



## Marlowe's Doctor Faustus: Summary & Analysis

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**Introduction :** The Tragic History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus, commonly shortened to the title character's name, Doctor Faustus, is a play that was written by Christopher Marlowe and was published in 1604. In this lesson, we'll explore the plot of this play, and analyze some of the major characters, themes, and symbols.

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Doctor Faustus, a talented German scholar at Wittenburg, rails against the limits of human knowledge. He has learned everything he can learn, or so he thinks, from the conventional academic disciplines. All of these things have left him unsatisfied, so now he turns to magic. A Good Angel and an Evil Angel arrive, representing Faustus' choice between Christian conscience and the path to damnation. The former advises him to leave off this pursuit of magic, and the latter tempts him. From two fellow scholars, Valdes and Cornelius, Faustus learns the fundamentals of the black arts. He thrills at the power he will have, and the great feats he'll perform. He summons the devil Mephostophilis. They flesh out the terms of their agreement, with Mephostophilis representing Lucifer. Faustus will sell his soul, in exchange for twenty-four years of power, with Mephostophilis as servant to his every whim.

**Summery :** In a comic relief scene, we learn that Faustus' servant Wagner has gleaned some magic learning. He uses it to convince Robin the Clown to be his servant.

Before the time comes to sign the contract, Faustus has misgivings, but he puts them aside. Mephostophilis returns, and Faustus signs away his soul, writing with his own blood. The words "Homo fuge" ("Fly, man) appear on his arm, and Faustus is seized by fear. Mephostophilis distracts him with a dance of devils. Faustus requests a wife, a demand Mephostophilis denies, but he does give Faustus books full of knowledge.



Some time has passed. Faustus curses Mephostophilis for depriving him of heaven, although he has seen many wonders. He manages to torment Mephostophilis, he can't stomach mention of God, and the devil flees. The Good Angel and Evil Angel arrive again. The Good Angel tells him to repent, and the Evil Angel tells him to stick to his wicked ways. Lucifer, Belzebub, and Mephostophilis return, to intimidate Faustus. He is cowed by them, and agrees to speak and think no more of God. They delight him with a pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, and then Lucifer promises to show Faustus hell. Meanwhile, Robin the Clown has gotten one of Faustus' magic books.

Faustus has explored the heavens and the earth from a chariot drawn by dragons, and is now flying to Rome, where the feast honoring St. Peter is about to be celebrated. Mephostophilis and Faustus wait for the Pope, depicted as an arrogant, decidedly unholy man. They play a series of tricks, by using magic to disguise themselves and make themselves invisible, before leaving.

The Chorus returns to tell us that Faustus returns home, where his vast knowledge of astronomy and his abilities earn him wide renown. Meanwhile, Robin the Clown has also learned magic, and uses it to impress his friend Rafe and summon Mephostophilis, who doesn't seem too happy to be called.

At the court of Charles V, Faustus performs illusions that delight the Emperor. He also humiliates a knight named Benvolio. When Benvolio and his friends try to avenge the humiliation, Faustus has his devils hurt them and cruelly transform them, so that horns grow on their heads.

Faustus swindles a Horse-courser, and when the Horse-courser returns, Faustus plays a frightening trick on him. Faustus then goes off to serve the Duke of Vanholt. Robin the Clown, his friend Dick, the Horse-courser, and a Carter all meet. They all have been swindled or hurt by Faustus' magic. They go off to the court of the Duke to settle scores with Faustus.



Faustus entertains the Duke and Duchess with petty illusions, before Robin the Clown and his band of ruffians arrives. Faustus toys with them, besting them with magic, to the delight of the Duke and Duchess.

Faustus' twenty-four years are running out. Wagner tells the audience that he thinks Faustus prepares for death. He has made his will, leaving all to Wagner. But even as death approaches, Faustus spends his days feasting and drinking with the other students. For the delight of his fellow scholars, Faustus summons a spirit to take the shape of Helen of Troy. Later, an Old Man enters, warning Faustus to repent. Faustus opts for pleasure instead, and asks Mephostophilis to bring Helen of Troy to him, to be his love and comfort during these last days. Mephostophilis readily agrees.

Later, Faustus tells his scholar friends that he is damned, and that his power came at the price of his soul. Concerned, the Scholars exit, leaving Faustus to meet his fate.

As the hour approaches, Mephostophilis taunts Faustus. Faustus blames Mephostophilis for his damnation, and the devil proudly takes credit for it. The Good and Evil Angel arrive, and the Good Angel abandons Faustus. The gates of Hell open. The Evil Angel taunts Faustus, naming the horrible tortures seen there.

The Clock strikes eleven. Faustus gives a final, frenzied monologue, regretting his choices. At midnight the devils enter. As Faustus begs God and the devil for mercy, the devils drag him away. Later, the Scholar friends find Faustus' body, torn to pieces.

Epilogue. The Chorus emphasizes that Faustus is gone, his once-great potential wasted. The Chorus warns the audience to remember his fall, and the lessons it offers.

### References :

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