

The Tragical History of the Life And Death of Doctor Faustus
by Christopher Marlowe

General Questions on the Play As a Whole

1. Is Faustus's damnation tragic or an act of justice? Discuss in detail.
2. Compare the master-servant relationship in the drama.
3. What is the function of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel in the drama? How are the Good Angel and the Evil Angel related to earlier morality plays? What else in the drama is a holdover from the morality plays?
4. Once Faustus has signed the blood pact with Lucifer, is there a possibility for him to repent? Does he have the opportunity to change his mind? Discuss, using specific examples. (*Hint: look at passages immediately before, during, and after the appearance of the Good Angel and the Bad Angel.*)
5. How are the comic interludes related to the main plot? The comic subplots are separated from the doctor's behavior until the deceived Horse Courser appears to pull off Faustus's leg in Scene 10. What does the separation do to our sense of the relationship between plot and subplot, and what does the fusion of the two do to the main plot?
6. What is the role of the Old Man? Discuss the conversation between the Old Man and Faustus. What do you learn about the sin of despair? the availability of mercy? the power of faith.
7. Acts III and IV are made up primarily of "low scenes" in which Marlowe records the days, months, and years that follow Faustus's deal with Lucifer. Faustus has been empowered with magic. List and discuss uses he makes of his great power. Is there anything ironic about the choices that he makes? Compare his accomplishments with his earlier ambitions.
8. Write a description of hell as it is variously described and presented in this drama.
9. How does Marlowe use Greek classical imagery in the drama?
10. How is the image of the "fall" used throughout the drama?
11. One of Faustus's first requests of Mephistophilis is a wife, a request that Mephistophilis cannot fulfill, offering him a female demon instead because marriage is holy. His last request is Helen of Troy as a paramour, a request that Mephistophilis grants. What is the significance of this union with a demonic spirit? How is the spirit of the Renaissance represented in it? How does Faustus's relationship with Helen of Troy epitomize the activities of the twenty-four years?

12. What is the function of the Chorus? What kinds of information does the Chorus deliver, and what does that tell you about the state of Marlowe's dramatic skill and the sophistication of the theatrical audience? How does a modern film producer introduce the same information?
13. Is this a comedy or is this a tragedy (or is it a history)? The title claims it's a "tragical history," but that may be an inadequate analysis. Troubling, as well, is the intrusion of comedy into the doctor's downfall.
14. Do you have any sense of whether Marlowe feels Faustus was morally wrong in seeking the knowledge and power he praises in the first scene? Or is Faustus tragic, for Marlowe, because he seeks it and finds it and loses it?
15. Finally, critics have long claimed that this story has universal appeal -- that it speaks to all people, all cultures, all ethnicities, throughout all centuries. Defend or deny this claim, explaining why you think readers are interested (or not interested) in this story and/or why readers relate (or do not relate) to the characters and events.