

**Ministry of Higher Education and
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College of Education for Humanities
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**Dr .Faustus / Drama
Second Stage
Act 1- Scene 1-4**

By

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Doctor Faustus

Christopher Marlowe

Act 1- Scene 1-4

In a long soliloquy, [Faustus](#) reflects on the most rewarding type of scholarship. He first considers logic, quoting the Greek philosopher Aristotle, but notes that disputing well seems to be the only goal of logic, and, since Faustus's debating skills are already good, logic is not scholarly enough for him. He considers medicine, quoting the Greek physician Galen, and decides that medicine, with its possibility of achieving miraculous cures, is the most fruitful pursuit—yet he notes that he has achieved great renown as a doctor already and that this fame has not brought him satisfaction. He considers law, quoting the Byzantine emperor Justinian, but dismisses law as too petty, dealing with trivial matters rather than larger ones. Divinity, the study of religion and theology, seems to offer wider vistas, but he quotes from St. Jerome's Bible that all men sin and finds the Bible's assertion that "The reward of sin is death" an unacceptable doctrine. He then dismisses religion and fixes his mind on magic, which, when properly pursued, he believes will make him "a mighty god".

Wagner, Faustus's servant, enters as his master finishes speaking. Faustus asks Wagner to bring Valdes and Cornelius, Faustus's friends, to help him learn the art of magic. While they are on their way, a good angel and an evil angel visit Faustus. The good angel urges him to set aside his book of magic and read the Scriptures instead; the evil angel encourages him to go forward in his pursuit of the black arts. After they vanish, it is clear that Faustus is going to heed the evil spirit, since he exults at the great powers that the magical arts will bring him. Faustus imagines sending spirits to the end of the world to fetch him jewels and delicacies, having them teach him secret knowledge, and using magic to make himself king of all Germany.

Valdes and Cornelius appear, and Faustus greets them, declaring that he has set aside all other forms of learning in favor of magic. They agree to teach Faustus the principles of the dark arts and describe the wondrous powers that will be his if he remains committed during his quest to learn magic.

Cornelius tells him that "The miracles that magic will perform / Will make thee vow to study nothing else". Valdes lists a number of texts that Faustus should read, and the two friends promise to help him become better at magic than even they are. Faustus invites them to dine with him, and they exit.

Analysis: Scene 1

The scene now shifts to Faustus's study, and Faustus's opening speech about the various fields of scholarship reflects the academic setting of the scene. In proceeding through the various intellectual disciplines and citing authorities for each, he is following the dictates of medieval scholarship, which held that learning was based on the authority of the wise rather than on experimentation and new ideas. This soliloquy, then, marks Faustus's rejection of this medieval model, as he sets aside each of the old authorities and resolves to strike out on his own in his quest to become powerful through magic. ([magic and the supernatural as a motif](#))

As is true throughout the play, however, Marlowe uses Faustus's own words to expose Faustus's blind spots. In his initial speech, for example, Faustus establishes a hierarchy of disciplines by showing which are nobler than others. He does not want merely to protect men's bodies through medicine, nor does he want to protect their property through law. He wants higher things, and so he proceeds on to religion. There, he quotes selectively from the New Testament, picking out only those passages that make Christianity appear in a negative light. He reads that "[t]he reward of sin is death," and that "[i]f we say we that we have no sin, / We deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us". The second of these lines comes from the first book of John, but Faustus neglects to read the very next line, which states, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". Thus, through selective quoting, Faustus makes it seem as though religion promises only death and not forgiveness, and so he easily rejects religion with a fatalistic "What will be, shall be! Divinity, adieu!". Meanwhile, he uses religious language—as he does throughout the play—to describe the dark world of necromancy that he enters. "These metaphysics of magicians / And necromantic books are heavenly", he declares without a trace of irony. Having gone upward from medicine and law to theology, he envisions magic and necromancy as the crowning discipline, even though by most standards it would be the least noble. ([Faustus's opening soliloquy, which quotes the New Testament](#))

Faustus is not a villain, though; he is a tragic hero, a protagonist whose character flaws lead to his downfall. Marlowe imbues him with tragic grandeur in these early scenes. The logic he uses to reject religion may be flawed, but there is something impressive in the breadth of his ambition, even if he pursues it through diabolical means. In Faustus's long speech after the two angels have whispered in his ears, his rhetoric outlines the modern quest for control over nature (albeit through magic rather than through science) in glowing, inspiring language. He offers a long list of impressive goals, including the acquisition of knowledge, wealth, and political power, that he believes he will achieve once he has mastered the dark arts. While the reader or playgoer is not expected to approve of his quest, his ambitions are impressive, to say the least. Later, the actual uses to which he puts his magical powers are disappointing and tawdry. For now, however, Faustus's dreams inspire wonder. ([important quotes about power and ambition](#))

Summary: Scene 2

Two scholars come to see [Faustus](#). Wagner makes jokes at their expense and then tells them that Faustus is meeting with Valdes and Cornelius. Aware that Valdes and Cornelius are infamous for their involvement in the black arts, the scholars leave with heavy hearts, fearing that Faustus may also be falling into "that damned art" as well .

Summary: Scene 3

That night, Faustus stands in a magical circle marked with various signs and words, and he chants in Latin. Four devils and Lucifer, the ruler of hell, watch him from the shadows. Faustus renounces heaven and God, swears allegiance to hell, and demands that [Mephistophilis](#) rise to serve him. The devil Mephistophilis then appears before Faustus, who commands him to depart and return dressed as a Franciscan friar, since "[t]hat holy shape becomes a devil best". Mephistophilis vanishes, and Faustus remarks on his obedience. Mephistophilis then reappears, dressed as a monk, and asks Faustus what he desires. Faustus demands his obedience, but Mephistophilis says that he is Lucifer's servant and can obey only Lucifer. He adds that he

came because he heard Faustus deny obedience to God and hoped to capture his soul.

Faustus quizzes Mephistophilis about Lucifer and hell and learns that Lucifer and all his devils were once angels who rebelled against God and have been damned to hell forever. Faustus points out that Mephistophilis is not in hell now but on earth; Mephistophilis insists, however, that he and his fellow demons are always in hell, even when they are on earth, because being deprived of the presence of God, which they once enjoyed, is hell enough. Faustus dismisses this sentiment as a lack of fortitude on Mephistophilis's part and then declares that he will offer his soul to Lucifer in return for twenty-four years of Mephistophilis's service. Mephistophilis agrees to take this offer to his master and departs. Left alone, Faustus remarks that if he had "as many souls as there be stars," he would offer them all to hell in return for the kind of power that Mephistophilis offers him. He eagerly awaits Mephistophilis's return.

Summary: Scene 4

Wagner converses with a clown and tries to persuade him to become his servant for seven years. The clown is poor, and Wagner jokes that he would probably sell his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton; the clown answers that it would have to be well-seasoned mutton. After first agreeing to be Wagner's servant, however, the clown abruptly changes his mind. Wagner threatens to cast a spell on him, and he then conjures up two devils, who he says will carry the clown away to hell unless he becomes Wagner's servant. Seeing the devils, the clown becomes terrified and agrees to Wagner's demands. After Wagner dismisses the devils, the clown asks his new master if he can learn to conjure as well, and Wagner promises to teach him how to turn himself into any kind of animal—but he insists on being called "Master Wagner."

Analysis: Scenes 2–4

Having learned the necessary arts from Cornelius and Valdes, Faustus now takes the first step toward selling his soul when he conjures up a devil. One of the central questions in the play is whether Faustus damns himself entirely on his own or whether the princes of hell somehow entrap him. In scene 3,

as Faustus makes the magical marks and chants the magical words that summon Mephistophilis, he is watched by Lucifer and four lesser devils, suggesting that hell is waiting for him to make the first move before pouncing on him. Mephistophilis echoes this idea when he insists that he came to Faustus of his own accord when he heard Faustus curse God and forswear heaven, hoping that Faustus's soul was available for the taking. But while the demons may be active agents eagerly seeking to seize Faustus's soul, Faustus himself makes the first move. Neither Mephistophilis nor Lucifer forces him to do anything against his will. ([important quotes about the theme of free will vs. fate](#))

Indeed, if anything, Mephistophilis seems far less eager to make the bargain than Faustus himself. He willingly tells Faustus that his master, Lucifer, is less powerful than God, having been thrown "by aspiring pride and insolence, / ... from the face of heaven". Furthermore, Mephistophilis offers a powerful portrait of hell that seems to warn against any pact with Lucifer. When Faustus asks him how it is that he is allowed to leave hell in order to come to earth, Mephistophilis famously says:

Why this is hell, nor am I out of it. Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God, And tasted the eternal joys of heaven, Am not tormented with ten thousand hells In being deprived of everlasting bliss?

Mephistophilis exposes the horrors of his own experience as if offering sage guidance to Faustus. His honesty in mentioning the "ten thousand hells" that torment him shines a negative light on the action of committing one's soul to Lucifer. Indeed, Mephistophilis even tells Faustus to abandon his "frivolous demands". ([Mephistophilis' speech detailing the horrors of hell](#))

But Faustus refuses to leave his desires. Instead, he exhibits the blindness that serves as one of his defining characteristics throughout the play. Faustus sees the world as he wants to see it rather than as it is. This shunning of reality is symbolized by his insistence that Mephistophilis, who is presumably hideous, reappear as a Franciscan friar. In part, this episode is a dig at Catholicism, pitched at Marlowe's fiercely Protestant English audience, but it also shows to what lengths Faustus will go in order to

mitigate the horrors of hell. He sees the devil's true shape, but rather than flee in terror he tells Mephistophilis to change his appearance, which makes looking upon him easier. Again, when Mephistophilis has finished telling him of the horrors of hell and urging him not to sell his soul, Faustus blithely dismisses what Mephistophilis has said, accusing him of lacking "manly fortitude". There is a desperate naïveté to Faustus's approach to the demonic: he cannot seem to accept that hell is really as bad as it seems, which propels him forward into darkness. ([important quotes by and about Mephistophilis](#))

The antics of Wagner and the clown provide a comic counterpoint to the Faustus-Mephistophilis scenes. The clown jokes that he would sell his soul to the devil for a well-seasoned shoulder of mutton, and Wagner uses his newly gained conjuring skill to frighten the clown into serving him. Like Faustus, these clownish characters (whose scenes are so different from the rest of the play that some writers have suggested that they were written by a collaborator rather than by Marlowe himself) use magic to summon demons. But where Faustus is grand and ambitious and tragic, they are low and common and absurd, seeking mutton and the ability to turn into a mouse or a rat rather than world power or fantastic wealth. As the play progresses, though, Faustus's grandeur diminishes, and he sinks down toward the level of the clowns, suggesting that degradation precedes damnation. ([Wagner and the Clown](#))