

Faust. First Part Study Guide

Faust. First Part by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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Contents

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| Faust. First Part Study Guide..... | 1 |
| Contents..... | 2 |
| Plot Summary..... | 3 |
| Dedication, Prelude on the Stage, and Prologue in Heaven..... | 4 |
| Night and Outside the Town Wall..... | 6 |
| Faust's Study (I & II) and Auerbach's Tavern in Leipzig..... | 7 |
| A Witch's Kitchen and A Street..... | 9 |
| Evening, A Promenade, and The Neighbor's House..... | 11 |
| A Street, A Garden, A Summerhouse, and A Forest Cavern..... | 13 |
| Gretchen's Room, Martha's Garden, and At The Well..... | 15 |
| By A Shrine Inside The Town Wall, Night, The Street Outside Gretchen's Door, and A Cathedral | 17 |
| Walpurgis Night and A Walpurgis Night's Dream..... | 18 |
| A Gloomy Day, Open Country, Night, In Open Country and A Prison..... | 19 |
| Characters..... | 21 |
| Objects/Places..... | 24 |
| Themes..... | 26 |
| Style..... | 28 |
| Quotes..... | 30 |
| Topics for Discussion..... | 32 |



Plot Summary

The play Faust is a tragedy with the main character fighting against both Mephistopheles and his own lack of self-confidence. Faust signs a pact with Mephistopheles to serve him if Mephistopheles finds something that makes Faust want to live. Faust's search for earthly happiness ultimately leads to the destruction of a young girl through an unwed pregnancy and murder.

During a meeting between the Lord and Mephistopheles, the Lord offers Mephistopheles a challenge to try to draw Faust away from service to the Lord. Mephistopheles accepts the challenge. Faust first appears in deep melancholy as he contemplates the uselessness of the knowledge he has acquired. He is at the point of suicide when his faith is bolstered by the songs of the Easter celebration. As Faust enjoys his renewed faith, he encounters a black poodle. This poodle disturbs Faust as he tries to study the Word. The poodle finally transforms into Mephistopheles who offers to serve Faust the remainder of his life if Faust will serve Mephistopheles in the afterlife. Faust agrees with the exception that Mephistopheles must present him with something that makes him want to live.

Mephistopheles first takes Faust to a tavern where Faust is not comfortable with the reveling crowd and finally asks permission to leave. Mephistopheles then takes Faust to a witch who gives him a potion to make him appear younger. While at this witch's home Faust sees an image of a beautiful girl in a mirror. His one desire becomes to make this girl his own. The two meet on the street and the girl brushes Faust off. Through the workings of Mephistopheles, Faust and Gretchen met again and this time they fall in love with each other.

Through their relationship, Gretchen becomes pregnant, a circumstance considered unforgivable by the standards of that time. Gretchen's brother, Valentine is killed by Faust and Mephistopheles as he tries to defend his sister's honor. Gretchen's mother is also killed when she is given an overdose of a sleeping potion by Gretchen. After Gretchen gives birth to her baby, she becomes crazy and drowns the child. At the conclusion of the play she is being held in prison for her crimes. Faust visits her with the intention of freeing her from jail but does not succeed. While Mephistopheles tells Faust Gretchen's soul is doomed, a voice from heaven declares the girl is redeemed. The state of Faust's soul is uncertain.



Dedication, Prelude on the Stage, and Prologue in Heaven

Dedication, Prelude on the Stage, and Prologue in Heaven Summary

The play Faust is a tragedy with the main character fighting against both Mephistopheles and his own lack of self-confidence. Faust signs a pact with Mephistopheles to serve him if Mephistopheles finds something that makes Faust want to live. Faust's search for earthly happiness ultimately leads to the destruction of a young girl through an unwed pregnancy and murder.

In his "Dedication" Goethe addresses a generation and a time long gone. However, he feels as if spirits of this long gone time are reviving to greet him. Goethe is saddened by the knowledge that the people who surrounded him when he was compiling Faust are no longer around or alive while a group of strangers instead enjoys his work. Goethe remembers these people and places with love and realizes their memory is more important than his current fame.

The "Prelude on the Stage" returns to the present time as a director, poet and clown debate what type of performance they ought to bring their audience. The director's only interest is in pleasing the people who have bought tickets to the show. The poet wants peace where he can create a work that will bring him fame in the future. The clown campaigns for a play that will entertain the people currently in their midst. The three continue to argue their own viewpoints throughout this prelude until in the end the director declares their work should take the audience on a journey from heaven to hell.

The "Prologue in Heaven" begins with three archangels praising God for the enduring beauty of His great works. Mephistopheles interrupts the chorus of praise with one of his invited visits. He is disdainful of mankind and the lack of challenge he finds in tormenting these people. At this point the Lord draws Mephistopheles' attention to Faust, a doctor who serves the Lord, but serves Him in confusion. Mephistopheles believes he can draw Faust away from the Lord while the Lord believes allowing Mephistopheles to have his way with Faust will only bring the doctor closer to his Lord.

Dedication, Prelude on the Stage, and Prologue in Heaven Analysis

In this "Dedication" Goethe speaks directly to the people, experiences and days of his now gone youth. This dedication's mystical tone of spirits and memories of the dead reviving sets the tone for the remainder of the play. The dedication consists of four eight-line stanzas each with a rhyme scheme of a-b-a-b-a-b-c-c.



"Prelude on the Stage" sets a dramatic contrast from the wistful longings of the "Dedication." In this prelude a director and poet debate what type of performance they should bring the audience. The director wants a work that will awe and astound the people while the poet wants to be left alone to create a good work. The poet feels pressed and blocked by the director's pressure. The clown participates in the discussion as a form of comic relief, to keep the debate between the poet and director from becoming too heavy.

It is the "Prologue in Heaven" that sets the stage for the plot of the play. Mephistopheles has been issued a challenge to try to draw Faust away from the Lord. Note that Mephistopheles' nature has been firmly established in this introductory section of the play. He is a haughty character who is disdainful of humans, angels and God as well as the creation as a whole. Mephistopheles believes, of course, humans would have been better off without the intervention of God. This opening scene personifies the battle between good and evil in the world.



Night and Outside the Town Wall

Night and Outside the Town Wall Summary

The play opens with Faust in his study reviewing his great knowledge but finding that his studies have all been fruitless. Since he has gained no fame or wealth from his knowledge Faust decides to turn to magic in order to determine the secrets of the world. He feels cramped by his study and the small world that his brain by itself can grasp and desires the freedom that witchcraft will bring. As Faust begins his studies into witchcraft and conjures his first spirit, he is interrupted by Wagner, a young man who studies under Faust. He has heard the cries and believes Faust is reading a play. Wagner wishes to share the experience with Faust. Wagner and Faust converse for awhile with Faust trying to steer Wagner away from a career in knowledge. Wagner finally leaves Faust alone with his thoughts. Faust is in deep despair wondering why he was not able to get through to Wagner. He also doubts his relationship with God. He feels that he is a worm rather than a creature made in God's image. Faust finally decides the call of dust, or death, is stronger than that of life. He is on the verge of drinking poison when he hears the songs of Easter morning. Although Faust fights against the influence of the hymns being sung, he finds his faith being renewed by the choruses.

At the opening of "Outside the Town Wall" a group of townspeople enjoy the Easter holiday and walk in the country. Faust and Wagner join this group of festive people. Faust marvels that in the same way the Lord was set free from death; the people are set free by the coming of spring. Wagner, however, marvels at the way the people react to Faust as they walk along together. In his feelings of unimportance, Faust feels as if he is being mocked by his admirers. At the close of this scene, Faust and Wagner are approached by a black poodle. The sight of this dog troubles Faust greatly because he believes it is a phantom or evil spirit.

Night and Outside the Town Wall Analysis

Faust's discouragement and depressed spirit make easy targets for the Mephistopheles' coming attacks. At one point he is so overcome by the hopelessness he feels that he is about to commit suicide. Note that it is the chorus of the Easter holidays and the renewed faith they bring to Faust that keeps him from killing himself. Although he does find the faith necessary to keep himself from death, however, Faust is still highly depressed during his walk with Wagner. Wagner's thirst for knowledge and reverence for Faust further irritate Faust and contribute to his melancholy mood. It is the point at which Faust is highly depressed and vulnerable to Mephistopheles' interference that this devil appears to him in the form of a black poodle. Note that Faust is first afraid of this dog and believes it is an evil spirit until Wagner convinces him differently.



Faust's Study (I & II) and Auerbach's Tavern in Leipzig

Faust's Study (I & II) and Auerbach's Tavern in Leipzig Summary

In the sixth scene Faust enters his study content with himself and God, but the poodle refuses to be calm. Faust entices the dog to be silent as he contemplates his new found contentment and begins to read and interpret a volume of Holy Scriptures. Faust tries to study but the poodle interrupts his study by howling and growling. As Faust watches, the poodle seems to transform into a hideous beast, then hides behind the stove. A mist or fog fills the room and the Mephistopheles steps from behind the stove in place of the dog. Faust at first believes his visitor to be a wandering student but as introductions are made learns he is affiliated with the devil himself.

Mephistopheles attempts to leave Faust's study but cannot do so because of a pentagram drawn on the threshold of the room. The rules of hell indicate he must leave by the same route he entered. For a short time Faust holds Mephistopheles prisoner. Faust requests a bit of entertainment from Mephistopheles, who conjures a chorus of spirits to sing for them. The song puts Faust to sleep and Mephistopheles is able to escape. Faust wakes believing his interview with the devil was merely a dream.

In the second scene entitled "Faust's Study" Mephistopheles pays Faust a second visit. Faust shares with Mephistopheles his dissatisfaction with his life and his desire for death. Mephistopheles asks Faust why he did not go through with his suicide plan. Faust admits his plans were disrupted by the hope the songs of the Easter celebration brought to him. He has now returned to his original despair and disillusionment with his life. It is at this point that Mephistopheles presents his deal to Faust. He will serve Faust on earth if Faust will promise to serve Mephistopheles in the afterlife. Faust agrees but adds that the devil must present him with some sort of amusement that will bring Faust enough pleasure that Faust will not want it to end. Faust signs the pledge with his own blood.

As this pact is signed, a student arrives wishing to meet Faust. Mephistopheles transforms into the image of Faust and "advises" the student on how he should go about his career in knowledge. The student leaves and Faust voices concern to the devil that he is too old and too antisocial to enjoy the pleasures of other people. Mephistopheles persuades him he will soon lose these inhibitions. They make their way through flight to a tavern in the town of Leipzig.

A group of revelers already fills this tavern as Faust and Mephistopheles enter. Mephistopheles sings for the crowd and then conjures up drinks to please each one of the group. After watching the drunken crowd for a while, Faust states he'd like to leave. Mephistopheles encourages him to stay a while longer in order to see the real fun. The



men begin to hallucinate and are at the point of cutting each other with knives when Mephistopheles frees them from their hallucinations. At this same point Mephistopheles and Faust vanish.

Faust's Study (I & II) and Auerbach's Tavern in Leipzig Analysis

It is in this portion of the play that Faust makes his bargain with Mephistopheles. Mephistopheles is to serve him on earth and show him some pleasure that strikes Faust's fancy. Mephistopheles' first attempt fails as he tries to include Faust in the pleasures of drink and the related revelry.

After his initial fear of the black poodle, Faust brings the animal back to his study. His fear of the dog was a foreshadowing of who is masked by the dog's form. As Faust attempts to read and study the scriptures, the dog interrupts and frustrates his study by howling and growling, and then finally transforming into the form of Mephistopheles himself. The dog works as a form of distraction, keeping Faust from studying the Word and at the same time putting him into a frame of mind that will easily allow him to be influenced by the devil. Following Faust's deal with the devil a student comes in wishing to interview Faust. Instead Mephistopheles disguises himself as Faust and advises the student. The interview is intended as comic relief to lighten the otherwise dark mood of the play.

Note Faust's lack of confidence in Mephistopheles' ability to make him feel at ease in social situations. Faust argues he is both too old and too socially backward to enjoy the social scene. These fears are realized as Faust feels uncomfortable and out of place in the bar and finally asks Mephistopheles for permission to leave.



A Witch's Kitchen and A Street

A Witch's Kitchen and A Street Summary

Faust and Mephistopheles visit a witch for a potion to make Faust appear young. A female baboon tends the witch's caldron while a male baboon watches their children. The baboons say the witch is dinning out and is late. Mephistopheles banter with the baboons about the contents of the boiling pot as well as a sieve on the shelf. Meanwhile, Faust moves back and forth in front of a mirror where he sees the image of a beautiful girl. He believes she holds paradise in her body. Mephistopheles promises to find the girl for him once they finish their business with the witch. The baboons have made Mephistopheles sit down, and have given him a whisk and broken crown.

The female baboon has forgotten the pot and it boils over just as the witch enters through the chimney. The witch is burnt by the flames from the pot. In her foul mood, she greets Faust and Mephistopheles unkindly. Mephistopheles curses her for not recognizing her master. The witch begs pardon and appeases the devil with praise. Mephistopheles asks the witch for the potion for Faust. The witch makes a circle and motions Faust to step inside. Faust is skeptical of the magic, but Mephistopheles makes him step into the circle. The witch reads from a book of spells and then gives Faust a potion to drink. Before they leave Faust wants to see his lady in the mirror one more time but Mephistopheles pulls him away saying they must keep moving in order for the potion to take full effect.

In the following scene Faust sees his mirror lady in person as Mephistopheles promised. The two meet on the street. Faust greets the young lady but she is rude. Mephistopheles tells Faust the young lady has just been to confession and that he has no power over her. Faust tells Mephistopheles if he does not get the girl for Faust that night, Faust will leave Mephistopheles. Mephistopheles convinces Faust to give him more time and attempts to appease him with a visit to the girl's bedroom. Faust consents and makes plans to take the girl a gift. Mephistopheles thinks of gifts he can arrange for Faust to leave for the girl.

A Witch's Kitchen and A Street Analysis

Although the witch's kitchen scene is important to the plot of the play, it is also inserted as a form of comic relief. Faust and Mephistopheles have just left the tavern and Mephistopheles appears to have no stronger hold over Faust than before. Faust is highly skeptical of the witch's ability to make him appear younger. With the devil in this unlucky position, the baboons crown him in a comical fashion. He is given a whisk as a scepter and a broken crown. As Faust feels himself becoming overwhelmed by his desire for the girl in the mirror, Mephistopheles feels overwhelmed by the baboon's antics.



It is interesting to note that Faust chooses a girl for his conquest over whom Mephistopheles says he has no power. She is described as being young, innocent and having just made confession to her priest. While Faust wants to take the girl right away, an idea that should have appealed to Mephistopheles, Mephistopheles is forced to convince Faust to go slow because of this lack of power over the young girl.



Evening, A Promenade, and The Neighbor's House

Evening, A Promenade, and The Neighbor's House Summary

The scene "Evening" opens as Gretchen prepares to leave her room. She wonders to herself about Faust's identity and admits she was attracted to him. Gretchen leaves her room as Faust and Mephistopheles enter. Faust begs Mephistopheles to leave him alone in Gretchen's room. Faust explores the room, visualizing Gretchen growing up in these surroundings. After some time Mephistopheles returns to make Faust leave before Gretchen comes back. While he is there, Mephistopheles leaves a box of jewelry in Gretchen's cabinet. They leave the room just as Gretchen enters.

Gretchen notices the room is warm and opens a window. She also suddenly feels uneasy and hopes her mother will be home soon. As she undresses for bed she finds the box of jewelry in her cupboard. She is awed by the jewels and wonders how they got there. Gretchen wants to keep the jewelry believing it makes her more beautiful. She admits to herself that she believes people only tell her she is pretty out of pity for her lack of wealth.

In the following scene Mephistopheles fumes over the fate of his jewels. It appears Gretchen showed the jewelry to her mother who made the girl give them to their priest. Mephistopheles explains to Faust that Gretchen's mother has a keen nose for sniffing out nonspiritual things. The mother senses from the start the jewels came from evil means so she calls the priest to take them away. The mother is happy with the priest's promise of heavenly riches while Gretchen is confused by the circumstances. She believes they were sent by a kind person, yet her mother believes this person to be evil. Faust convinces Mephistopheles to arrange for another case of jewels to be left in Gretchen's room.

Gretchen's neighbor Martha talks to herself about her abusive husband. She believes him to be dead but has no certificate to prove this suspicion. As she talks, Gretchen enters Martha's house with a second box of jewelry. Martha looks at the jewelry and advises Gretchen not to show these to her mother. Martha suggests that Gretchen might try wearing them occasionally and introducing them slowly so as not to arouse suspicion. Even Martha admits, however, there is something funny about the jewelry.

Martha and Gretchen's conversation is interrupted by a knock at the door. Mephistopheles comes in the guise of bringing Martha information that her husband is indeed dead. Martha asks the location of his grave and if Mephistopheles has brought her any token from her husband. As Gretchen tries to comfort Martha Mephistopheles tries to convince Gretchen she should be married soon. When Gretchen replies she is



too young to marry, he suggests she take on a lover, an act Gretchen says is not acceptable.

Mephistopheles and Martha continue to discuss Martha's dead husband. In one sentence Mephistopheles gives Martha hope that her husband did indeed love her and in the next he indicates the husband ran away because he did not love his wife. Mephistopheles says her husband earned a fortune, but blew this fortune on a lady who gave him a sexually transmitted disease. Mephistopheles suggests Martha grieve her husband the required amount of time, and then find another man. Mephistopheles promises to return again with proof of Martha's husband's death. He also says he will bring Faust with him to meet Gretchen.

Evening, A Promenade, and The Neighbor's House Analysis

Note in the "Evening" scene that the presence of Mephistopheles in Gretchen's room for only a little while has made the room seem very warm. Gretchen is very sensitive at this point to the presence of the devil as she feels uncomfortable in the room. As soon as Gretchen's mother has seen the first set of jewelry, she believes they have been left by some evil being. Martha believes there is something funny about the second set of jewelry. Notice the way the characters respond to the aura of evil around this jewelry. Gretchen's mother senses it quickly and gives the jewels away. Martha notices something odd about the jewels, but doesn't recognize what this oddity is. Gretchen is simply bewildered by the appearance of the riches. She does not seem to equate them with evil. Although the priest tells Gretchen and her mother he believes the jewelry was indeed placed in Gretchen's room for evil purposes, he has no qualms about claiming the jewelry for the Church. He claims this is because the Church can make use of the evil jewels without it being a black mark against the Church. If an individual were to benefit from the jewels, however, it would be considered a sin.



A Street, A Garden, A Summerhouse, and A Forest Cavern

A Street, A Garden, A Summerhouse, and A Forest Cavern Summary

Mephistopheles tells Faust his meeting with Gretchen is all set up. The only condition is that Faust back Mephistopheles' story about Martha's husband's death. Faust at first refuses to lie. Mephistopheles reminds Faust it will not be the first lie he has ever told. He also suggests Faust's vows of love to Gretchen will be lies. Faust argues with him but in the end agrees that he has no choice in the matter but to lie to Martha.

The scene "A Garden" begins with Faust and Gretchen walking together. Gretchen is surprised that Faust should take notice of her. Meanwhile Martha and Mephistopheles walk together. Martha questions Mephistopheles about his occupation and warns him not to be a bachelor when the time comes for him to die. The action passes back to Faust and Gretchen. Gretchen tries to convince him that as soon as they are away from each other, he will forget her. She vows, however, that she will think of him often because she has plenty of spare time to spend thinking about him.

Gretchen shares with Faust a few details about her life. She has a brother who is a soldier. Her father is dead. She had a little sister whom she raised who is now also dead. During the time she was raising her sister, Gretchen was also responsible for cooking, shopping and cleaning because her mother was sick.

The scene passes back to Martha and Mephistopheles where Martha appears to be trying to seduce Mephistopheles. He tells Martha he has not even been serious with a woman because "trifling with ladies is a serious crime." Action turns back to Faust and Gretchen as they discuss the day they met outside the church. Gretchen admits before that day she had never had a man approach her in that manner before. She asks forgiveness for her rudeness. Gretchen then picks a daisy and begins pulling off each petal. With each petal she alternates between the phrases "He loves me" and "He loves me not" until the last petal reveals to her that Faust does indeed love her. Faust declares the daisy is correct. That he will love her forever. Martha and Mephistopheles finish the scene as Martha apologizes for not asking Mephistopheles to stay longer. She blames her actions on her nosy neighbors. They agree that it appears both Gretchen and Faust have found their true loves.

The scene "A Summerhouse" opens with Gretchen and Faust involved in flirtatious play. Mephistopheles interrupts their play and tells them it is time to go. Faust and Gretchen say their loving farewells. After Faust and Mephistopheles leave, Gretchen again shows wonder that Faust could find her interesting.



In "A Forest Cavern" Faust addresses a spirit whom he believes has sent him his current happiness. He is awed that he has already fallen so deeply in love with Gretchen and that he already finds her such an essential part of his life. He notes, however, Mephistopheles' ability to degrade and turn sour his happiness. Mephistopheles enters and starts to irritate Faust. He warns Faust soon he will take his affections for Gretchen too far. He tells Faust how Gretchen is sitting waiting for Faust to come to her, wanting him. Faust begs Mephistopheles to stop tormenting him. Faust admits that he is even jealous of Christ as the figurative Body of Christ touches Gretchen's lips as she takes communion. Mephistopheles asks if Faust plans to sleep in his own bed or Gretchen's. He encourages Faust to go to Gretchen.

A Street, A Garden, A Summerhouse, and A Forest Cavern Analysis

Notice that often in this sequence of scenes the devil is caught saying a double-sided statement. For instance, he tells Faust they must lie to Martha about the circumstances of her husband's death. When Faust refuses because it is wrong to lie, the devil convinces Faust otherwise. Perhaps a better example of the Mephistopheles' double-sidedness is the garden scene where Faust successfully woos Gretchen. Meanwhile, Martha tries to seduce Mephistopheles, an action Mephistopheles claims to Martha is wrong. However, this act of messing around with an unmarried woman is the very one he is trying to encourage in Faust and Gretchen.

Also interesting in this section is the contrast between the real wooing of Gretchen by Faust and the parody of this wooing between Martha and Mephistopheles. The scene switches back and forth between the two couples so that one gets first a view of Gretchen and Faust growing closer, then a glimpse of Mephistopheles trying to dodge Martha's attempts to court him. It is already known that Mephistopheles thinks little of Martha. As Mephistopheles says earlier in the play, most humans are so stupid they don't recognize the devil when they meet him face to face. In this case, Martha is actually trying to seduce the devil.



Gretchen's Room, Martha's Garden, and At The Well

Gretchen's Room, Martha's Garden, and At The Well Summary

In the scene "Gretchen's Room" Gretchen broods on the sorrow she feels when Faust is not near her. She misses the sound of his voice, his smile and his kisses. In the following scene Gretchen walks again with Faust. As they talk, she discusses Faust's relationship with Mephistopheles' and the condition of Faust's soul. Gretchen believes Mephistopheles to be a bad influence on Faust. She admits she hates the man.

Before Gretchen goes home, Faust asks her if they can sleep together. Gretchen is afraid her mother will wake up and catch them. To keep the mother from waking Faust gives Gretchen a sleeping potion to give to her mother. He convinces Gretchen the potion is safe and will have no lasting effects on her mother. Gretchen agrees. After she leaves Mephistopheles enters and mocks the girl's concern over Faust's soul. He asks if tonight will be the night, claiming that he will get pleasure from the act as well as the couple.

In the scene by the well Gretchen and a friend discuss the fate of Barbara, another girl in their town. Lieschen scorns Gretchen for feeling sorry for Barbara and her condition. She believes Barbara has gotten what she deserves for spending her evenings with gentlemen while the other girls were at home working and being kept at home. Lieschen also notes that the father of Barbara's baby has run away, leaving Barbara alone in her ruin.

Gretchen's Room, Martha's Garden, and At The Well Analysis

In "Gretchen's Room" Gretchen soliloquizes about how she misses Faust. She misses not only his presence, but also their physical relationship. Note her reference to death at the end of the soliloquy. The term death is often used in literature to symbolize sexual orgasm. In the following scene Gretchen shows concern for Faust's soul and asks him to stay away from Mephistopheles. Gretchen tells Faust she feels Mephistopheles' evil nature every time she is in his presence. Mephistopheles' evil presence is so strong that Gretchen feels unable to love Faust, or even pray when she is near him. The reader draws from the following discussions between Gretchen and Faust, and Faust and Mephistopheles that it will be that night that Gretchen and Faust will experience sexual relations.



Although the scene at the well may seem unimportant, it gives important information about the way an unwed mother is treated during this time period. Not only must the girl give birth to and raise her baby, she is also publicly disgraced as a result of her sin. First, she is forced to do penance in the church. The girl also must take part in a public ceremony where her bridal wreath is taken from her. This ceremony represents the girl's lost virginity as well as her status as an undesirable woman.



By A Shrine Inside The Town Wall, Night. The Street Outside Gretchen's Door, and A Cathedral

By A Shrine Inside The Town Wall, Night. The Street Outside Gretchen's Door, and A Cathedral Summary

Gretchen bows before an icon of the Virgin Mary and begs mercy for her crimes. She acknowledges that Mary is one who can understand her pain. Gretchen cries ceaselessly for her sins. In the following scene Gretchen begins to realize the results of her actions. Gretchen's brother, Valentine, is distraught when he learns what has happened to his sister. As Valentine stands in the street outside Gretchen's house, he hears Faust and Mephistopheles approach. Faust has come to visit Gretchen and has brought her a new necklace. Valentine moves to protect his sister's honor and is killed during a sword fight between himself, and Mephistopheles and Faust. Before he dies Valentine tell his sister he knows her secret. He calls her a whore and slut, and tells her the whole town will soon have her. Valentine also calls for a curse upon Gretchen until the day she dies.

The heaviness of Gretchen's sin increases even more when she attends a mass for the dead. An evil spirit appears and torments Gretchen with the death of her mother as well as the murder of her brother. The choir in the scene sings in Latin about God's day of judgments and the punishments of the wicked. Gretchen feels as if the walls of the cathedral are closing in around her. She passes out.

By A Shrine Inside The Town Wall, Night. The Street Outside Gretchen's Door, and A Cathedral Analysis

Gretchen identifies with the Virgin Mary because like the Virgin Mary, Gretchen is now pregnant out of wedlock. This scene shows how deeply Gretchen feels fear and dread as a result of the coming punishments for her actions. Gretchen seems most afraid her mistake will doom her to hell. In the following scene, Gretchen begins to feel the heaviness of her crime as she hears her own brother curse her. Valentine dies in an attempt to defend Gretchen's honor, however, he appears to be certain that what he has heard is true.

In the cathedral scene it becomes obvious that Gretchen's mother died as a result of the sleeping potion she was given. Although it is a mass for the dead that Gretchen attends, it is uncertain if the mass is specifically for her mother and brother, or just the dead in general. Note there is an evil spirit that adds to Gretchen's pain by tormenting her with images of hell and God's judgment.



Walpurgis Night and A Walpurgis Night's Dream

Walpurgis Night and A Walpurgis Night's Dream Summary

In the "Walpurgis Night" scene Faust and Mephistopheles travel to the Harz Mountains where they watch the witches' celebrate their night of folic. Near the end of the scene, Faust sees an image of Gretchen that chills him and causes him to stop dancing. In his vision, Gretchen is dead but no one has closed her eyes, there is the mark of a knife cut around her neck. Mephistopheles tries to draw Faust's attention from the vision. The following Walpurgis dream is merely a song sung to the accompaniment of an orchestra.

Walpurgis Night and A Walpurgis Night's Dream Analysis

The Walpurgis Night scenes offer a bit of comic relief from the drama of the previous scenes. Even in comedy, however, Faust's vision brings back the memory of what has happened and what is coming. He sees a vision of the dead Gretchen, with a mark around her neck evidencing that she will have her head cut off. The Walpurgis dream section is pure comedy and appears to have little or no connection to the action of the play itself.



A Gloomy Day. Open Country, Night. In Open Country and A Prison

A Gloomy Day. Open Country, Night. In Open Country and A Prison Summary

Faust rebukes Mephistopheles as he learns about Gretchen's pregnancy and her imprisonment. He first commands Mephistopheles to set Gretchen free. When he learns this is not possible he asks Mephistopheles to take him to Gretchen so he can set her free himself. Mephistopheles agrees saying that if Faust frees Gretchen he can carry them both to safety. In the next brief scene Faust and Mephistopheles watch as a guild of witches performs a ritual over the gallows where Gretchen is to be killed.

In the final scene of the play Faust goes to see Gretchen in prison with the intent of setting her free. Faust listens as Gretchen sings a meaningless song intended to help her determine who caused her current plight. When Faust enters the cell, Gretchen believes he is one of the guards coming to take her to the gallows. Even when Gretchen stands face to face with Faust and begs for her life, she does not recognize her lover. She asks permission to feed her baby before being killed, but then in the next breath tells Faust she has been told she killed her baby.

Faust calls Gretchen's name. Although Gretchen recognizes his voice she still does not realize it is Faust in the cell with her. Faust finally convinces Gretchen he is there but cannot get her to come with him to safety. Gretchen babbles in a senseless manner about the death of her child and her mother. She takes Faust's hand, but believes there is blood on it. Faust tries to convince Gretchen she will be safe if she comes with him but she refuses to follow, saying there is no hope for her anymore. She asks Faust to go to the pond where she drowned her baby in order to save him. Faust attempts to carry her from the cell but she resists. At this point Mephistopheles appears to tell Faust he must leave the cell now or he will be caught. Gretchen sees the evil man and believes he has come for her. Mephistopheles' final declaration is that Gretchen is doomed. A voice from above, from heaven it is assumed, responds that the girl is redeemed.

A Gloomy Day. Open Country, Night. In Open Country and A Prison Analysis

Faust is distraught when he learns the fate of his lover. He is angry Mephistopheles has hidden the truth from him and demands Mephistopheles free Gretchen. Again in his lack of power, Mephistopheles is unable to free the girl, only to take Faust to her. When Faust enters Gretchen's cell, it is obvious she has become mentally unstable during her ordeal. She babbles to Faust, first saying she wants to feed her baby, then admitting to him she has killed her baby. In a scene that reminds one of Shakespeare's "Hamlet"



Gretchen visualizes bloodstains on Faust's hands. These "stains" probably come from Faust's role in the murder of Gretchen's brother.

Note there are many allusions to a wedding in the text as Gretchen waits for her death. She compares her expectant waiting to that which should have occurred on her wedding day, a day no longer in her future. She will not enjoy this day obviously because she is about to be put to death, but also because she has been found to have been involved in sexual relations before her wedding. For this reason, her wedding garland, the flowers that should have decorated her during her wedding, are taken away from her in a public ceremony. When Mephistopheles appears at the end of the day, Gretchen is upset he is there saying the day is supposed to be sacred. One generally thinks of a wedding as sacred, not a public execution. Gretchen may again be referring to her own wedding, or even her reunion with Christ in heaven where she will become part of the symbolic bride of Christ.

Notice that even though Gretchen does not appear to be completely of a sound mind, she takes full responsibility for her actions. She admits she was fully consenting in her relationship with Faust. She also states that she gave her mother the sleeping potion so that they could enjoy each other's company in the bedroom without her mother's interference. Gretchen seems to be content to go to her death, knowing that the remainder of her life has been ruined by the decisions she has made.



Characters

Heinrich Faust

Faust begins the play as a relatively good person. He serves the Lord but according to the Lord Himself, he serves in confusion. The Lord grants Mephistopheles permission to try to draw Faust away from the Lord. The description the Lord and even Mephistopheles give of the faith of Faust is greatly contrasted with the audience's first view of Faust as they see him in dismay and melancholy, and at the brink of committing suicide. Faust has reached this point because he no longer sees the sense of his learning. He feels that although he has dedicated his life to the task of gaining knowledge he is no better off than when he began. He has no wealth or riches to show for his learning and even feels mocked by the respect others show to him.

In literary terms Faust is categorized as a tragic hero. Faust fits this term because he is a person who is highly respected those around him. This respect is evidenced by Wagner's allegiance as well as that of the unnamed student who comes to Faust seeking advice. The tragic hero generally makes a bad decision that leads to his downfall. In this case, it is Faust's decision to make a pact with the devil that leads to his downfall. Often a tragic hero will cause others to fall along with him. In the case of Faust, he causes the ultimate destruction of Gretchen's life when he becomes involved with her.

At the beginning of the play Faust is struggling with his own self-worth as well as his ability to believe and have faith in God. Although he knows he was made in God's image, he sees himself as little more than a worm. It is this mindset that allows the devil to get an easy grip on Faust. Throughout the remainder of the play Faust struggles with Mephistopheles as he tries to show Faust pleasure beyond learning and knowledge. As Faust participates in the devil's deal, he impregnates a young girl, kills her brother and assists in the death of her mother.

Mephistopheles

Mephistopheles acts as Faust's antagonist in the play. He is a devil-like character who tries to entice Faust away from his belief in God. Note that while God is considered all powerful, there are several instances in the play that refer to the devil's lack of power. While speaking with Faust the devil admits he is not omniscient as God is, but that he knows a lot. Mephistopheles is also forced by the laws of hell to exit a room or home the same way he entered that room. This is evidenced in the scene in Faust's study where Faust is able to hold the devil captive for a short while because of the pentagram on his threshold.

Although Mephistopheles is portrayed as being the leader of the underworld, he is not even recognized by the witch in the scene entitled "The Witch's Kitchen." The witch



admits she expected the devil to have a cloven hoof, while the Mephistopheles that travels with Faust appears to be a normal human. Note, however, that in the tavern scene, one of the revelers even notices Mephistopheles' malformed foot. These differences could indicate that Mephistopheles actually changes form throughout the play. After all, it is known that he first appeared to Faust as a poodle.

From the beginning of the play Mephistopheles' attitude is haughty and disdainful. He dislikes God's creation, especially humans who he says offers him little challenge. Mephistopheles readily accepts the Lord's offer to try to lead Faust away from his belief in the Lord. He believes Faust will offer him no difficulty and will be easy to lead away from his belief in God.

Margareta (Gretchen)

Faust first sees Gretchen in a mirror in a witch's kitchen. From this point on, he is determined to get the girl as his own. Gretchen is described as being beautiful, but young and innocent. According to the play she is only about fourteen years old. When Faust meets the girl on the street she has just made her confession to the priest. Because of her great faith, Mephistopheles has no power over her. With the help of a not so faithful neighbor, Mephistopheles is able to convince the girl to see Faust. Gretchen falls in love with Faust and soon is willing to do anything for him. She gives her mother a sleeping potion so that she and Faust can spend the night together. Apparently she gives too much of the potion, however, because her mother dies. Gretchen also becomes pregnant through her relationship with Faust. Gretchen is put in prison for her sins and becomes insane. This mental instability causes her to drown her baby when it is born. Despite her sins, a voice from heaven declares that Gretchen is redeemed at the conclusion of the play.

Wagner

Wagner is a young man who has chosen to learn from Faust. He is a type of servant whose job is to learn what he can from the doctor and teacher. Wagner's young, fresh pursuit of knowledge contrasts with Faust's hopeless position where he believes himself no better off for all of his learning. Wagner is a serious man and does not care for the folly or discussion of common people. He sees their socialization as mere frivolity. Wagner is also awed by the respect people show toward Faust. Wagner hopes that one day he will warrant this same respect.

Valentine

Valentine is Gretchen's brother. He is a soldier. When he learns about Gretchen's condition he comes home to defend her honor. He is killed in the street outside Gretchen's house as he fights with Faust and Mephistopheles.



Martha

Martha is Gretchen's neighbor. It is through Martha's help that Mephistopheles is able to set up meetings between Gretchen and Faust. Although Martha is a believer, her faith is not as strong as that of Gretchen's mother. Martha senses there is something strange about the jewelry that Gretchen is given but does not readily sense it has come from an evil source. Martha also unknowingly courts Mephistopheles.

The Witch

The witch is referred to as an understudy of Mephistopheles. She makes most of his potions for him because Mephistopheles lacks the patience to mix the brews. In the one scene in which she appears in the play, she does not recognize Mephistopheles and is cursed for her lack of recognition. It is this witch's potion that makes Faust young so that he can woo Gretchen. While she is away the witch's kitchen is attended by a pair of baboons and their children.

Margareta's Mother

Gretchen's mother never has a speaking part in the play but she is an important character as she makes Gretchen give the first set of jewels to the priest. Gretchen keeps the second set of jewels at Martha's house to keep her mother from giving them away also. Mephistopheles says Gretchen's mother has an uncanny ability to identify sinful things simply by their smell. Gretchen's mother is killed when Gretchen gives her a sleeping potion so that Faust can visit Gretchen in her home.

Barbara

Barbara is a friend of Gretchen who becomes pregnant out of wedlock. As Gretchen and her friend Lieschen talk about Barbara's situation Gretchen realizes how little tolerance she used to have for people who found themselves in this situation. Now that Gretchen is in the same situation, however, she finds herself feeling differently about Barbara.

The Lord

The only scene in which the Lord appears is in the third scene of the play. However, He plays a very important part in the play as He gives Mephistopheles permission to try to entice Faust from following the Lord. The Lord admits Faust is a believer, but that he is still serving in confusion. The Lord sets up the trial as a way to bring Faust to a clearer understanding of the Lord and His ways.



Objects/Places

Heaven

Mephistopheles meets with Lord and His archangels in Heaven to ask permission to tempt Faust.

Faust's Study

It is in Faust's study that Mephistopheles appears to Faust as a poodle, then transforms into his human form.

Auerbach's Tavern in Leipzig

Mephistopheles first takes Faust here to enjoy the pleasures of drink.

The Witch's Kitchen

This is the spot where Faust drinks a potion to make himself appear younger. He also first sees an image of Gretchen in a mirror in this kitchen.

Jewelry

Mephistopheles places jewels two different times in a cabinet in Gretchen's room to help Faust woo the girl.

Martha's House

Martha convinces Gretchen to keep her second set of jewelry at Martha's house so that her mother will not find it and give it to the priest as she did with the first set of jewelry.

A Daisy

Gretchen pulls the petals from this flower to determine if Faust really loves her or not.

Sleeping Potion

Faust gives Gretchen this potion to give to her mother so the mother will sleep through their rendezvous. Gretchen apparently gives her mother too much of the potion and her mother dies.



Martha's Garden

It is here that Gretchen asks Faust whether or not he believes in God.

A Well

It is near this well that Gretchen and a friend discuss Barbara's out of wedlock pregnancy.

A Statue of the Virgin Mary

It is in front of this icon that Gretchen prays for Mary to forgive her of her sin of fornication.

The Street Outside Gretchen's Home

Gretchen's brother Valentine is killed in this street by Mephistopheles and Faust as Valentine tries to defend his sister's honor.

Walpurgis

Walpurgis is noted in the play as a night of wild witching. It is generally thought to be a night when supernatural powers are heightened.



Themes

Faith

One of the questions raised by the play "Faust" concerns how one defines faith and how one determines how much faith one has. Both Gretchen and Faust have faith, but they have faith of differing levels. In the opening prologue, the Lord refers to Faust as His servant. Even the Lord admits that Faust serves Him in confusion. This indicates Faust has faith, but a confused faith. The first scene of the play does not seem to show Faust as a man who has any faith at all. Even before his encounter with Mephistopheles, Faust contemplates, and almost commits, suicide. Faust's faith is restored, however, when he hears the singing of the Easter hymns. Faust's small amount of faith is again shaken when he is disturbed by the poodle as he attempts to study God's Word. It is at this point that Mephistopheles takes over and attempts to destroy what is left of Faust's faith.

Gretchen, on the other hand, is a character with a living, growing faith. She is young, but during her first appearance in the play Mephistopheles says he has no power over her because of her faith. It is the result of Gretchen's faith that she is able to recognize the bad influence Mephistopheles has over Faust and encourage Faust not to socialize with Mephistopheles. It is interesting, however, that Gretchen's mother senses the jewels came from an evil source while Gretchen does not sense this same evil source. Consider especially that Gretchen quickly felt Mephistopheles' presence in her room the day the jewels were left although the demon had already left.

Battle Between Good and Evil

The main theme of this play can be defined as the struggle between good and evil. This struggle is not only seen in Faust's pact with Mephistopheles but also in Faust's relationship with Gretchen. The theme is introduced in the prologue when the Lord gives Mephistopheles permission to try to draw Faust away from the Lord's service. The struggle between the Lord and the devil is the ultimate battle between good and evil that will last until the end of time. This battle is seen especially clearly in the transformation of Gretchen once she becomes involved with Faust. Faust's uncertain belief makes him an easy target for the devil while Gretchen appears to have a deep and unending faith. Gretchen, however, takes a most drastic fall as she becomes pregnant out of wedlock, accidentally murders her mother, and then kills her child. Even with all of these faults, however, at the end of the play it is announced that Gretchen's soul has been saved. The status of Faust's soul at the end of the play remains a mystery.

The Limits of the Mephistopheles' Power

Although it is well known that the Lord is all powerful, it appears in this play that the devil has limits in his power. First, he is limited by the laws of hell to leave a room by the



same manner in which he entered. Mephistopheles is also limited in his power by certain witch symbols and signs. It is for this reason that Faust is able to hold the devil captive for a short while. Mephistopheles is also not all-knowing, or omniscient, as the Lord is. It appears Mephistopheles must gain his knowledge about people by eavesdropping. In the end of the play Mephistopheles again shows his lack of power by telling Faust he has no power to save Gretchen from the prison. The can be compared to his lack of power to save a person's soul, only to condemn it.

Mephistopheles does, however, have power to find or conjure the jewels that Faust gives to Gretchen. In fact, he is able to produce two sets of jewels. Mephistopheles also has power over witches and witchcraft. He is able to command the witch to create a potion that will cause Faust to appear younger. He admits he is able to mix this potion himself but does not have to patience to do so. Also note that Gretchen finds herself unable to pray while Mephistopheles is present. This evidences that Mephistopheles does have power to influence those around him not to worship or talk to God. Also while disguised as a poodle, Mephistopheles distracts Faust from studying the Word, by making noise.



Style

Point of View

When dealing with a play, it is hard to determine a specific point of view through which the story is told. Each players' lines are their own words and thoughts, so in that way the play is told through the first person point of view of each character as they get their own individual turn to speak.

The story is told almost entirely through dialogue. The few exceptions include stage directions and brief descriptions of sets. Although this work was intended to be acted out in front of an audience, actions are not a big key in understanding the play. Therefore, this play is just as meaningful as one reads the script as a piece of literature as it would be if seen acted.

Setting

Since this is a play, settings are obviously very important to those wishing to reproduce the work. The setting for each scene is indicated at the beginning of the scene. Example of scenes include heaven, Faust's study, the countryside outside the town walls, Gretchen's room, the witch's kitchen and the jail where Gretchen is imprisoned.

It is indicated by the "Prelude on the Stage" that the play is being acted out in a playhouse somewhere in Germany. In a scene that occurs outside the town wall, one of the townspeople speaks of going to Burgdorf, a town located in Hanover, Germany. This reference indicates the play may be set in a town in Germany, but the name of this town is never given. Leipzig, the location of the tavern that Faust and Mephistopheles visit, is also a town in Germany.

Language and Meaning

The difficulties in understanding this work come mostly from the form the writer chooses as well as the many allusions and other literary techniques he uses in his writing. The play is written in dramatic poetry, the form of a poem with a distinct meter and rhyme scheme. It is important to remember that this work has been translated from German so much of the original beauty and beat of Geothe's work is lost when it is translated. Good translations try to follow the original meter and often complex rhyme scheme. Although the work is divided into lines, it is important to read the lines just as one would read a prose work, not pausing at the line breaks. There is one exception in which Geothe writes one scene of Faust in prose. This one exception is the 26th scene that just before the end of the play.



Structure

This work is structured as a play with only one act. In this play there are twenty-eight scenes including a dedication, a prelude and a prologue. Each scene bears a title that indicates either where the action of the scene takes place or the location of the action of the scene. For instance, the first scene is simple entitled "Night." The reader later learns this scene is the night before Easter. Although it is not specified it is understood the action takes place in Faust's study. Most other scenes indicate exactly where the action takes place. For instance the eighth scene takes place in Auerbach's Tavern in Leipzig, as stated in the title of the scene.

The main plot of the novel involves the battle for Faust's soul and Faust's pact with the devil. The plot widens to include Gretchen and impact Faust has on her in his attempt to find joy in the base pleasures of life. The play flows well with all action occurring in the present. It is a very dramatic piece with little of the folly the clown requests in the prelude. There are scenes, such as the one with the witch and the baboons, which lighten the mood of the play. In its entirety it is a very serious play which deals with the serious topic of faith and belief in God.



Quotes

"Thus on these narrow boards you'll seem / To explore the entire creation's scheme - / And with swift steps, yet wise and slow / From heaven, through the world, right down to hell you'll go!" Prelude on the Stage, lines 239-242.

"The little earth-god still persists in his old ways, / Ridiculous as ever, as in his first days. / He'd have improved if you'd not given / Him a mere glimmer of the light of heaven; / He calls in Reason, and it has only increased / His power to be beastlier than a beast." Prologue in Heaven, lines 281-286.

"Well that's Philosophy I've read, / And Law and Medicine, and I fear / Theology too, from A to Z; / Hard studies all, that have cost me dear. / And so I sit, poor silly man, / No wiser now than when I began." Night, lines 354-359.

"I have a potion here whose work's soon done; / Its dizzying liquid fills you, dark and brown. / I made and mixed it well, as I know how. / And so, with all my heart, I raise it now: / With this last festive drink I greet the rising sun!" Night, lines 732-736.

"Go, chant elsewhere to tenderer souls! For I / Can hear the message, but believe no longer." Night, lines 764-765.

"In this world I will bind myself to cater / For all your whims, to serve and wait on you; / When we meet in the next world, some time later, / Wages in the same kind will then fall due." Faust's Study (II) 1666-1669.

"If ever I lie down in sloth and base inaction, / Then let that moment be my end! / If by your false cajolery / You lull me into self-sufficiency, / If any pleasure you can give / Deludes me, let me cease to live! / I offer you this wager!" Faust's Study (II) 1692-1698.

"Do you know me now? Skinny, cadaverous bitch, / do you know your lord and master? Why don't I / Smash you to pieces, tell me why, / You and your ape-familiars? Must I teach / You some respect for my red doublet? What / Is this cock's feather, eh? My face / have I been hiding it? You learn your place, / Old hag! Am I to name myself or not?" A Witch's Kitchen, lines 2481-2488.

"Oh, sublime Spirit! You have given me, / Given me all I asked for. From the fire / You turned your face to me and not in vain. / You gave me Nature's splendor for my kingdom, / and strength to grasp it with my heart." A Forest Cavern, lines 3217-3221.

"Besides, when he's there, I never could pray, / And that's what's eating my heart away. / Dear Heinrich, tell me you feel the same way!" Martha's Garden, lines 3498-3500.

"I cannot loose the Avenger's bonds or open his bolts! - Save her! - Who was it who ruined her? I, or you?" A Gloomy Day. Open Country, lines 44-46.



"My mother's dead; I poisoned her, you see. / I drowned my child when it was born. /
Hadn't it been God's gift to you and me?" A Prison, lines 4507-4510.



Topics for Discussion

Consider the "Prologue in Heaven." Do you believe Mephistopheles would have been able to toy with Faust if he had not had the Lord's permission? Do you believe in reality the Lord actually sends the devil to test people on earth today?

Why is it significant that Mephistopheles first appeared to Faust as a poodle? Discuss the role of this poodle.

Explore Mephistopheles' lack of power as evidenced in play. Compare and contrast his evidences of power with those of his lack of power.

Consider how much more seriously an unwed pregnancy was judged in Faust's time as compared to modern times. How might this story have played out differently if it had occurred in modern times?

Faust's agreement with Mephistopheles is that he will serve Mephistopheles in the afterlife if Mephistopheles can introduce him to some pleasure that makes him want to live. Do you think Mephistopheles succeeded in this pact?

At the end of the play it is declared that Gretchen soul is redeemed. In your opinion what is the status of Faust's soul? Is he redeemed or doomed? Explain your answer.

Discuss the differing reactions to the jewels given to Gretchen. Consider the reactions of Gretchen, her mother, the priest and Martha. Why did each react differently and for what reason?