance man who rejects God's authority and the Middle Ages belief that God's laws govern all and must be obeyed.

This Renaissance emphasis on the individual inspires another break with medieval tradition, whose literature celebrated historic, saintly, or heroic figures. In *Doctor Faustus* the chorus makes it clear that the audience will be watching a play not about great or legendary figures, but about an ordinary man. This idea resonated with a Renaissance audience that believed in the potential and value of the everyday human.

In the later B-Text version of the play, the university where Faustus studies is called Wittenberg.

## Act 1, Scene 1

### Summary

Alone in his study, Faustus contemplates what line of scholarship he will pursue. He has earned a higher degree in theology but suspects his interests may have changed. He first considers the study of logic, or reasoning, whose foundation is Greek philosopher Aristotle's *Analytics*. Yet the main goal of



logic seems to be the art of debating well. Having mastered the skill already, Faustus impatiently rejects this line of study.

Next he looks to medicine, noting a quotation from Aristotle: "Where philosophy ends, medicine begins." Faustus mentions Galen, a physician of ancient Rome, considered the most prominent of famous doctors. Faustus knows there is good money in practicing medicine and fame to be acquired for discovering some wondrous cure. Yet he is already an accomplished physician and finds no satisfaction in his success—he is still simply Faustus.

Turning to the field of law, the doctor turns to Roman Emperor Justinian, whose works form the basis for the study of law during the Renaissance. But Faustus dismisses this, as well. He decides law is a profession too tedious and narrow in scope, with only trivial aims. Rejecting it, he arrives full circle, judging that the formal study of religion best fits his ambitions. Picking up St. Jerome's translation of the Bible, he reads a line of verse: "The reward of sin is death." It occurs to him that humankind is fated to sin and so fated to die an everlasting death. In light of this the study of theology also seems pointless and unable to satisfy his yearnings.

Having eliminated the three main subjects studied at a Renaissance university, Faustus turns to the "metaphysics of magicians" (the study of what is considered beyond the known world) and necromancy. This unorthodox line of scholarship promises money, pleasure, power, respect, and influence. Faustus notes that an accomplished magician "is a mighty god," and he dreams he will become omnipotent, or all-powerful, greater than emperors or kings. Faustus decides in favor of magic and promptly sends his servant, Wagner, to invite two friends, Valdes and Cornelius, to visit. They can help him in his studies.

Alone once again, Faustus is confronted by the Good Angel and the Evil Angel. The Good Angel begs Faustus to put aside his blasphemous book of magic and read the Bible instead. The Evil Angel urges Faustus on his ambitious course of study. Once they leave, Faustus argues aloud for all the benefits of pursuing magic, all the splendid things he will accomplish with its power.

When Valdes and Cornelius arrive, Faustus tells them he has become possessed with the idea of practicing magic. Valdes assures Faustus that his intelligence guided by their experience and books will bring them all fame and privilege. Cornelius adds that once Faustus sees what magic can do, he

will want to study nothing else. The two agree to help Faustus learn the rudiments of the art, expecting that he soon will outshine them. Though anxious to begin that night, Faustus asks his friends to dine with him first.

## Analysis

The knowledge and wisdom of the past inherited by the Renaissance flowed from men such as Aristotle (philosophy), Galen (medicine), and Justinian (law) and from the Bible (theology). Faustus has been "ravished" by the works of Aristotle but is certain there is more to know. The ancient authorities on medicine and law seem to him equally limited. Faustus uses faulty logic, based on an incomplete reading of a Bible verse, to reject continued study of theology.

Romans 6:23 reads, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Faustus concentrates only on "the wages of sin is death," leaving out the rest of the sentence, which focuses on the "gift" of eternal life through Christ. Instead, Faustus looks only at "everlasting death." This is a most pessimistic interpretation, devoid of hope. As a master of the subject of theology, Faustus should have known better. However, he is bent on studying magic and is willing to engage in self-deception to do so, such as basing his decision on half of a Bible verse.

This conveniently allows Faustus to discard religious studies as easily as philosophy, medicine, and law. He treats the idea of sin lightly, observing, "We must sin, and so consequently die." It's a rather clinical view of the process, a view detached from the damning nature of sin. He coolly continues, "Ay, we must die an everlasting death," as if this has no meaning for him personally. This foreshadows Faustus's fall, when he will give in to sin and marginalize its spiritual consequences.

The doctor's longing to study magic appears potentially admirable. He yearns to expand the frontiers of human knowledge and to do great things with his power. His list of goals is impressive and lends his character an idealistic grandeur. However, he also fantasizes about the vast wealth and fame he will acquire; the worldly delights he will explore. These less worthy desires will undermine his more noble goals. In time he will use his knowledge and power only for self-serving pleasure and profit, amusing tricks, and petty revenge. For all his scholarship, Faustus has failed to assimilate the wisdom—a gift he could glean from many works in the

past—that greed for power never ends well. If he had considered this, he might have recognized and guarded against the corrupting influence of unlimited power. Faustus turns to Valdes and Cornelius to help him in his studies. Anxious to get started, he is impatient with the idea of self-conducted study. This indicates that, for Faustus, the pursuit of knowledge is secondary to the objective of power and wealth. He is willing to take a shortcut to possess them, just as he is willing to delude himself with his flawed interpretation of the biblical verse.

The Good Angel and Evil Angel are also introduced in this scene. They appear to be physical embodiments of true spirits as well as representatives of Faustus's conflicted conscience. Within the play they establish the universal conflict between good and evil. They then proceed to work consistently as a pair, speaking in a call-response pattern. In the beginning the Good Angel is first to speak. However, when they appear a last time near the end of Act 2, Scene 3, the Evil Angel speaks first, suggesting Faustus has crossed a line, slipping closer to damnation and further from redemption. Even so, as in this first scene, the Good Angel stubbornly insists that Faustus may yet be saved if he rejects magic and repents by expressing his sorrow and remorse for his sins.

## Act 1, Scene 2

### Summary

Two nosey scholars come looking for Faustus at his residence. Wagner engages them in a bit of verbal sparring before telling them his master is at dinner with Valdes and Cornelius. The scholars take this as bad news, knowing the doctor's guests are infamous practitioners of "that damned art." They fear that Faustus may be practicing magic as well. Gloomily, they go off to inform the head of the university, faintly hoping he will be able to rescue Faustus from this grave mistake before it is too late.

### Analysis

The concern of the two scholars illustrates Faustus's respected status at the university, where knowledge and mental agility are prized. They seem to miss his presence most

keenly at debates, introducing his arguments with the familiar scholarly phrase *sic probo*—meaning "Here is my proof."

The two scholars reveal a personal sense of intellectual superiority by addressing Faustus's servant Wagner as "sirrah," an address reserved for inferiors. When they demand Wagner tell them where Faustus is, he challenges their right to insist that he knows. The ensuing exchange provides a closer look at Wagner's character.

Wagner has the intellect and education to engage the scholars in a dispute using logic. He does not appreciate being treated as an inferior and impudently plays the scholars for fools, using wordplay to obscure the truth of where Faustus is at the moment. His impatience with these two representatives of traditional learning mirrors Faustus's impatience in this arena, as expressed in the previous scene. Wagner's logic is flawed but clever enough to confuse the scholars. He is not only having some fun, but also protecting Faustus. He knows that the scholars will not approve of his master's guests. This establishes Wagner's role as a rather clever, very loyal, and protective servant to Faustus. In some respects he acts as a double for Faustus, albeit in the form of a servant. His outlook and actions will often reflect those of his master, as they do in this scene. He will also step into the role of the chorus on occasion.

## Act 1, Scene 3

### Summary

Faustus has sufficiently mastered the art of conjuring to call up a devil one winter's evening. Consulting a book of spells, he draws circles, signs, and symbols. He writes Jehovah's name backward and forward and then rearranges it to form different words. He shortens the names of the saints. Then chanting in Latin, he invokes the powers of heaven and hell, calling upon the devils of Hades, the Holy Trinity, the spirits of fire, air, water, and Earth, Belzebub, and Demogorgon (a demon). He commands that Mephistophilis appear.

When a devil shows up, Faustus judges him "too ugly to attend on me" and sends him off to change his shape into something more pleasing. He sarcastically suggests that the guise of an old Franciscan friar would be appropriate. He's delighted when the devil immediately departs, and he anticipates that "this



Mephistophilis" will be an obedient, humble servant.

Mephistophilis appears and asks Faustus what he wants of him. When Faustus demands that the devil serve him, Mephistophilis explains that he cannot without permission from his master, Lucifer. He has not come in response to Faustus's summons but on his own. He is intrigued to assess the condition of Faustus's soul, which he hopes to obtain. The doctor's conjuring is a sure sign of a man in danger of being damned.

In answer to Faustus's questions, Mephistophilis describes the nature of Lucifer as a fallen angel, his status as prince of devils, and how God threw him out of heaven for pride and insolence. Mephistophilis explains that he, being one of Lucifer's followers, was damned with him. Reflecting on the everlasting torment he endures being separated from God, Mephistophilis warns Faustus to turn back from the course he has chosen. Dismissively, Faustus tells him to return to his master, Lucifer, and offer his (Faustus's) soul in exchange for 24 years of service from Mephistophilis, who must do whatever he asks. Faustus also notes that during this time he wishes to live a life of "voluptuousness," one filled with pleasure and luxury. He wants an answer by midnight. Once the devil departs, Faustus contemplates all that he will do with his anticipated power. He will be emperor of the world, capable of great feats, such as joining the continental coastline of Africa to that of Spain.

## Analysis

Some time has passed, and Faustus has been diligently studying the art of conjuring. The spell he cites in Latin begins by calling on the gods of Acheron (Hades) and the threefold spirit of Jehovah (the Holy Trinity) to aid him. This blasphemy is all the more shocking coming from a theologian. Once again, Faustus's bold use of it calls into question the depth of his former religious convictions. The doctor ends his incantation with more blasphemy by sprinkling around holy water ("consecratam aquam") and making the sign of the cross. Holy water, which has been blessed by a priest, is used in Catholic religious ceremonies, such as baptism and last rites, and is considered a powerful spiritual weapon.

In response to the incantation, Mephistophilis materializes, and his shocking appearance leaves no doubt that he is a devil and a product of hell. As such, he establishes for the audience that hell is real and a terrible place. When Faustus sends

Mephistophilis off to assume a more pleasing form, he takes a cheap shot at Catholicism, suggesting that the devil return as an old Franciscan friar—a shape that suits a devil best. Franciscans are a Catholic Christian religious order founded by St. Francis of Assisi. They advocate a life of preaching, penance, and poverty. The unpopularity of all things Catholic made this mockery of the Franciscans delightful to English audiences of the Renaissance. It also reveals Faustus's low opinion of a religious order whose values and practices are in opposition to his own. While members of the order share knowledge with others, Faustus gathers it for himself. While they seek to redeem their souls through penance, Faustus seeks to damn his soul through sinfulness. While they are content to live in poverty, Faustus desires to acquire vast wealth.

Mephistophilis quickly clarifies that he answered Faustus's summons not as a servant, but as a collector of souls. This establishes Mephistophilis as powerful in his own right, though he is also in service to Lucifer. As a collector of souls, Mephistophilis fits the traditional religious idea of devils and demons employed in corrupting goodness and luring souls into hell. However, this traditional perception is given a twist when Mephistophilis describes himself as one of the "unhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer." He declares that he is tormented by his separation from God. This capacity for suffering is unexpected. So terrible is his hellish existence that he warns Faustus to give up pursuit of magic. This impulse to do a damned soul a good turn is equally surprising in a devil. The result is a complex character, both powerful and tortured, full of evil intentions yet capable of fleeting compassion.

Blinded by pride and ambition, Faustus cannot or will not accept that he is in danger. Until Mephistophilis corrects him, he mistakenly believes that his abilities as a conjurer were so powerful they brought the demon to him. It is not Faustus's power but the vulnerability of his soul that has caused Mephistophilis to appear. Faustus accepts the idea of demons and hell, but only in a most objective, detached way. Once he sends off Mephistophilis with his message for Lucifer, Faustus claims that he would sacrifice "as many souls as there are stars" to get the knowledge and power he desires. He continues to indulge his fantasy of being a "great emperor of the world," so powerful he can shift Earth's geography as he wishes.

## Act 1, Scene 4

### Summary

Wagner engages in some banter with a clown, or peasant, by calling him "boy." Insulted, the fellow asks how many "boys" he has seen with beards like his. Wagner then asserts that the fellow looks unemployed and hungry enough to sell his soul to the devil for some meat to eat. He tries to recruit him to become his servant, but the clown seems unwilling. So Wagner threatens him with magic—to turn all the clown's lice into evil spirits that will tear him to pieces. When this fails, he forces money on the fellow that the man tries to return. In frustration Wagner calls up two devils, Baliol and Belcher, who chase the terrified clown. After a few moments, Wagner sends the devils away. Now the clown, impressed by Wagner's demonstration, consents to serve Wagner if he will teach him to summon devils, too, and other feats of magic.

### Analysis

As the play progresses, an alternating pattern of serious and comic scenes becomes apparent, with the comic scenes offering a parody by providing a mocking imitation of the preceding serious scene. These scenes serve to ridicule the presumed greatness of Faustus's achievements as he masters black magic at the price of his soul. In this scene Wagner demonstrates that even the unschooled can summon devils.

In a bit of comic relief, Wagner's actions once again reflect the previous events involving Faustus. Mimicking his master, Wagner engages a clown (meaning a rustic fellow or peasant) to be his servant. Determined to convince the fellow to serve him, Wagner employs insults, crude logic, and bribery. Traditional means of persuasion prove too weak to be effective. Like his master, Wagner decides that the only way to get what he wants is through magic.

In the previous scene (Scene 3), Faustus conjured a devil. In this scene Wagner conjures Baliol and Belcher to frighten the clown. Just as Faustus hopes to engage the services of Mephistophilis through magic, Wagner hopes to engage the services of the clown through intimidation by magic. Wagner also mimics the two scholars, the intellectual snobs from Act 1, Scene 2. While he objected to the pompousness of the two

nosey scholars, he now assumes a superior attitude and talks down to the clown, again recalling Faustus's arrogance and sense of entitled superiority.

Variations of the A-Text and B-Text identify the clown as Robin, a character who otherwise appears for the first time in Act 2, Scene 2.

## Act 2, Scene 1

### Summary

Faustus waits in his study for Mephistophilis's return. He is troubled by doubts about the choice he has made. On the one hand, he knows he will be damned for delving into magic. On the other, it may be too late to turn to God again—it seems impossible that God could love him. Abruptly, he realizes he would rather fulfill his own ambitious desires anyway, so he may as well continue serving Belzebub. The Good Angel and Evil Angel appear once more to argue for and against repentance. The Good Angel asserts it is not too late for Faustus to renounce magic, repent, and attain heaven. The Evil Angel argues this is an illusion, not to be trusted. He urges Faustus to keep in mind the honor and wealth he will gain through his use of magic.

The angels depart, and Faustus resolves to continue his pursuits, believing that no god can hurt him as long as Mephistophilis is beside him. At that moment the devil returns with the news that Lucifer has agreed to Faustus's proposal: he may buy 24 years of service from Mephistophilis and a life of luxury and pleasure for the price of his soul. There is one provision. To demonstrate his commitment to the agreement, Faustus must write and sign the contract in his own blood. When Faustus asks what value his soul has for Lucifer, Mephistophilis replies that it will add to Lucifer's growing kingdom. Asked if he, as a devil who tortures damned souls, suffers pain, Mephistophilis admits that he suffers as much as those human souls. Then to distract Faustus from any misgivings, the devil reminds him of the great rewards tied to a pact with Lucifer.

Slashing his arm, Faustus proceeds to write the contract in blood, but soon the blood congeals, making it impossible for him to continue. Briefly he wonders what this portends. Then Mephistophilis brings hot coals to liquefy the blood again, and

Faustus can complete the contract. Signing it, he announces in Latin, "It is finished." Instantly, the words *Homo fuge!* (Fly, O man!) appear, etched on his arm. Though it seems a dire warning, Faustus cannot think of anywhere to go. Certainly God would not offer him a safe haven.

As a diversion, Mephistophilis lavishes crowns and fine clothing on Faustus and swears "by hell and Lucifer" that the doctor shall have everything he desires. As hoped, Faustus confirms the contract, and Mephistophilis accepts it on behalf of Lucifer. Then, at Faustus's first command, Mephistophilis describes the dreadful nature of hell. Nevertheless, Faustus says, "I think hell's a fable," and asserts that he has no fear of damnation.

Changing the subject, Faustus commands that Mephistophilis "fetch" him a wife. The devil returns with another devil dressed as a frightful woman. When Faustus rejects her, Mephistophilis begs him to give up all thoughts of marriage. Instead he can have the most beautiful mistresses, whomever he desires. Then, to gratify Faustus's thirst for learning, the devil gives him an all-inclusive book of knowledge to study about spells and incantations, astronomy and astrology, and the natural sciences.

## Analysis

In his opening soliloquy, Faustus reveals the corruption that already taints his soul. The doctor is having second thoughts about the path he intends to follow. His initial impulse to turn back to God is overshadowed by despair. Surely God cannot love him. In a moment of self-awareness, he admits that he is ruled by his appetite for the things dark magic can offer. This is the "god" he wants to follow. For the love of Belzebub, he would build "an altar and a church" and ritually murder newborn babies in tribute to him. Turning his back on God in this way, Faustus embraces evil and rejects the divine goodness and mercy he once accepted as a theologian. The battle for Faustus's soul resumes when the Good Angel and Evil Angel return. Faustus joins in their call-and-response but refuses to be persuaded in favor of repentance and redemption. He stubbornly prefers to exchange the spiritual gifts of heaven for earthly honor and wealth. By the time Mephistophilis shows up, Faustus is mentally and spiritually prepared to enter into the pact with Lucifer.

Lucifer takes no chances that a scholar such as Faustus will

find a loophole in their agreement when the time comes to forfeit his soul. He insists that the pact be written and signed in Faustus's blood. Blood, the body's source of life, represents the soul. Used in a blood oath, it becomes a link between Faustus and Lucifer and binds Faustus's soul to hell. As his soul's representative, the doctor's blood seems determined to prevent him from completing the contract. It congeals so he cannot write. So intent is Faustus on making the dark deal that he only fleetingly worries that this is a bad sign worth heeding. His blood is wiser than he, in another instance of Faustus failing to interpret the information before him correctly if it challenges his desires.

The doctor's final words upon signing the pact echo those spoken by Jesus Christ as he died when crucified on the cross. *Consummatum est* is Latin for "It is finished." From Christ's lips, the phrase meant that he had fulfilled ancient prophesy and the work God, his father, had sent him to do; salvation was assured to those who believed. From the lips of Faustus, however, the phrase means something completely different—his salvation is now firmly in jeopardy and his damnation assured.

Once the pact is finalized, Faustus engages Mephistophilis in a round of questions. The topic is hell, just as it was during their first encounter. Faustus appears fascinated by the subject though skeptical that hell is real. In Act 1 Mephistophilis explained that, because he is damned, hell is all around him. It is wherever he is. This time, instead of describing hell as a psychological state, Mephistophilis provides a more traditional description of a place "under the heavens ... where we are tortured and remain forever." Surprisingly, since he is talking to a devil and has signed his soul over to Lucifer, Faustus says, "I think hell's a fable." This statement from a scholar who has studied the nature of God and religious belief raises questions: Did Faustus ever believe, or did he lose his faith along the way? Is his lust for power so extreme that it has possessed him to the point of shutting out everything else? As the play progresses, Faustus will struggle to deny the reality of hell and the peril to his soul. As the certainty of hell grows, he will fight a desperate but losing battle to find or rekindle his faith and save himself through repentance.

## Act 2, Scene 2

## Summary

Robin, an ostler (a person who works with horses), has stolen one of Doctor Faustus's books of spells and intends to try his hand at conjuring. A fellow ostler named Rafe comes to inform him that a gentleman requires their services, but Robin shoos him away with a warning that he is about to do something risky. Seeing the book, Rafe remarks that Robin cannot read. Robin replies that, with luck, he can read well enough to seduce his mistress. Rafe learns that Robin is using a powerful book of spells and has been practicing some minor magic. Robin promises him a spell for beguiling the kitchen maid, Nan Spit, anytime he wishes. Thrilled at the prospect, Rafe agrees to assist Robin in his conjuring.

## Analysis

Comic relief again contrasts with the seriousness of the preceding scene in which Faustus deeds his soul to Lucifer in exchange for power and knowledge. Robin is as uneducated as Faustus is scholarly in matters of magic. He has not studied it, but stolen a book about it from Faustus. He cannot read but intends to try conjuring anyway. His ambitions are not lofty, as are Faustus's, but boorish and vulgar. Magic as an exalted subject to be seriously pursued is reduced by a lout to something trivial and low. Once more, the actions of a minor character seem to point out that anyone with the right book can perform magic of some kind without limitless knowledge or loss of his soul.

Variations of the A-Text and B-Text identify Robin as an ostler (A-Text) or as the clown (B-Text). In addition the B-Text lists the second character as Dick instead of Rafe. There are variations as well in the placement of this scene within the play. Some A-Texts place it later, after Act 3, Scene 1, displacing the chorus. Some B-Texts place this scene after Faustus views the Seven Deadly Sins. Nevertheless, several authorities have agreed that a scene was missing at this point in both versions of the text and Marlowe likely intended this scene to fill that gap.

## Act 2, Scene 3

## Summary

Once again, Faustus is wavering in his decision to follow magic, fearing damnation. Mephistophilis declares that the heaven the doctor imagines is not as glorious as man, for whom it was made. Contrary to the effect the devil intended, Faustus turns this statement into a reason to renounce magic and repent.

At the mention of repentance, the Good Angel and Evil Angel appear. The Good Angel assures Faustus that God will still pity him if he repents, while the Evil Angel claims that God cannot. Faustus asserts that God will pity him if he repents, to which the Evil Angel replies, "Ay, but Faustus never shall repent."

The angels depart, and Faustus admits that repentance feels impossible because "[his] heart's so hardened." He bemoans the fact that whenever he mentions salvation, faith, or heaven, the refrain "Faustus, thou art damned" echoes in his ears like thunder. He feels he might have committed suicide by now, except for the fact that the "sweet pleasure" that magic offers has "conquered [his] deep despair." So thinking, Faustus resolves yet again to never repent and calls upon Mephistophilis to discuss the nature of the cosmos. The discussion goes well until Faustus asks who made the world. Mephistophilis refuses to answer. He reminds Faustus that, in his fallen state, he should think more about hell, which he calls "our kingdom," and he can't tell Faustus anything that goes against it.

Faustus is shaken into wondering if it's too late for his soul. The Evil Angel appears and states firmly that it is. The Good Angel follows with assurances that it's never too late. The Evil Angel promises that devils will tear Faustus to pieces if he repents, while the Good Angel vows they will never cut his skin. Confused and terrified, Faustus cries out for Christ the Savior to save his wretched soul.

Hearing Faustus's appeal to Christ, Lucifer, Belzebub, and Mephistophilis appear. Lucifer bluntly tells Faustus that he is beyond salvation through Christ's intervention. He then warns Faustus to never again invoke Christ's name or think of God. To do so is against the pact Faustus made with him. Faustus asks Lucifer's pardon and vows to obey. To reinforce the doctor's resolve, Lucifer parades before him personifications of the Seven Deadly Sins: Pride, Covetousness, Wrath, Envy, Gluttony, Sloth, and Lechery. The display appeals to Faustus's baser appetites, prompting him to exclaim, "Oh, this feeds my soul!" Lucifer promises that hell holds all such manner of

delights. He then gives Faustus a new book of spells to peruse, which the doctor gratefully accepts, and reminds him to "think on the devil."

## Analysis

Faustus is struggling to rekindle his faith; to find reasons to renounce magic and repent. The mere sight of the physical heavens suggests to him that a real heaven exists and must be too wonderful to forego. Yet the doctor wants to be convinced otherwise. He does not turn to the Bible or a priest for wisdom and encouragement. He complains to Mephistophilis and then allows himself to be persuaded to continue in his evil ways, justifying them with the idea that he may repent at the last minute and be saved. "Be I a devil," he says, "yet God may pity me ... if I repent." The Evil Angel knows Faustus better than he knows himself and observes, "Ay, but Faustus never shall repent."

Faustus proves the Evil Angel right. Hardening his heart once more, he resolves never to repent, but to pursue the "sweet pleasures" and refrain from despair. He turns his thoughts to astronomy, though he calls it "divine astrology." In the 16th century the term could apply to both fields of study; little differentiation was made between the two. His first question to Mephistophilis on the topic receives a disappointing answer. The devil recites the traditional view held by academia—a very old, Earth-centered description of the "heavens [planets] above the moon," based on ideas developed by the Greek astronomer and mathematician Ptolemy in the 2nd century. This view had been challenged by 16th-century Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus. He theorized that the sun, not Earth, was the center of our system of planets. During Marlowe's time, the idea that Copernicus could be right was still being debated. Faustus scolds Mephistophilis for providing an answer Wagner could have thought up.

His next question seeks answers concerning the erratic motion of certain spheres, or planets—another unresolved question during Marlowe's lifetime. Mephistophilis offers a vague response: variation in phenomena related to movement among spheres is "because of their unequal motion with respect to the whole." Faustus seems to give up this line inquiry in frustration, stating, "Well, I am answered." In other words, it's an answer—not a good one, but an answer. His disappointment is clear. Thinkers of Marlowe's day could not provide a definitive answer. Therefore, Marlowe uses the devil's unwillingness or

inability to answer to signal that the deal Faustus has made for unlimited knowledge may fall short on its promises. This raises the possibility that Faustus has been duped into selling his soul for very little in return.

By refusing to answer the doctor's final question, "Who made the world," Mephistophilis all but admits the supremacy of God over Lucifer. Lucifer dared to challenge this supremacy and was cast from heaven for it. Mephistophilis, as Lucifer's ally, was cast out as well. His pride will not let him admit, even by inference, that he was mistaken. If only God could make the world, then Lucifer, logically, must be an inferior entity.

Faustus's next twinge of conscience brings him closer than ever to the brink of repentance. This time Lucifer shows up to frighten Faustus into honoring the pact. He then rewards the doctor with personifications of the Seven Deadly Sins. More than entertainment for Faustus, they represent the sins he will indulge in over the course of 24 years. Pride is the first and most glaring of these. In pride of ambition, Faustus and Lucifer are alike. Their desire for godlike power leads to defiance of divine power and is the most important step in their damnation. Envy plays into this high-flying ambition. Faustus envies those who possess knowledge and power that is hidden from him and will do whatever he must to acquire it. The doctor will also participate in lechery with "the fairest courtesans" and Helen of Troy; in wrath to punish enemies; and in avarice (i.e., covetousness), gluttony, and sloth as he acquires vast, useless wealth and overindulges in the forbidden arts and sensual pleasures.

## Act 3, Chorus

### Summary

Assuming the role of the chorus, Wagner explains that Faustus has dedicated himself to the pursuit of limitless knowledge. He has mastered astronomy, gained power to match that of the Olympian gods, and is now out gathering knowledge of geography. He next stops in Rome with the aim of seeing the pope and taking part in the day's holy Feast of Saint Peter.



## Analysis

In the true spirit of the Renaissance, Faustus has flung himself headlong into acquiring the knowledge he seeks. Faustus now travels in a dragon-drawn chariot. As described in the prologue, he is soaring to dangerous heights like mythic Icarus. The dragon is a Christian symbol of evil, paganism, and Satan. Faustus's ambition is unrestrained.

The day he chooses to visit Rome and the pope is significant. The Feast of Saint Peter (also known as the Feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul) is an annual public holiday in the Holy City. It honors two of the original disciples of Christ credited with establishing the Christian church and its teachings. Peter is considered the first pope. This feast day would have deep significance for the current pope.

The B-Text designates the speaker for this scene as the chorus, not Wagner.

## Act 3, Scene 1

### Summary

Doctor Faustus recounts the course of his recent travels with Mephistophilis. He highlights memorable places of beauty or significance: Trier, Germany; Paris and the coast of France; the path of the Rhine River; Naples and Campania, Italy; the poet Virgil's tomb; Venice and Padua, Italy. He then asks if Mephistophilis has brought him to Rome, as commanded. The devil assures Faustus this is so and they are in the pope's private chamber. He then describes the high points of the surrounding city, such as the Tiber River, the four main bridges, the castle, and so on. Intrigued, Faustus eagerly suggests they go off and explore Rome. But Mephistophilis bids him to stay until he sees the pope, promising they'll have some fun. Faustus agrees and, in preparation, asks the devil to make him invisible.

The pope enters accompanied by the cardinal of Lorraine and attendant friars. A banquet is waiting. To the embarrassment of the pope and confusion of all, their conversation is interrupted with snide comments by a disembodied voice. Dishes of food and cups are snatched by invisible hands. The cardinal suggests this is a soul escaped from purgatory, to

which the pope agrees. He then makes the sign of the cross, only to have his ears boxed by unseen hands. At the pope's direction, the friars begin a dirge to curse the evil spirit. In response Faustus and Mephistophilis beat them and throw fireworks among them before leaving.

### Analysis

In the true spirit of the Renaissance, Faustus has been on a learning spree, realizing his ambition to gather knowledge of the universe. It has been an exhilarating experience, and Faustus is filled with a heady sense there is more out there, waiting for him to discover. Though he has asked Mephistophilis to bring him to see the pope, the devil's descriptions of Rome make Faustus eager to explore. However, the devil turns the doctor's thoughts from this intellectual pursuit by tempting him with the chance for some wicked fun, specifically the childish torment of the pope. The ease with which Mephistophilis draws Faustus into the scheme highlights a weakness in the doctor's character that will undermine all his lofty dreams. In spite of his intellect and high-minded scholarship, Faustus has a streak of pettiness and love for sensual pleasure that Mephistophilis will exploit to keep him bound to Lucifer and doomed to hell. In this scene Faustus uses the marvels of magical powers to pull mean-spirited pranks. The brightness of his noble aspirations is beginning to darken, and the corrupting influence of unbridled power is beginning to show.

Faustus's attack on the pope is overtly anti-Catholic, which would have delighted playgoers in Protestant England during the Renaissance. The pope is humiliated by Faustus's high jinks, which include grabbing his food and drink and striking him. The monks are portrayed as chanting nonsense that does nothing to stop Faustus's antics: he and Mephistophilis "beat the Friars and fling fireworks among them." Beliefs specific to Catholicism are mocked. These include the existence of purgatory from which a soul might escape. In Catholicism purgatory is a place or state of being in which souls are made pure through suffering before going to heaven. Protestants reject the idea of purgatory, so the cardinal of Lorraine's explanation that there must be a runaway ghost from purgatory in the room would have been amusing to them. They also reject the sign of the cross, such as the pope makes to invoke God's protection from the evil pestering him. This practice involves tracing a cross from forehead to chest and shoulder to shoulder. Protestants of the time viewed the

practice as superstitious.

A third ritual, which Faustus refers to as "bell, book, and candle," is the Catholic ritual of excommunication, in which a person may be excluded permanently from the Christian Church. In this ceremony a death bell is rung, sounding the death of the person's soul. Then, the Holy Bible is shut, cutting the person off from the word of God. Lastly, a candle is snuffed out, banishing the person's soul to eternal darkness. Marlowe has made a mistake here by confusing excommunication with exorcism. The correct process for getting rid of evil spirits or devils is exorcism.

The B-Text later expands this scene to exaggerate the unflattering qualities of the pope and his guests. In doing so it reflects the growing antagonism in Protestant England toward the papacy's claims of supreme authority in western Europe.

## Act 3, Scene 2

### Summary

Robin and Rafe have been using Doctor Faustus's book to do some conjuring. Robin holds up the proof of their success: a stolen silver goblet. Just then a vintner (wine merchant) approaches, demanding payment for the goblet. Robin and Rafe deny having the item and secretly pass it back and forth while the vintner searches each of them. Then Robin insists on searching the vintner, uttering an incantation while he does so. The result is the appearance of a disgruntled Mephistophilis, who has traveled all the way from Constantinople to answer the summons. Finding that the call came from these two lowly villains, the devil angrily turns Robin into an ape and Rafe into a dog.

### Analysis

Robin and Rafe again provide some comic relief while making a point. In two previous scenes Faustus has been treated to a parade of the Seven Deadly Sins and, with Mephistophilis's help, has played low pranks on His Holiness, the pope. Similarly, Robin and Rafe use magic to tease and torment a lowly wine merchant. Though the subjects of these pranks differ in social rank, the pranks themselves are equally mean-spirited and petty in nature. The point is that for all Faustus's

knowledge and power, his instincts for its use are no more noble or moral than the instincts of a couple of ridiculous lowlifes.

When Robin and Rafe summon Mephistophilis, he is outraged by their silliness. He appears not as the obliging servant to Faustus, but as the proud and powerful demon—the "monarch of hell"—who snares souls for Lucifer. This is the Mephistophilis who will mercilessly work to send Faustus to his doom. His punishment for Robin and Rafe's audacity is both amusing and a reminder of his role of demonic destroyer as he transforms them into an ape and a dog to emphasize their lowliness and foolishness.

## Act 4, Chorus

### Summary

The chorus explains that Faustus has enjoyed all he cares to see of the world and has returned to Germany. His friends have welcomed him home and have been amazed by the wide-ranging knowledge of astrology, the world, and magic the doctor has acquired. Faustus's intellectual prowess has made him famous "in every land." Emperor Carolus the Fifth has invited the doctor to visit his palace and demonstrate his art.

### Analysis

Faustus's pursuit of knowledge seems at an end. He has achieved the power and acclaim he desires. His friends and nearest companions take delight in the stories of his travels "through the world and air." He is admired and sought after. However, this is only for his cleverness. He dines with royalty, but only to entertain them with demonstrations of magic. The chorus tells no stories that reflect the grand and noble aspirations that Faustus once held of becoming emperor of the world.

The chorus announces that Faustus is now at the palace of Emperor Carolus the Fifth. The name Carolus is the Latin form of the name Charles. Carolus the Fifth is Charles V, king of Spain and Holy Roman emperor. The Holy Roman Empire was a group of smaller kingdoms in western and central Europe collectively ruled by an emperor from 800 to 1806.

This chorus scene appears only in the A-Text and was shifted from its position after Faustus's visit to Rome in Act 3, Scene 1, where it appeared to be out of place.

## Act 4, Scene 1

### Summary

At the court of Carolus the Fifth, the emperor challenges Faustus to prove his celebrated knowledge of conjuring. He promises Faustus will not be harmed in any way for performing magic. Faustus agrees, and the emperor requests that the doctor raise Alexander the Great and his paramour from their tombs. Faustus explains that he cannot raise their physical bodies, which have long since turned to dust, but will make them appear as spirits. Throughout this exchange between Faustus and the emperor, a knight has interjected snide, skeptical comments. Now he mocks Faustus openly and leaves, having no desire to witness Faustus's conjuring. The doctor promises to get even with him soon.

Mephistophilis ushers in Alexander the Great and his paramour. To the emperor, the two beings appear alive and tangible. Once they leave, Faustus asks that the unpleasant knight be called back. The man returns, unaware that a pair of horns has sprouted from his head. The emperor points them out, saying they are a sure sign the man is married and has been cheated on by his wife. Furious, the knight demands Faustus undo this magic. After savoring his revenge, Faustus does so and leaves the court.

Faustus returns to Wertenberg, Germany. Once home, he is approached by a horse-courser (horse trader) who asks to buy his horse. With a little persuasion, Faustus finally agrees but adds slyly that the horse-courser must not ride the horse into water. After the man departs, Faustus frets over the waning days of his life and the doom that is pending. He draws some comfort from the New Testament story of a thief's last-minute redemption as he hung on a cross next to the crucified Jesus Christ. So thinking, the doctor falls asleep in his chair.

Some while later, the horse-courser returns, wet and crying, to Faustus's home. He tells Mephistophilis that he wants back his 40 dollars. Thinking Faustus's horse had magical qualities that water would reveal, the man had defied the doctor's warning and ridden the animal into a pond. The horse had promptly

disappeared. Mephistophilis shows the man where Faustus lies fast asleep. When the man's shouts do not rouse the doctor, the horse-courser grabs Faustus's leg and pulls. To his horror, the leg comes off, and the terrified man runs away. Faustus and Mephistophilis are enjoying the results of this latest prank when Wagner enters. He announces that the duke of Vanholt wishes Faustus to visit. The doctor and devil immediately depart.

### Analysis

The emperor promises Faustus that he will not be harmed in any way if he demonstrates his "knowledge of the black art." His protection is necessary during this time in Europe where people believed in and feared witches and burned them at the stake. Any suggestion of being in a league with the devil invited punishment. Emperor Carolus the Fifth is a man of enormous power and authority. Yet Faustus has been invited to his court to perform parlor tricks. This is the reputation the doctor has earned—far from the exalted status he once imagined.

The emperor expects nothing less, and Faustus meets his expectations. The emperor's request to see Alexander the Great serves no purpose but to feed his royal vanity. Nevertheless, Faustus, with the help of Mephistophilis, proudly conjures the conqueror and his paramour and basks in the emperor's praise.

However, suggestions by a knight that Faustus is little more than a fraud touch a nerve. Faustus has acquired wealth and fame, but he has wasted his power and sold out his lofty goals for pleasure and self-aggrandizement. His great ambition has withered. The doctor's petty revenge on the knight—making horns spring from the man's head—reveals that, on some level, Faustus recognizes this truth and resents having it pointed out.

Faustus next strikes a devious bargain with the horse-courser. Like other comic scenes, this parodies more serious action in the play. Faustus tells the horse trader honestly and clearly that he must not ride the horse into water. But in doing so, he deliberately sets an irresistible trap. Faustus understands human nature and knows that the man will ignore his warning simply because he *has* been warned. Faustus again abuses his power with the "fake leg" joke he plays on the horse-courser. The doctor has much more power and intelligence than the man he deceives, and as a result, the practical joke feels like a cheap trick—more pathetic than clever.

Despite the price he is paying for access to dark knowledge, the forbidden study of black magic, he seems unwilling or unable to put it to any good use. What Faustus fails to understand is that he has similarly fallen into a trap set by Mephistophilis. Early on, the devil just as honestly and clearly explains the truth about hell and the horror of eternal torment. Faustus, enraptured by his own outsized ambitions, ignores the advice. This allows Mephistophilis to help Faustus make his deal with Lucifer. The demon entraps the doctor's soul and works very hard to keep Faustus ensnared.

At this point in the play, the A- and B-Texts begin to differ. The B-Text expands its account of Faustus's practical joking into four additional scenes. The story lines converge once more with events in the A-Text's next scene (in the B-Text, Act 4, Scene 6). The B-Text's additional scenes were most likely authored by playwrights other than Marlowe.

## Act 4, Scene 2

### Summary

The duke and duchess of Vanholt have been enjoying Faustus and Mephistophilis's company. Addressing the duchess, who is pregnant, Faustus asks what he might provide in the way of a delicacy to please her. She replies that she craves a dish of ripe grapes—something impossible to get at this time, during winter. Faustus says she shall have it and sends off Mephistophilis. The devil returns moments later with the best grapes the duchess has ever tasted. She asks how Faustus obtained them, when grapes are available only in summer. The doctor explains while it is winter here, it is summer in some far countries of the world. He only must send a "swift spirit" to fetch the grapes. With thanks, the duke and duchess promise to reward Faustus well for this great kindness.

### Analysis

This brief scene further accentuates the trivial uses to which Faustus puts his magic. Conjuring grapes in winter bears little resemblance to his original ambitions to be "emperor of the world" and "make bridges through the moving air" or to change the configuration of continents by joining Africa to Spain (Act 1, Scene 3). Instead of dominating kings and other figures of

power, he performs tricks for them at their command.

The doctor's explanation of how grapes may be obtained demonstrates existing, though imperfect, knowledge of the world and describes the division between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. However, "India, Saba, and farther countries in the east" ("east" referring to the Middle East) do not lie in the Southern Hemisphere any more than Germany does. This problem is addressed in the later B-Text when Faustus states that these countries "have fruit twice a year."

With this scene, the B-Text aligns once again with the A-Text. However, in the B-Text the scene has been expanded for comic effect to include the reappearance of characters such as Robin and the horse-courser.

## Act 5, Scene 1

### Summary

In a brief soliloquy Wagner expresses concern that his master intends to die soon. Faustus has given him all his possessions. Yet it seems odd to him that, for a man about to die, the doctor is feasting, drinking, and partying to excess with university students.

As Wagner departs, Faustus enters with three scholars. They have been dining together, and the scholars now beg Faustus to conjure up the peerless beauty Helen of Troy. Seeing that they are sincere in their interest, Faustus consents. With the help of Mephistophilis, Helen appears in all her glory, to the awe and delight of the scholars. They depart happy men.

An old man enters as the scholars are leaving. He offers Faustus yet another chance to repent. Though the doctor's sins are heinous, he still may be saved through the mercy of Jesus Christ, the Savior. Disbelieving and in despair, Faustus takes a dagger offered by Mephistophilis, intending to commit suicide. The old man begs the doctor to stop, declaring that an angel hovers over him, ready to grant him grace. Faustus senses some truth in this and asks the old man to go away while he ponders it. The old man leaves with a heavy heart.

Faustus teeters on the verge of repentance until Mephistophilis calls him a traitor to Lucifer and threatens to tear him apart. With apologies, Faustus declares he will

reaffirm his vow in blood and, cutting his arm, writes. Then he commands Mephistophilis to torment the old man who dared tempt him to break his pact with Lucifer. However, the old man's faith is strong, and Mephistophilis predicts that no torment can touch his soul, only his body. Faustus then asks the devil to bring back Helen to be his lover, which the devil does gladly "in a twinkling of an eye." Bedazzled by her beauty and her kiss, Faustus swears she will be his one and only paramour. When Faustus departs with Helen, the old man (who has returned) is threatened by devils. However, as Mephistophilis expected, his faith remains strong and unshaken by their abuse.

## Analysis

The scene opens with Wagner, still in the role of Faustus's faithful servant, speaking as a choric narrator (taking the place of the chorus). He relates what Faustus has been doing and confides his personal fears for his master's well-being. Through his description of Faustus's eating, drinking, and carousing, it becomes clear that the doctor has reached new lows in his corruption. While Faustus apparently realizes that his time is nearly up, he seems interested not in repentance, but in indulging in as much sensuality as possible before going to hell.

The scholars enter the scene discussing their latest topic of debate: which lady in all the world was the most beautiful. While they no doubt applied their scholarly gifts for logical dispute to the debate, the topic itself is trivial. These scholars would deny any resemblance between themselves and characters such as Wagner, the clown, or Robin and Rafe. However, their everyday interest in the topic of women and lustful response to the appearance of Helen—though eloquently expressed—demonstrates they are more similar to these characters than they would probably want to admit. Education has not altered the scholars' ordinary interests or added nobility to their characters. They are just three guys fascinated by a beautiful woman.

In this scene the Good Angel and Evil Angel are replaced by the old man. He enters as a force for good, encouraging Faustus to "break heart, drop blood, and mingle it with tears." In other words, with a blood offering and the tears of true repentance, Faustus may yet save his soul. Nevertheless, Faustus chooses despair and wails, "Damned thou art, Faustus, damned! Despair and die!" Christian belief holds that despair is

a mortal sin involving deliberate and complete abandonment of all hope for salvation. An individual intentionally rejects the possibility of God's mercy and grace. Despair not only cuts off all hope of escape, it encourages surrender to sinful earthly pleasures. Faustus willfully turns his back on God once more, reaffirms his bargain with Lucifer in blood, and gives in to his lust for Helen. In taking Helen for his paramour, Faustus once again trivializes his power. All his early grand aspirations have shrunk to the pursuit of sensuous, self-indulgent pleasure. His despair is complete.

While there is little difference between the A-Text and B-Text in this scene, the B-Text cuts the final lines when the old man returns and mocks the devils attempting to harm him.

## Act 5, Scene 2

### Summary

Faustus is spending the final evening of his life with the three scholars. They detect something is wrong. Faustus sighs and seems frightened by something they cannot see. He speaks of eternal death. The scholars question Faustus until he confesses he has "damned both body and soul" by an excess of sin. They counsel him to ask God for mercy, but the doctor says his sins are worse than that of the serpent when it tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. He then confides he has rejected God, blasphemed, and sold his soul to Lucifer and Mephistophilis. The scholars are horrified and baffled about how to help Faustus, except to pray. The doctor sends them away for their own safety as the clock strikes eleven.

In despair Faustus implores time to cease so that midnight will never come. He now craves time to repent and save his soul. But even as he reaches for heaven, he can feel hell pulling him down. Faustus calls on Christ and then on Lucifer to spare him. He pleads for the mountains and hills to fall on and hide him. When they do not, he begs his soul to be torn from his body by a violent storm brewing in the clouds so that his soul may ascend to heaven.

The clock strikes eleven thirty. In growing terror Faustus tries to make a deal with God. In the name of Christ, whose death paid for all sins, Faustus pleads that God affix a limit to his punishment in hell. A hundred thousand years is not too long, if at last he will be saved. He then curses the fact he has a soul



at all, curses his parents for giving him life, and then, more honestly, curses himself and Lucifer for his fate. The clock strikes twelve. Thunder and lightning erupt, and devils appear. In a panic Faustus renounces magic, crying out he will burn his books. But he is too late, and the devils drag him off to hell.

## Analysis

The time for Faustus to pay the price for dark knowledge has come. Despite several chances to repent and save his soul, he has stubbornly stayed on the path to damnation. His former mastery of theology—which tells him hell is terrifyingly real—has not served him well. With defiance, he has deceived himself into thinking hell is a fable or not so bad. Now that its existence, with all the horror that it holds, becomes minute by minute more real, Faustus cannot help but confess to someone what he has been up to. The scholars are shocked at the lengths Faustus has gone to for the sake of knowledge. They, too, are men of the Renaissance who deeply value learning, but they would not consider taking the same route that Faustus has. Though they encourage him to repent and promise to pray for his soul, they fearfully leave him as if doubting even God's mercy is enough.

Rather than take the direct path to repentance that the Good Angel and old man have described, Faustus begs time to stop, to give him time to repent. Quoting from the poet Ovid's *Amores*, he cries, "Oh run slowly, slowly, ye horses of the night!" There is verbal irony in this quote. The speaker in the poem lies in the arms of his lover and prays for the slow arrival of dawn so his time with that person will not end. It is a cry of ecstatic love. Faustus is pleading for more time for a different reason. Rather than renouncing magic outright, Faustus seems to beg for more time to make up his mind, enjoy life, or find a loophole in his deal with Lucifer.

When time fails to slow for him, Faustus reaches body and soul for heaven, but something pulls him down. He finds that he is trapped between salvation and damnation. As a theologian, he understands how deeply he has offended God and the consequences of God's wrath. Once again, he despairs and begs the mountains to fall on and hide him. His plea echoes a Bible passage from the Book of Revelations 6:16–17: "And they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One sitting on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of Their wrath has come, and who is able to withstand it?'" In the Bible, the Book of

Revelations describes the Apocalypse, the end of the world, during which God destroys evil and evildoers and rewards those who are righteous, or morally worthy, by allowing them to enter a new, divine kingdom.

Next Faustus blames influences beyond his control—namely the stars—for his impending doom. Heavenly bodies were thought to exude an invisible, ethereal substance that affects a person's character and destiny. He implores these heavenly spheres to do what God will not: to free his soul. When nothing changes, he tries to bargain with God, to reduce the length of his time in hell. Cursing the fact that he even has a soul, he fervently wishes that Greek philosopher Pythagoras's theory of the transmigration of souls were true. This is the notion that the soul, after the body dies, moves on to another body. Depending on the quality of that previous life, the soul would begin a new existence in a human, animal, or spirit state.

At the last moment, Faustus vows to burn his books if only God will spare him. This was traditionally considered proof that a magician was abandoning magic. Unfortunately, the promise comes too late. Faustus never does overtly, without excuses or evasion, admit his sins, renounce his pact with Lucifer, and ask forgiveness and mercy from God. He stubbornly has traveled a highway to damnation, all the while seeking an unmarked off-ramp, an escape route, rather than taking the clearly marked road to salvation.

## Epilogue

### Summary

The chorus confirms that Faustus is in hell. Like the branch of tree that has grown twisted and unhealthy, his twisted, unhealthy life has been cut off. His chance for great achievements and immortality has been destroyed. The chorus warns that, while it may be interesting to consider the life path Faustus chose, the wise will understand it is dangerous to follow in his footsteps.

### Analysis

While assuring the audience Faustus is in hell, the chorus sums up all he has lost in the line "And burnèd is Apollo's laurel bough." The Greek god Apollo is associated with knowledge,

art, poetry, and oracles. In ancient times a wreath of laurel, which was Apollo's symbolic tree, was awarded to victors in athletic competitions and poetry contests. The laurel is also associated with eternity or immortality, as the leaves never wilt. While Faustus might have enjoyed triumph and immortality through fame, this has been destroyed by his twisted ambitions, which have led him to the burning fires of hell.

Though the chorus blames Faustus for his "hellish fall" and "fiendful fortune," it also expresses sympathy for the man whose potential for greatness was never realized. He is "the branch that might have grown full straight." The final line suggests that Faustus was punished by God for practicing "more than heavenly power permits." This echoes the prologue, in which the chorus states that, like Daedalus and his son Icarus, the doctor "did mount above his reach" and the "heavens conspired his overthrow." In other words Faustus is doomed from the start for seeking "unlawful things." His life serves as a warning to seek knowledge carefully and be wary of the pitfalls of pride and ambition.

## “” Quotes

*"Till, swoll'n with cunning of a self-conceit, / His waxen wings did mount above his reach, / And melting, heavens conspired his overthrow."*

— Chorus, Prologue

The chorus introduces proud, brilliant Faustus by comparing him to the mythic character Icarus. Icarus's father, Daedalus, made him artificial wings of feathers and wax, allowing him to fly. In spite of his father's warnings, Icarus foolishly flew too close to the sun. His wings melted, and he plummeted to his death. As the comparison suggests, Faustus ignores all dire warnings to repent and give up his evil pursuits. His thirst for knowledge leads to his destruction.

*"'Tis magic, magic that hath*

*ravished me."*

— Doctor Faustus, Act 1, Scene 1

The motivation for Faustus's pursuit of dark knowledge, the forbidden study of magic, is established in this statement. Faustus has reviewed all traditional paths to knowledge—logic, medicine, law, and religion—and finds them unfulfilling; he thirsts for something more. He tells his friends and accomplished magicians Valdes and Cornelius that his mind and imagination are seized by the desire to study necromancy. He then asks them to teach him the art of magic.

*"For when we hear one rack the name of God, / Abjure the scriptures and his saviour Christ, / We fly in hope to get his glorious soul."*

— Mephistophilis, Act 1, Scene 3

This is Mephistophilis's first appearance in answer to Faustus's conjuring. He tells Faustus that the magician's spell is not the reason he has appeared. He is not obligated to do so. Rather, Faustus's use of conjuring is a sure sign that he has rejected God and religion and therefore his soul is likely ripe for the taking. This offers a servant of Lucifer an opportunity too good to ignore.

*"Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it."*

— Mephistophilis, Act 1, Scene 3

Faustus ignorantly assumes that because Mephistophilis is in his presence, then the devil is out of hell, even though he is forever damned. Mephistophilis explains that he has seen the face of God and tasted the eternal joys of heaven. Now that he is deprived of these, he is in hell, no matter where he goes. Rather than take to heart the devil's counsel to abandon the pursuit of black magic—to "leave these frivolous

demands"—Faustus sends Mephistophilis off to negotiate a deal with Lucifer.

*"But Faustus, thou must bequeath  
it solemnly / And write a deed of  
gift with thine own blood, / For  
that security craves great Lucifer."*

— Mephistophilis, Act 2, Scene 1

Lucifer has agreed to give Faustus 24 years of power and limitless knowledge in exchange for his immortal soul. To make the pact binding, he demands that the doctor write it up like a contract and sign it in his own blood. Blood is the bodily fluid that maintains life. Lucifer believes he will have Faustus more securely in his power if he is in possession of the doctor's blood.

*"Come, I think hell's a fable."*

— Doctor Faustus, Act 2, Scene 1

Lucifer has accepted Faustus's offer, and Faustus has written and signed the pact in blood. He then asks Mephistophilis about the nature and whereabouts of hell. However, though he's talking to a resident of hell and has just signed a pact with Lucifer, Faustus dismisses hell's reality. Mephistophilis answers, "Ay, think so still, till experience change thy mind," but Faustus continues to insist it is an old wives' tale. Since physical sensation cannot survive death, Faustus cannot imagine pain exists in the afterlife. At this moment in the play, he fails to grasp the spiritual torment that hell will be.

*"Tut, Faustus; marriage is but a  
ceremonial toy. If thou lovest me,  
think no more of it."*

— Mephistophilis, Act 2, Scene 1

Faustus has told Mephistophilis that he wants a wife. To discourage the notion, Mephistophilis presents him with a devil dressed up as a dreadful woman. Faustus rejects her, as expected. Mephistophilis then asks Faustus to think no more about marriage. This request is due to the sacred nature of marriage. It is a union blessed by God and involves a religious ceremony, so as a devil, he wishes no part of it.

*"Scarce can I name salvation, faith,  
or heaven, / But fearful echoes  
thunder in mine ears: / 'Faustus,  
thou art damned!'"*

— Doctor Faustus, Act 2, Scene 3

Throughout the play Faustus suffers pangs of doubt about his unholy chosen path. Time and again there are chances for him to turn back. Yet each time he considers repentance and entertains hopes of salvation, something reminds him that he is hopelessly damned. As fearful as this is, Faustus next recalls "the sweet pleasure" he has gained in pursuit of power and knowledge. So believing himself beyond forgiveness or reprieve, he hardens his heart and continues down the path.

*"Christ cannot save thy soul, for he  
is just."*

— Lucifer, Act 2, Scene 3

In a moment of dreadful doubt, Faustus calls upon Christ to save his soul. Lucifer appears to chastise him and dissuade him from breaking their pact. He tells Faustus that Christ, being fair, cannot pardon Faustus. He knows what the doctor has done and must judge him accordingly.

*"Confound these passions with a  
quiet sleep: / Tush, Christ did call  
the thief upon the cross."*

— Doctor Faustus, Act 4, Scene 1

Faustus is reflecting on his condemned state, knowing that his time to die is drawing near. His thoughts are darkened with despair that he hopes a restful sleep will dispel. He tries to comfort himself with thoughts of a thief crucified on the same day as Jesus Christ, according to the New Testament of the Bible. Known as the Good Thief or Penitent Thief, the man had led a sinful life but expressed belief in Christ's divinity while dying. As a result, he is mercifully forgiven his sins, and his soul is called into heaven. Faustus's last hope is that he will be granted mercy the same way.

*"Was this the face that launched a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?"*

— Doctor Faustus, Act 5, Scene 1

This is an allusion to mythological Helen of Troy, over whom the Trojan War was fought. At Faustus's request, Mephistophilis has summoned the beautiful Helen. Her abduction by Trojan Prince Paris from her husband, the king of Sparta, sparked the 10-year conflict between Greece and Troy. More than a thousand ships set sail from Greece to avenge the wrong. Mephistophilis summons Helen to tempt Faustus, appeal to his baser nature, and thereby reinforce his dedication to Lucifer.

*"Gentlemen, farewell. If I live till morning, I'll visit you; if not, Faustus has gone to hell."*

— Doctor Faustus, Act 5, Scene 2

Faustus has at last confessed his involvement with Lucifer to three scholars who once applauded his magic skills. Appalled and frightened for him, the scholars urge him to pray for God's mercy as they will pray for him, also. Faustus sends them away just as the clock strikes eleven—one hour before his scheduled death.

*"Mountains and hills, come, come, and fall on me / And hide me from the heavy wrath of God!"*

— Doctor Faustus, Act 5, Scene 2

In his last hour of life, Faustus grows certain that Lucifer has made redemption of his soul through Christ unattainable. All that is left is God's just punishment for his evil ways. He begs Earth to hide him. It is a foolish notion born of desperation, as religion teaches that God is all-knowing and all-seeing. Faustus's words echo biblical text from the Book of Revelation 6:16—"And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (the "Lamb" being Christ, the Lamb of God).

*"Ugly hell, gape not! Come not, Lucifer! / I'll burn my books—ah, Mephistophilis!"*

— Doctor Faustus, Act 5, Scene 2

Faustus's time is up, and Lucifer's devils have arrived to drag him off to hell. At last Faustus comprehends in full what is going to happen—hell is real, and he is doomed to spend eternity in it. In a final, frantic bid for escape, he vows to burn his books of spells, a traditional gesture by magicians to prove they were renouncing magic.

*"Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight, / And burned is Apollo's laurel bough / That sometime grew within this learned man."*

— Chorus, Epilogue

The chorus closes the book on Faustus saying that, just as the crooked branch of a healthy tree must be pruned, so Faustus, grown twisted by his choices, has been cut off from life.

Apollo's laurel bough refers to the crown of laurel worn by victorious athletes in ancient Greece. It is a symbol of great ability and achievement, such as Faustus sometimes exhibited. It is also a symbol of immortality through fame—a status Faustus achieved at the cost of his soul, which now burns in the fires of hell.

## Symbols

### Books

Books scattered throughout the play represent various avenues of learning as well as Faustus's attitude toward the knowledge and wisdom each offers. In Act 1 he peruses books representing traditional subjects of study during the Renaissance: logic, medicine, law, and theology. These books represent the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the medieval past. Tossing the books aside, Faustus rejects their subject matter and dismisses their value. What they offer is old-fashioned, too limited in scope, or something he has already mastered.

Faustus, hungry for new knowledge, picks up a book on necromancy, a branch of magic in which someone makes the dead appear in the form of spirits in order to manipulate the present or predict the future. This promise of hidden knowledge appeals to Faustus. Once he signs his pact with Lucifer, Mephistophilis gives him a better book, filled with spells and incantations, as well as the secrets of astronomy, astrology, and the natural sciences. However, neither book contains wisdom. As a result they represent Faustus's foolish entry into forbidden realms of study, where he is showered with knowledge while losing his soul. In a final act of despair, Faustus vows to burn his books, signaling that he means to give up necromancy. The wisdom of rejecting magic in favor of salvation does not come from a book but from the hard reality that magic has brought him to the doorstep of hell.

## Angels

As symbols, the Good Angel and the Evil Angel personify the conflict between the opposing values of good and evil and represent the spiritual battle taking place for Faustus's heart and soul. The angels also symbolize Faustus's inner turmoil as he wrestles with his pride and ambition on the one hand and his conscience and fear of damnation on the other. The angels stand for the two warring aspects of his mind and as such engage in a perpetual debate. In Act 2, Scene 1 the Good Angel urges Faustus to "think of heaven and heavenly things" while the Bad Angel counters with "think of honor and wealth." Later, in Act 2, Scene 3, the Evil Angel is convinced that it is "too late" for Faustus to repent. The Good Angel retorts, "Never too late, if Faustus can repent." In a broader sense the two angels illustrate the dividedness of human nature, the internal tug-of-war between a human's noble and moral aspirations and that same human's ignoble and immoral passions.

## Blood

In general blood is a symbol of life and life's connection to God—the divine source that animates the body. In *Doctor Faustus* it represents the doctor's soul, and thus his link to the devil, but also the only path to Faustus's salvation. In Act 2 Mephistophilis insists that the deed to Faustus's soul be drawn up in the doctor's blood, underscoring the blood's supernatural nature. It is blood that secures the link between Faustus and Lucifer as the doctor literally hands over the physical and spiritual essence of his divine nature to the devil. This causes Faustus's soul to be bound to hell. Yet while blood still courses through Faustus's veins, he lives and may therefore repent.

In his blood oath to Lucifer, Faustus says, "I cut mine arm, and with my proper blood / Assure my soul to be great Lucifer's." But his own blood acts independently of him. Midway through the writing of his pact with Lucifer, Faustus's blood congeals to the point where he cannot get enough to continue writing. The doctor has time to wonder what this portends and to ask, "Is [my blood] unwilling I should write this bill?" Then Mephistophilis provides hot coals that liquefy the blood once



more. As the blood represents Faustus's soul, it appears that his soul is not yet damned but is fighting for survival. Something within Faustus is righteous enough to resist what the doctor is about to do by signing the pact. Throughout the play he must be convinced to keep his bargain. In Act 5 when Mephistophilis fears that Faustus may repent, he frightens Faustus into renewing his blood oath to Lucifer.

The sacred significance of blood appears at the end of the play and represents atonement through Christ. The old man pleads with Faustus to shed one drop of blood to mingle with tears of repentance, to save his soul. Later Faustus despairingly wishes he could "gush forth blood, instead of tears." As his death draws near he sees "where Christ's blood streams in the firmament." This alludes to the blood Jesus Christ shed on the cross to wash away the sins of the world. In other words Faustus is not yet beyond mercy and deliverance. All that is required is repentance and a blood oath to God.

## Themes

### Knowledge over Wisdom

There is an important distinction between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is the accumulation of facts, information, and skills through education and experience. It is only a tool and offers no insights into the meaning of life. Wisdom comes from the useful synthesis of facts, information, and skills into a deeper and more truthful understanding of life and relationships.

In the true spirit of the Renaissance, Doctor Faustus thirsts for knowledge. In his unbridled pursuit of it, he rejects what may be learned from even the wisest men of the past, specifically the brilliant Greek philosophers Aristotle and Galen and the Byzantine emperor Justinian, who rewrote Roman law. Though he is a doctor of divinity, he also dismisses what theology and the Bible have to teach. Impatient and dissatisfied with the past's accumulated knowledge, he craves to know more. This quest leads to his downfall primarily because Faustus has not acquired—and does not search for—wisdom.

As Faustus demonstrates, knowledge without the moral

guidance of wisdom can be used for good or evil. He looks to the forbidden knowledge of necromancy, the practice of speaking to the spirits of dead people, to fulfill his desire to know more than traditional sources of knowledge can teach him. He is further seduced by the power and wealth magic promises. His desire to push the boundaries of human knowledge is without guiding wisdom. Nor does he acquire wisdom along the way. His grand boasts of all he will do with his newly acquired dark knowledge of magic fizzle into mean-spirited pranks and self-serving tricks to gain fame and money. He discovers no universally applicable truth. He is never wise enough to heed the council of the Good Angel, the old man, or even Mephistophilis. When devils at last cart him off to his doom, he has a head full of facts and information. Too late he acquires the insight that might have saved him: hell is real, and he has damned himself to it.

### Pride and Ambition

The theme of pride and ambition is linked to the theme of knowledge over wisdom. The synthesis of these two themes has an intoxicating effect on Faustus. His intellectual pride, or arrogance, makes him impatient with even the most revered authorities of the past, such as Aristotle, a philosopher, Galen, a philosopher and physician, and Justinian, a specialist in law. Faustus's ambition is to know more than all their accumulated knowledge and wisdom can teach him. For this reason, he turns to the study of magic. He fantasizes that by mastering this field of study, he could become a god and command a vast realm, limited only by his imagination. He never considers using his knowledge for any kind of greater good.

In his pride and ambition, Faustus has a kindred spirit in Lucifer, whose history mirrors his own. In the beginning Lucifer, the highest ranking angel in heaven, was full of wisdom and perfect in his beauty. But he became filled with pride and desired to be God, instead of a servant to God. For his pride and insolent ambition, God threw Lucifer and his followers out of heaven. Lucifer went on to establish his own kingdom: hell. Like Lucifer, Faustus's first great sin is pride. It leads to his rejection of God, his pact with the devil, the many additional sins he commits, and his final damnation.

Like Lucifer's, Faustus's pride-driven ambitions are never

realized. Worse, they are reduced to something trivial and low. Lucifer uses his power to corrupt and add souls to his hellish kingdom. Faustus uses his power to play pranks, con simple folk, and gain fame by entertaining royalty with magic. He never uses his power to better himself or the world, nor does he fulfill his initial desire to rule Earth. In fact, his conjuring tricks are, at best, impressive versions of those pulled off by Wagner, Rafe, and Robin.

## Damnation versus Salvation

Throughout the play, Faustus finds himself at the crossroads of eternal death and eternal life: damnation and salvation. Damnation is eternal separation from God. Salvation is a merciful gift of God to one who repents and asks forgiveness. Sin, an immoral act that violates divine law, is the defining factor that leads to one state or the other, depending on the relationship of the sinner to their sin. If a person shows repentance—appropriate remorse and sorrow for their sins—salvation is still possible. If not, damnation is inevitable.

In Act 1 Faustus's failure to consider both sides of this equation initiates the path to his doom. Based on an incomplete reading of a Bible verse from the book of Romans (6:23), he falsely reasons that sinful humans are destined for eternal death. Therefore, his only escape may be through pursuit of magic, as "a sound magician is a mighty god." Faustus overlooks the second half of the verse, which emphasizes salvation and God's offered gift of eternal life. The doctor concentrates on the half that justifies the path to damnation he yearns to pursue. As a consequence he will struggle with ideas of repentance and salvation throughout the rest of the play.

Mephistophilis makes it clear in his descriptions of hell's torments that defying God is the road to eternal suffering. However, the Good Angel and the old man make it equally clear that Faustus can save himself if he will repent and accept God's mercy. As he tries to decide between damnation (sticking to his deal with the devil) or accepting the "gift ... of eternal life" (by showing proper repentance to God), Faustus is forced to question his character and motivations, often at the expense of his lust for power and his fantasy of his own superiority. Yet once he has sealed the deal with Lucifer, Faustus audaciously continues down the path to his

damnation. He seems committed to his doom, ultimately unwilling or unable to alter his chosen course.

## Destiny versus Free Will

The theme of destiny versus free will is related to that of damnation versus salvation. Faustus appears unable to repent. Even in moments of greatest despair, when he teeters on the brink of repentance, he ultimately pulls back and renews his allegiance to Lucifer, assuring his doom. Too late he renounces pursuit of magic in the last line of the play with a final, desperate cry, "I'll burn my books." Playwright Christopher Marlowe uses Faustus's apparent helplessness to explore the idea of predestination posed by French-born Protestant theologian John Calvin. Calvin reasoned that God, being omniscient, knows from the outset who will be saved and who will not. Therefore, human action and choice are not the keys to salvation. That end is predetermined. Whatever action or choice a human makes has been set up in advance by God. This suggests that no matter how free Faustus seems in his choice to pursue magic or reject redemption, he is simply playing out a script already written. His natural defiance and rebellion guide him to fulfill his destiny.

On the other hand Marlowe also suggests that Faustus may have a choice. On numerous occasions in the play, he considers the possibility of asking God to forgive his sins, allowing him to change his spiritual path from damnation to one of salvation. The Good Angel, the Bad Angel, Mephistophilis, the old man, and other characters chime in to encourage him to save himself or give in and go to hell. Faustus himself goes back and forth, until it is too late. The question remains: is Faustus helplessly driven by destiny or doomed by his own poorly exercised free will? Marlowe provides no definitive answer but weaves the two possibilities into his play. However, to believe that Faustus has no choice denies the more pitiable aspects of his character. The doctor's intelligence, skepticism, and deeply human desire for knowledge incite choices and actions that anger heaven and fate him to be destroyed.

## Good versus Evil

The push-and-pull conflict between good and evil is a motivating force throughout *Doctor Faustus*. Faustus personally embodies the concepts of good and evil. As a theologian, he represents the good or spiritually uplifting study of divinity. However, he abandons theology to pursue forbidden knowledge, falling prey to sin. His noble intentions for acquiring power through magic soon give way to fancy tricks bought with his soul. Whenever he wavers in his commitment to evil, Mephistophilis finds it easy to tempt him back from the good of repentance by appealing to his baser nature. Whether it's a book of hidden knowledge or the beautiful Helen of Troy, Mephistophilis knows just what to give Faustus to hold on to his soul. Lucifer, too, knows how to beguile Faustus and quiet his conscience. He invokes visions of the Seven Deadly Sins, to which Faustus exclaims, "Oh, this feeds my soul."

Every prick of conscience expressed by Faustus signals a new skirmish. Faustus is mentally and spiritually torn by desire and fear: desire for salvation and desire for unholy knowledge; fear of damnation and fear that it is too late to repent. This conflict is embodied by the Good Angel and the Evil Angel. They appear at times when Faustus seems close to renouncing magic and asking God's forgiveness for his defiance and heresy. The two angels act as counselors, offering advice, warnings, and arguments intended to persuade the doctor toward salvation or damnation.

Other characters echo Faustus's inner struggle as well. In Act 5 three scholars beg Faustus to conjure the spirit of Helen, the world's most beautiful woman. He complies, and they enjoy it. Soon after, the same men shift gears instantly when he admits to them how he has sold his soul to Lucifer. Now they offer to pray for Faustus, "that God may have mercy upon [him]," but it is too late. Mephistophilis is perhaps the most surprising representation of this theme. While as Lucifer's minion he is clearly a servant of evil, he is a demon with feelings and the occasional impulse for good. He devotedly serves Lucifer, but he is tormented by his separation from God. He scouts for souls to add to hell's population, but in Act 1 he warns Faustus to "leave these frivolous demands, / Which strike a terror to my fainting soul!" With this unexpected mix of good and evil, Mephistophilis breaks the mold of the traditional fiendish villain.

## Motifs

### Aspiration

Supporting the theme of pride and ambition, the motif of aspiration draws attention to Faustus's failed goals as a master of magic. Before his study begins, the doctor muses over the "world of profit and delight, / Of power, of honor, of omnipotence" that will be his. He fantasizes that "a sound magician is a mighty god," and he will command spirits to gather for him all the treasures and secret knowledge in the world. He will be its emperor. Even the land and sea will obey his command when he joins the continent of Africa to Spain.

Once the pact with Lucifer is made, Faustus eagerly accepts an all-embracing book of knowledge from Mephistophilis. However, Faustus never even approaches fulfilling his lofty goals. Soon his search for knowledge is overshadowed by his misuse of power. His intellectual aspirations give way to baser desires for wealth, fame, and sensual pleasure. Mephistophilis makes quick use of these low impulses to keep Faustus enthralled and his soul shackled.

### Power without Conscience

This motif supports the themes of knowledge over wisdom and good versus evil. Power wielded without conscience can be dangerous. The promise of wielding power free of conscience can corrupt the human heart. Faustus is a master of divinity, but he demonstrates early on that he lacks the goodness and wisdom necessary to handle power well. At the beginning of Act 2, before signing over his soul to Lucifer, Faustus briefly wonders if he is taking the right path. Should he "think of God and heaven" or "trust in Belzebub"? In a flash of self-awareness, he realizes that his "appetite" aligns more with serving Belzebub than with serving God. Without a twinge of conscience, he says that for the sake of gaining knowledge of the dark art of magic, he will "build an altar and a church [to Belzebub] / And offer lukewarm blood of new-born babes."

After signing away his soul, Faustus is granted the power he desires but is not instinctively driven by conscience to use the power wisely or for good. He neither improves himself nor the world with this gift but wantonly gathers fame and riches by

performing magic tricks. He uses his power to humiliate anyone he pleases. With a glaring lack of conscience, he declares that for the love of Helen, he would see his own city of Wertenberg plundered. Faustus once imagined the dominion of magic stretching as far as his mind could conceive. The corrupting influence of power without conscience quickly reduces that grand vision to a repertoire of pointless magic stunts.

## Hell

Representing damnation, despair, and the fall from God's grace, hell is a dominant motif in *Doctor Faustus*. In Christian terms the existence of hell is a result of humankind's original fall from grace through sin. It is a place of final judgment for the wicked. For Lucifer, hell is his domain, and as Mephistophilis explains, he gathers souls to "enlarge his kingdom" (Act 2, Scene 1). For the damned, it is a place of eternal death. Mephistophilis describes hell as a physical place "under the heavens" and "within the bowels of these elements / Where we are tortured and remain forever." He also describes a psychological or spiritual hell—a state of permanent separation from God and therefore from the "eternal joys of heaven" and "everlasting bliss." Though a doctor of divinity, Faustus insolently states, "I think hell's a fable," yet the idea of hell persistently intrudes on his dark pursuits and troubles his mind. Ultimately Christopher Marlowe allows the true nature of hell to remain ambiguous, but its reality is undeniable as Faustus cries out in the end, "Ugly hell, gape not!" before being dragged off by devils.

## Suggested Reading

Marlowe, Christopher, and David Wootton. *Doctor Faustus with the English Faust Book*. Hackett, 2005.

Freeman, Robert. *The Protestant Reformation*. Kendall Lane, 2013.

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Nicholl, Charles. *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe*. Vintage, 2002.

Riggs, David. *The World of Christopher Marlowe*. Holt, 2005.