



**TRINITY COLLEGE FOR WOMEN  
NAMAKKAL**

**Department of English**

**DRAMA**

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# Dr. Faustus Introduction

- ❖ *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, commonly referred to simply as *Doctor Faustus*, is an Elizabethan Tragedy by Christopher Marlowe based on German stories about the title character Faust.
- ❖ It was written sometime between 1589 and 1592, and may have been performed between 1592 and Marlowe's death in 1593. Two different versions of the play were published in the Jacobean era several years later.
- ❖ The Admiral's Men performed 24 times in the three years between October 1594 and October 1597. On 22 November 1602, the diary of Philip Henslowe recorded a £4 payment to Samuel Rowley and William Bird for additions to the play, which suggests a revival soon after that date.

# Dr. Faustus Introduction

- ❖ In *Histriomastix*, his 1632 polemic against the drama, William Prynne records the tale that actual devils once appeared on the stage during a performance of *Faustus*, "to the great amazement of both the actors and spectators".
- ❖ Some people were allegedly driven mad, "distracted with that fearful sight".
- ❖ John Aubrey recorded a related legend, that Edward Alleyn, lead actor of The Admiral's Men, devoted his later years to charitable endeavours, like the founding of Dulwich College, in direct response to this incident.

# Some facts on Faustus

- ❖ The play may have been entered into the Stationers' Register on 18 December 1592, though the records are confused and appear to indicate a conflict over the rights to the play.
- ❖ A subsequent Stationers' Register entry, dated 7 January 1601, assigns the play to the bookseller Thomas Bushnell, the publisher of the 1604 first edition. Bushnell transferred his rights to the play to John Wright on 13 September 1610.
- ❖ The relationship between the texts is uncertain and many modern editions print both.
- ❖ As an Elizabethan playwright, Marlowe had nothing to do with the publication and had no control over the play in performance, so it was possible for scenes to be dropped or shortened, or for new scenes to be added, so that the resulting publications may be modified versions of the original script.

# Two Versions

Two versions of the play exist:

1. The 1604 quarto, printed by Valentine Simmes for Thomas Law; this is usually called the A text. The title page attributes the play to "Ch. Marl."
2. A second edition (A2) of first version was printed by George Eld for John Wright in 1609. It is merely a direct reprint of the 1604 text. The text is short for an English Renaissance play, only 1485 lines long.

# Characters

- ❖ **Doctor John Faustus** A learned scholar in Germany during the fifteenth century who becomes dissatisfied with the limitations of knowledge and pledges his soul to Lucifer in exchange for unlimited power.
- ❖ **Wagner** Faustus' servant, who tries to imitate Faustus' methods of reasoning and fails in a ridiculous and comic manner.
- ❖ **Valdes and Cornelius** Two German scholars who are versed in the practice of magic and who teach Faustus about the art of conjuring.
- ❖ **Lucifer** King of the underworld and a fallen angel who had rebelled against God and thereafter tries desperately to win souls away from the Lord.

# Characters

- ❖ **Mephistophilis :** A prince of the underworld who appears to Faustus and becomes his servant for twenty-four years.
- ❖ **Good Angel and Evil Angel:** Two figures who appear to Faustus and attempt to influence him.
- ❖ **The Clown:** The clown who becomes a servant of Wagner as Mephistophilis becomes a servant to Faustus.
- ❖ **Horse-Courser:** A gullible man who buys Faustus' horse, which disappears when it is ridden into a pond.
- ❖ **The Pope :** The head of the Roman Catholic church, whom Faustus and Mephistophilis use as a butt of their practical jokes.
- ❖ **Charles V, Emperor of Germany:** The emperor who holds a feast for Faustus and at whose court Faustus illustrates his magical powers.

# Characters

- ❖ **Knight:** A haughty and disdainful knight who insults Faustus. In revenge, Faustus makes a pair of horns appear on the knight.
- ❖ **Duke and Duchess of Vanholt:** A couple whom Faustus visits and for whom he conjures up some grapes.
- ❖ **Robin:** An ostler who steals some of Dr. Faustus' books and tries to conjure up some devils.
- ❖ **Rafe (Ralph):** A friend of Robin's who is present with Robin during the attempt to conjure up devils.
- ❖ **Vintner:** A man who appears and tries to get payment for a goblet from Robin.
- ❖ **Old Man:** He appears to Faustus during the last scene and tries to tell Faustus that there is still time to repent.
- ❖ **Seven Deadly Sins, Alexander, Helen of Troy, and Alexander's Paramour :** Spirits or apparitions which appear during the course of the play.
- ❖ **Chorus:** A device used to comment upon the action of the play or to provide exposition.



# Themes & Moral of Dr. Faustus

- ❖ **The problem of salvation and damnation** is now central to Faustus' conflict.
- ❖ He is deeply concerned over his own fate. In each appearance, Faustus is more influenced by the advice of the Evil Angel, and thus Faustus centers his thinking on the wealth and power that he is about to receive.
- ❖ Marlowe's Dr. Faustus,' Marlowe teaches us the lesson that **life is a straight line, not a circle; if one does not advance, one goes back.**
- ❖ Faustus, with his pendular movement goes and returns in an endless move, without hope and direction.

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