

Summary of Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlowe

Faustus becomes dissatisfied with his studies of medicine, law, logic and theology; therefore, he decides to turn to the dangerous practice of necromancy, or magic. He has his servant Wagner summon Valdes and Cornelius, two German experts in magic. Faustus tells them that he has decided to experiment in necromancy and needs them to teach him some of the fundamentals.

When he is alone in a grove, Faustus begins experimenting with magical incantations, and suddenly Mephistophilis appears, in the form of an ugly devil. Faustus sends him away, telling him to reappear in the form of a friar. Faustus discovers that it is not his conjuring which brings forth Mephistophilis but, instead, that when anyone curses the trinity, devils automatically appear. Faustus sends Mephistophilis back to hell with the bargain that if Faustus is given twenty-four years of absolute power, he will then sell his soul to Lucifer.

Later, in his study, when Faustus begins to despair, a Good Angel and a Bad Angel appear to him; each encourages Faustus to follow his advice. Mephistophilis appears and Faust agrees to sign a contract in blood with the devil even though several omens appear which warn him not to make this bond.

Faustus begins to repent of his bargain as the voice of the Good Angel continues to urge him to repent. To divert Faustus, Mephistophilis and Lucifer both appear and parade the seven deadly sins before Faustus. After this, Mephistophilis takes Faustus to Rome and leads him into the pope's private chambers, where the two become invisible and play pranks on the pope and some unsuspecting friars.

After this episode, Faustus and Mephistophilis go to the German emperor's court, where they conjure up Alexander the Great. At this time, Faustus also makes a pair of horns suddenly appear on one of the knights who had been skeptical about Faustus' powers. After this episode, Faustus is next seen selling his horse to a horse-courser with the advice that the man must not ride the horse into the water. Later, the horse-courser enters Faustus' study and accuses Faustus of false dealings because the horse had turned into a bundle of hay in the middle of a pond.

After performing other magical tricks such as bringing forth fresh grapes in winter, Faustus returns to his study, where at the request of his fellow scholars, he conjures up the apparition of Helen of Troy. An old man appears and tries to get Faustus to hope for salvation and yet Faustus cannot. He knows it is now too late to turn away from the evil and ask for forgiveness. When the scholars leave, the clock strikes eleven and Faustus realizes that he must give up his soul within an hour.

As the clock marks each passing segment of time, Faustus sinks deeper and deeper into despair. When the clock strikes twelve, devils appear amid thunder and lightning and carry Faustus off to his eternal damnation.