Faust. Part Two Study Guide

Faust. Part Two by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Faust, Part II, is the continuation of the Faust story after the death of Gretchen in Part I. Goethe wrote Part II several decades after he finished Part I and there is a marked difference in themes. Part II shows Faust and Mephistopheles traveling through time and space, interacting with mythological figures and ultimately, Faust overcoming the snares of the devil.

In Act I, we find Faust sleeping on the side of a mountain awakened by the messenger Ariel. Eventually he joins Mephistopheles who has taken over the role of the fool in the court of the Holy Roman Emperor. The emperor's realm is in turmoil because the emperor does not have the money he needs to pay his bills. Mephistopheles tells the emperor that he can have as much money as he want if only he starts issuing paper money based on treasure supposedly buried underground. The emperor does this and restores his empire to solvency, for the time being. Bored again, he asks Faust to find and bring Helen of Troy and Paris to him.

Faust, with the help of Mephistopheles, travels to the mysterious realm of the "mothers" and brings back Helen and Paris. Faust, smitten by Helen's beauty, attempts to hold her and is jolted into unconsciousness. Act II begins back in Faust's old study. Faust is still unconscious and Mephistopheles helps his old colleague, Wagner, create a homunculus. The homunculus can read Faust's thoughts and he tells Mephistopheles that they must travel to ancient Greece to find Helen. They travel to ancient Greece where Faust finds a prophetess who claims she can lead him to Helen and the homunculus, seeking a corporeal form, merges with the Aegean Sea.

In Act III, Mephistopheles has found Helen and he has convinced her that he is in Sparta and that her husband, Menelaus is intent on killing her. He tells her that he can take her to Faust's castle where he will protect her. They arrive a Faust's castle and proceed to fall in love. Eventually, with her angry husband and his army at the gates, Mephistopheles, Faust and Helen transport to Arcadia. There, Faust and Helen have a son Euphorion who desires to fly into the sky. He does so, but flies too high and crashes to the ground. Once he dies, his mother Helen joins him in the spirit realm. Act IV begins with Faust and Mephisto on a mountain top.

Mephistopheles offers Faust power and fame, which he rejects, claiming instead to want to build a technological utopia out of land currently under the sea. They then see their old friend the emperor readying for battle against a rival emperor who is trying to take his throne. Mephistopheles' paper money scheme has led to inflation and eventually civil war. Faust and Mephistopheles agree to help the emperor win his war so long as he gives Faust the land underwater that he desires. They win the battle and Faust gets his land. In Act V, Faust has built a commercial empire on the land and is now 100 years old. He eventually dies and instead of the devil getting his soul, a host of angels descend to draw him up to heaven.

Act I

Act I Summary

Act I of Part II of the Tragedy begins with a necessary transition from the tragic end of Part I. Gretchen and several other people have died, due, in large part, to the actions of Faust, and the plot requires some way to move away from that episode into the entirely different setting and theme of Part II. Part II begins then with a poetic and mythical prologue that serves as the first scene before the real action of the Act begins in Scene 2.

Scene 1 Pleasant Region

The scene begins in a "pleasant region," that is, something like a Swiss alpine meadow with Ariel, a spirit character from Shakespeare's Tempest, awakening a sleeping Faust. Ariel sings, accompanied by harps that all of the high spirit races of the earth feel for a grieving man despite his past deeds. The grieving man is Faust, grieving for his part in the discord of Part I. Ariel heals Faust's soul and awakens him. Faust rises up and proclaims that he will strive for the greatest heights possible, comparing his struggle to the struggle of light attempting to pass through a cloud.

Scene 2 Imperial Palace

Scene 2 begins in the court of an unnamed emperor. The emperor on his throne asks for his fool and a squire tells him that his fool has just fallen down the stairs and died. Another squire continues that, immediately after the death of the old fool, a new fool came out of nowhere and took his place. The new fool, Mephistopheles, enters the court and kneels before the emperor.

The emperor, not in the mood for foolish amusement, listens to the chancellor tell him about the trouble in his empire. The whole empire is in need of money. The army, merchants, bankers, and peasants are all grumbling because the emperor is out of money and cannot pay his bills. The emperor, not knowing what to do about the situation, looks to his fool Mephistopheles. Mephistopheles, however, has a plan to solve the financial crisis. He claims that there is a vast amount of treasure buried in the kingdom and the emperor only needs to dig it up to find the money he needs. The chancellor grumbles that the fool does not know what he is talking about and is only trying to confuse the emperor. The emperor, however, seeing a possible way out of his financial mess, wants to hear more from the fool. Mephistopheles deflects this inquiry by summoning the astrologer to talk nonsense to the emperor. Tiring of talk about money, the emperor asks the fool to set up some pre-Lenten Mardi Gras festivities.

Scene 3 Spacious Hall

Scene 3 begins with the carnival already in full swing. The court, including the fool and the emperor, are all in carnival masks. Garden girls come on the scene selling goods

that represent their feminine natures and male gardeners join them selling fruit. A mother and daughter enter and the mother tells her daughter not to fear, as she will eventually find a suitor. Several potential suitors enter. First a woodcutter, then a clown enters, followed by a parasite and a drunkard. Next several poets enter the scene reciting poetry to one another. Next the Graces and the Fates of classical mythology take the stage and are superceded by the Furies. Next a elephant comes on the stage flanked by Fear and Hope, with Prudence riding the great beast. Mephistopheles, in disguise, heralds a Chariot with Faust dressed as Plutus accompanied by a Boy Charioteer. Faust distributes magical money to the crowd assembled, though it disappears and transforms as they touch it. The emperor as Pan looks at the treasure Faust has brought him, but kneeling too close to the magical fire in the treasure chest, the emperor lights his beard on fire. Mephistopheles puts out the fire and the scene ends.

Scene 4 Pleasure Garden

The scene begins the morning after the carnival rivalry of the night before. Faust asks the emperor if he will forgive him for his tricks of magical fire and the emperor responds that he was very amused by the whole spectacle. Mephistopheles flatters the emperor and a marshal enters with news for the king. Amazed, the marshal tells the emperor that everyone in the empire has been paid in full. During the carnival, Mephistopheles apparently had the emperor sign, without his knowledge, paper notes that say the emperor will redeem the note for gold. These notes, paper money, have been used to pay off the debts of the emperor and Mephistopheles claims that the emperor can use the buried treasure as security on the notes. This amazes the emperor and the whole court is excited by the prospect of the new paper money, which excites their greed.

Scene 5 Dark Gallery

In a gloomy corridor inside the palace Faust meets with Mephistopheles alone. Faust tells Mephistopheles that the emperor, desiring more and more amusement, has requested that Faust conjure Helen of Troy and Paris so that he may see the most perfect human specimens of beauty. Mephistopheles, upset that Faust would promise something so difficult to achieve, tells Faust that he can get Helen and Paris, but only if he descends into the void to meet the Mothers. The Mothers are the ultimate grounds and forms of all things and it there that Faust will be able to find Helen and Paris. Mephistopheles gives Faust a magical key and bids him good luck on his journey.

Scene 6 Brightly Lighted Room

This scene takes place in the court with Mephistopheles assuring the rest of the members of the court that Faust will be back soon with Helen and Paris. Mephistopheles then spends some time curing ailments of some of the women and telling a young page that if he is having trouble attracting women, maybe he should set his sight on older women.

Scene 7 Hall of Knights

The next scene begins with Faust appearing and summoning Paris. The women comment on his beauty while the men, envious, try to find fault with him. Next Faust summons Helen and, this time, the men comment on her beauty, while the women call her a whore. Faust, enraptured by the beauty of Helen, decides that he wants the woman for himself and with his magical key, tries to dispel Paris and grab Helen. With a great explosion, the spirits of Helen and Paris disappear and Faust is left unconscious on the floor.

Act I Analysis

Faust, Part II is very different in both theme and form from the first part of the tragedy. Goethe wrote the first part of the tragedy in his youth, during his "storm and stress" period and the first part of the tragedy does embody many of the characteristics of that proto-romantic movement in literature, in which the younger Goethe played a central part. Written almost 30 years later and not completed until the year of his death, Part

II of Faust repudiates the earlier style and expresses Goethe's more mature appreciation of classical Greek styles and motifs.

The break between the parts is represented in the prologue scene, Scene 1. Faust awakes, as to a new life, and without mentioning or alluding to his past crimes or the events of Part I, he begins his striving again. Goethe provides no explanation for why Faust and Mephistopheles are at the court of an unnamed emperor, nor does he explain why Mephistopheles takes over the role of fool. Faust and Mephistopheles also have a slightly different relationship here than they did in the first part of the tragedy.

They have a more equal relationship here, with Faust and Mephistopheles playing off one and other. Mephistopheles introduces paper money to the emperor, an innovation that Goethe sees as destructive and foolish. Although every country uses paper money now, at the time, Goethe had just watched several paper money economies in Europe self-destruct because of inflation. The paper money plot is not resolved in this Act, so we will have to see what Goethe makes of it throughout the play.

The symbolism of paper money, that is, notes signed by the king, mirrors the contract between Faust and Mephistopheles for Faust's soul. In both cases, the empty promises of the devil are used to purchase something of value. The Mardi Gras scene is the most difficult in this act with characters entering and leaving, seemingly without reason. Goethe is here trying to depict a scene that would have been more familiar to his contemporaries than to us, a grand costume carnival. In this context, he presents a dream-like scene of allegories and symbols.

Although magic and the supernatural are present in the first part of the tragedy, it is important to remember that in Part II, there is no clear distinction between the supernatural and the natural. Faust travels to the realm of the "mothers", which seem to be something like Platonic forms. Completely abstract entities that serve as the basis of real individuals. This Platonic theme will be more common in Part II, where much of the

action relates to the abstract notions of "beauty" or "truth" or the like and the action on stage serves as a kind of indicator of that more symbolic action underneath the surface.

Act 2

Act 2 Summary

Scene 1 Gothic Room

This scene takes place in Faust's study, which has been preserved since his disappearence after the first part of the play. Faust is unconscious, still shocked from his earlier encounter with Helen, and Mephistopheles places him behind a curtain. Mephistopheles dons Faust's scholar's robe and rings a loud bell. Hearing the ringing bell, Famulus, an earlier student and assistant of Faust comes into the study. The student does not recognize the devil and after some questioning by Mephistopheles, the student leaves followed by another student, Baccalaureus, who has just finished his studies. The student is arrogant and argues that knowledge is worth less than experience and that men over thirty are worthless and should be shot. The devil listens to the student patiently and sends him on his way before moving into the laboratory.

Scene 2 Laboratory

Mephistopheles enters the laboratory to find Faust's colleague Wagner engaging in Alchemy. Since Faust has been gone, Wagner has taken over Faust's position in the University. Wagner welcomes Mephistopheles, believing that the sound of the bell is a sign of good things to come. Wagner, who is knowledgeable, but lacks the wisdom of someone like Faust, is attempting to produce a homunculus. A homunculus is a being of spirit made real through an alchemical process.

Once created, the creature will be super-intelligent and able to read minds. Wagner's previous attempts to create a homunculus have failed and it is only the intervention of Mephistopheles that prevents this attempt form being another failure. Once the creature is created, he immediately recognizes the devil and Mephistopheles takes the homunculus over to the sleeping Faust where the homunculus reads his mind. Faust is dreaming of classical Greece and the rape of Leda the swan by Jupiter the God that produces their offspring, Helen.

The devil claims that he cannot see into Faust's dreams and the homunculus tells him that he is not able to see into the classical because he is a romantic (or rather medieval) creature and, therefore, has no access to the spirit of classical Greece. The homunculus tells Mephistopheles that they must take Faust to the classical Walpurgis Night otherwise he will die. Mephistopheles has never heard of the classical Walpurgis Night, but agrees to go into classical Greece with the homunculus. The creature, however, tells his maker, Wagner, to stay in the study. With that, Mephistopheles, the homunculus, and Faust travel in time and space into classical Greece.

Scene 3 The Classical Walpurgis Night

This long scene begins with a prologue by the Thessalonian witch, Erichto. The setting is the plains of Pharsalus, the site of Pompey's defeat by Caesar in the civil war. The witch describes the benefits and costs of liberty and makes some remarks on the battle between Pompey and Caesar before leaving. Something like a battlefield with tents and fires is set up on the plains. Mythical creatures from ancient Greece populate the scene. All three characters descend from the sky with Faust immediately awaking from his stupor when he reaches the ground. Still obsessed with finding Helen, the characters split up so that they may follow their own paths.

Faust, seeking Helen, searches through the countryside until he finds several sirens and sphinxes. Getting only cryptic clues from the sirens, he learns from one of the Sphinxes that Chiron, the centaur and tutor of Achilles, may know where Helen can be found. Faust, after wandering in search of Chiron, eventually finds the centaur, who takes Faust for a ride on his back. The centaur does not know where Helen is, but he takes Faust to Manto, a prophetess, who decides that she will show Faust the place deep within mount Olympus where Helen and other dead heroes can be found.

Mephistopheles is out of his element in ancient Greece. The Greeks do not have a conception of good and evil that fits in well with the Christian conception and Mephistopheles seeks ugliness in the place of actual evil. He eventually finds several female vampires, Lamiae, who are ugly even by the standards of the devil. Leaving the vampires, he wanders some more until he comes upon three Phorkyads. Mephistopheles makes himself at home with these despicable and noxious creatures.

The homunculus, still formless and only a light in a bottle, seeks to find a form that he can take on to make himself real. Not finding any of the forms he has seem very appealing, he finds two philosophers, Anaxagoras and Thales, who are arguing about the true origin and basis of natural and matter. Thales argues that the true principle is water, whereas Anaxagoras argues that all things come into being through sudden shifts in land and fire. After a meteor falls from space and violently disrupts the landscape. Anaxagoras believes he has won the argument. Not impressed, Thales takes the homunculus to the sea.

There they meet several other mythological figures that tell the homunculus to seek Proteus, the shape-shifting god of forms. One of the creatures they meet along the way is Nereus, the guardian of the sea whose daughter Galatea is expected to return to this part of the sea later in the evening. Proteus, intrigued by the homunculus, explains that all form originally comes from the ocean and, after transforming into a dolphin, takes him into the ocean on his back. After Galatea arrives with her host of watery gods and creatures, the homunculus takes on the form of water, expecting to slowly evolve into higher forms over time. The chorus sings a hymn to nature and the scene ends.

Act 2 Analysis

There is a lot going on in Act 2 and the length and complexity of the Classical Walpurgis Night make summary difficult. The whole act, though, is a kind of counterpoint to Part I

of the tragedy. Like Part I, this act begins in Faust's study but, instead of Faust practicing alchemy, we find Faust's pedantic and clueless colleague Wagner engaged in the practice. Faust is unconscious and this symbolizes the fact that he has moved beyond the medieval alchemy and learning of the earlier part and has entered the realm of the classical. Faust has, with the help of the Mothers and Mephistopheles, moved beyond time and space and in dreaming of the classical past, he also inhabits it.

Mephistopheles, now the dean of the medieval spirit, with Faust's absence takes on the role of Faust, first to the two students and then to Wagner. The students represent different attitudes towards learning. The first student is deferential and does not seem to have a hunger for true wisdom. The second student is impudent and, believing that all of the knowledge he has learned in the university is worthless, he seeks wisdom in experience. Of the two, Mephistopheles responds more favorably to the second student, who he thinks may eventually ripen into a more wise man.

The homunculus is a creature that figured heavily in medieval alchemy. The idea was that by combining certain substances, a creature of pure spirit could be created. This act of creation is meant to mimic God's original act of creation out of nothing. Wagner, who lacks the skill to make the creature, only succeeds in his task with the aid of the devil. This seems to suggest that some spirit of negation is needed even in the most basic act of creation. Once created, though, the homunculus lacks form and seeks a proper form to take on in ancient Greece.

Faust is also, in some sense, seeking the perfect form, in his case the perfect form of beauty in Helen. Mephistopheles, on the other hand, has a hard time making sense of Greece. This may be because the Greeks, at least according to Goethe, did not have a Christian sense of good and evil, but rather a distinction between the beautiful and the ugly or base. Mephistopheles then, seeks the base and ugly among the Greeks, eventually finding the Phorkyads.

Act 3

Act 3 Summary

Scene 1 Before the Palace of Menelaus in Sparta

This scene begins in Sparta, directly after the Trojan War. Helen and Menelaus have finally returned and the Trojans have been defeated. The scene proceeds in the form of an ancient tragedy, specifically in the style of Euripides. Helen begins by singing the praises of her husband and recounting the tale of their return from Troy. The chorus echoes this and describes Menelaus as a hero.

The chorus's description of her husband is a little too much for Helen and she begins to disclose some of her doubts and fears about Meneleus's intentions. She is not entirely sure what he intends to do with her and she vaguely fears him. Before he left her, he ordered her to prepare the sacrificial hearth for a sacrifice to come once he returns, but he did not tell her what the sacrifice will be.

The chorus tries to assuage her vague fears and Helen goes inside of the palace. She immediately runs out of the house in fear telling the chorus that inside her house there is a creature of the night, a foul Phorkyad. Of course, the creature is really Mephistopheles in disguise, but, for now, he retains his form as a Phorkyad. Mephistopheles, in his current form, abuses the servants of Helen (the chorus) and eventually Helen tells Mephistopheles to stop the abuse.

Of course, he does not stop and the chorus and Mephistopheles trade insults, will the while the chorus is trying to get Mephistopheles to tell them his name. Characteristically, he refuses. Mephistopheles then cleverly tells Helen that Menelaus is planning on sacrificing her when he returns. Mephistopheles tells her that there is a castle to the north where she can hide. Although he does not tell Helen, the castle he is describing is Faust's castle. Mephistopheles and Helen flee while a dark cloud follows them.

Scene 2 Inner Courtyard of a Castle

Scene 2 begins with Helen, her retinue, and Mephistopheles inside the gates of Faust's Medieval Castle. It is important that the castle is a German, medieval castle. This setting is unfamiliar to Helen and her chorus and they marvel at it. Next they see Faust descend from the heights of the castle with his entourage of pages, squires and all of the other accompaniments a medieval king would have.

Faust is dressed in medieval style, as are the members of his entourage. Faust greets Helen and tells her that his lookout, Lynceus, did not notice their arrival. Since his lookout did not notice Helen's arrival, Faust tells Helen that the man's life is forfeit and she may decide what to do with him; either to let him live or to put him to death. Lynceus kneels before Helen and, overcome with her beauty, he tells her that he would be happy

to die at her word. Helen pardons the man and Faust also kneels before her and tells her that she has conquered him and he makes her his queen.

Sitting on the throne, she asks Faust to teach her how to speak in rhyme and Faust and Helen engage in a dialogue in rhyme about love. Helen, enraptured by Faust, but still an alien in this medieval world, expresses her fondness for Faust. Mephistopheles, still in his disgusting disguise, enters and tells the two that an angry Menelaus has arrived with his armies to regain his bride. Faust, enraged, gathers his commanders together and goes over the history of German people's invasions of Greek lands. Faust then departs from his castle with Helen to Arcadia.

Scene 3 Arcadia

Scene 3 begins in the Arcadian paradise on a cliff near caverns, with the chorus spread out and asleep. Mephistopheles as Phorkyas remarks that he is unaware how long the chorus has been sleeping, but he will now awaken them. The chorus asks Mephistopheles to tell them what has happened in their splendor and they remark that they are utterly bored by the landscape. Mephistopheles remarks that it is sad that the chorus is bored before they have completely awoken and then proceeds to describe the landscape, mentioning the important aspects that the chorus may have missed. Mephistopheles tells the chorus that the caves nearby has been the home of Faust and his lover Helen.

Mephistopheles then goes on to tell the chorus a story about the creation of a man or god that seems very familiar to the god Hermes. Lacking any real classical knowledge, though, Mephistopheles makes some mistakes and the chorus tells the origin of the fleet footed Hermes properly. They tell of the son of Maia who with his speed became the patron god of thieves and rascals. He also stole the trident from Poseidon and the sword from Ares, as well as the tongs from Hephaestus and the thunderbolts from Zeus. After this recounting of the Hermes myth, Mephistopheles tells the chorus that the time for their gods has come and gone and now a higher art must rule directly from the heart.

Helen, Faust, and their new son Euphorion enter the scene; Helen and Faust sing of the joys of love that have bound them together and of their son who is the physical manifestation of that love. Euphorion wants to skip up to the sky, but Faust, fearing that his son will fly too far and eventually crash, bids him to beware. Euphorion responds to his father's concern that the earth will no longer bind him and that his life is his own to risk. Helen and Faust together plead with their son to forget about flying and to instead live in peace with them in Arcadia.

The son says he will refrain from flying for now, but only to please them. Soon enough though, the son emerges with a young woman in his arms. He is taking her to rape her, though the girl decides to disintegrate and burn Euphorion rather than succumb to his carnal desires. After this, Euphorion tells his parents that he will now climb the heights and fly beyond. Again, his parents implore him to live in peace and this time he tells them that only in strife and war is life worth living. He flies into the sky and with the

chorus crying "Icarus" he falls to the ground, his body vanishing, leaving beyond only his clothes.

From Hades, Euphorion cries to his mother that he not be left alone. She embraces Faust one last time and disappears, again leaving only her garments. Faust embraces Helen garments and is lifted into the sky while Mephistopheles as Phorkyas takes Euphorion's clothing. The chorus all transform slowly into vines and trees and other parts of the landscape. Finally, Phorkyas, left alone, removes his mask and reveals himself as Mephistopheles. There the Act ends.

Act 3 Analysis

Act three is a play within a play. Built as a three-act play sometimes in the style of a Greek tragedy, this act shows the relationship between Faust and Helen and through this relationship, the relationship between classical Greece and Romantic Europe. This relationship is embodied in Goethe as a poet.

In his early career he was the leader of the Sturm und Drang (storm and stress) movement in German poetry, an early precursor to romanticism. Later, especially during the period when he wrote the second part of Faust, he changes and rediscovers classical Greek poetry, art, and religion. This act can be seen as an examination of the relationship between those two very different forms of art and life and how they can be united, if there is a possibility of union at all.

The first scene is the most explicitly Greek, sticking to Euripidean meter and form. This scene is written as if it were a Greek tragedy. Helen, with the help of Mephistopheles, comes to fear her husband and to want to flee into the arms of Faust. The scene is, in fact, not set in ancient Greece at all, but rather an elaborate set produced by Mephistopheles to fool the Greeks, who are really spirits, into believing that they are in their old homes. This becomes clear at the end of the Scene as Mephistopheles uses a cloud of smoke to aid their flight from Menelaus.

The whole thing is nothing but smoke and mirrors by Mephistopheles. Be that as it may, the scene begins in an extremely traditional Greek form and then slowly transforms into something else. Towards the end of the poem, the increasingly excited descriptions of Faust and his castle lead to an increase in emotion among the chorus, something that would never happen in a true Greek tragedy.

The second scene is a slow introduction of Helen, the exemplar of classical Greek beauty to Romantic, German culture. Faust initiates Helen into some of the customs of the time. She is particularly interested in the practice of speaking in rhymes. In Greek tragedy, the lines are unrhymed and, noticing Faust's rhyming style, she seeks to learn it form him. He tells her that he can teach her but that she must learn to speak from the heart. They begin to sing together until, after the mysterious appearance of Menelaus, they are both spirited off to Arcadia.

In Arcadia, we see the union of the Greek and the Romantic, that is, Euphorion, the actual union between Faust and Helen. Their progeny is rash and full of verve. We see that he wants to fly into the sky, whatever the consequences, and decides also to rape a woman. The idea seems to be that the union of the classical and the romantic is unstable and Goethe seems to be suggesting that the actual Lord Byron was a personification of this union and similar to Euphorion. At the end of the Act, Faust and Mephistopheles are again alone.

Act 4

Act 4 Summary

Scene 1 High Mountains

This act begins where the previous Act left off. Faust, after Helen's disintegration, wraps himself in her veil and clothing, which turn into a cloud, which transports him into the sky. At the beginning of this Act, Faust has just landed on a mountain, still enclosed by his cloud. Upon landing, however, the cloud drifts away from him and merges with other clouds in the sky, taking on the female forms of Leda and her daughter, Helen. Eventually the huge cloud forms dissolve and are left with another form that reminds Faust of his love from Part I, Gretchen. Faust comments that this form does not dissolve, but instead draws him upwards.

At that moment, Mephistopheles appears and says that the landscape reminds him of his home, hell. Faust thinks he is joking, but Mephistopheles, deadly serious, recounts the tale of how God exiled him and his legions of devils to the depths of hell. Faust then comments on how the mountains and valleys were slowly formed by gradual processes. This echoes the theories of Thales from Act 2. Mephistopheles retorts that it was rather the cataclysmic event of his devil's exile that caused the mountains to be violently and rapidly created. Mephistopheles, now playing the part of tempter, asks Faust if there is anything he truly desires.

Faust replies that there is, but asks Mephisto to guess what it is. To Mephistopheles, who is used to tempting men with power and luxury and can only really understand these things, it seems obvious that Faust must be talking about earthly power. He attempts to tempt him first with power over all the nations and then attempts to tempt him by describing all the luxuries of a modern city, in this case Paris. This does not appeal to Faust, so

Mephistopheles increases the amount of pleasure by tempting him with a palace as beautiful and extravagant as Versailles. Faust replies that such a palace would be "modern," that is decadent, and vile. Faust hints that he wants instead to do things hitherto undone and to achieve new goals. Still not understanding, Mephistopheles thinks that Faust is talking about fame, but Faust claims he has no interest in fame. Faust describes his real desire to Mephistopheles.

Looking down at the seashore, Faust says that he wants to drain the sea at that spot and built a new society where the sea now covers. He hints that part of the reason for this is the sheer challenge and part of the reason is the new advances and technology he believes he could create. Just as he tells the devil this, though, Mephistopheles interrupts him.

Below, Faust and Mephistopheles see a battle about to commence. Mephisto tells Faust that since they have been gone, the emperor's empire has dissolved into anarchy. It seems that the paper money scheme that Mephistopheles introduced led to massive inflation and created unrest among the nobles. This, combined with the inexperience and bad judgment of the young emperor, led to all out civil war. Now a rival emperor with a larger army is leading his troops into the field to defeat the emperor once and for all.

Feeling somewhat responsible for the emperor's fate and also hoping that by helping him, the emperor will give Faust the land that he desires. Mephistopheles and Faust decide to help the emperor win his war. Mephistopheles turns Faust into the general-in-chief and summons three mighty men to aid him. They both then go down the mountain together to aid the emperor.

Scene 2 On the Promontory

The general is talking to the emperor, telling him of his plan to force the rival emperor's troops into a narrow corridor where the emperor's outnumbered troops will have an advantage. The emperor receives reports from his scouts and announces that it is only with the accession of the rival emperor that he has realized that he indeed has a right to rule his kingdom. Faust and Mephistopheles enter.

Faust is in armor and the emperor does not seem to notice him. Faust claims that he and Mephistopheles were sent by the necromant of Sabine Norcia, a wizard whom the emperor pardoned from being burned years ago. This pardon greatly angered the church, but now Faust claims that the necromant is willing to use his magic and troops to help the emperor. The emperor welcomes Faust and the battle begins.

Initially, things are going well and the troops seem to be making progress. Soon, though, the enemy army begins to make progress on one of the flanks and it looks like the day may be lost. Mephistopheles, however, uses his magic to summon illusory sea monsters and St. Elmo's fire to confuse and frighten the enemy. In the ensuing chaos, the emperor is able to crush his rival's army and win the battle.

Scene 3 The Rival Emperor's Tent

The next scene begins in the defeated rival emperor's tent. Some of the men that Mephistopheles summoned are attempting to steal some of the booty, but the guards of the emperor send them off. The emperor, excited and emboldened by his victory, consults with his generals and advisors. The Chamberlain and Chief Marshall describe the triumph and festival that they will have in the emperor's honor, but the emperor is not interested in talking about such things. He makes his aides and marshals princes and then the archbishop enters his presence.

The archbishop realizes that the emperor has used the magic of the necromant to win the battle and he tells the emperor that he must give the church full authority to collect taxes on his territory. The archbishop also wants the emperor to build a grand church on the land near the battlefield, including the land he has promised to Faust. The

archbishop draws up a contract saying as much and the emperor signs it. At the end of the scene, the emperor comments that if this continues, that is, extortion by the church, his entire empire will be ruined.

Act 4 Analysis

Act 4 is a radical change from the highflying symbolism and language of the preceding two acts. In many ways, Act 4 is reminiscent of Shakespearean battle scene, something from to Henry V or Julius Caesar. Remember that in Greek tragedy, battles were not portrayed on the stage, but only related by other characters after the fact. Here we get something like a modern battle scene similar to what would be in Shakespeare.

In the first scene, though, we return to the original Faust theme of temptation by knowledge. In Part I, Faust signs his soul over to the devil for knowledge and experience. Here, Mephistopheles offers Faust earthly power and luxury, similar to the temptation of Christ. Faust rejects these offers, but unlike Christ and in keeping with his character, he offers a counteroffer to the devil. What Faust desires is to tame nature by draining part of the sea and establishing a kind of technological utopia.

In this sense, Faust desires to be a kind of creator similar to his earlier creation of Euphorion with Helen and with Wagner and Mephisto's creation of the Homunculus. This time, though, Faust seeks to create knowledge made real through technology and innovation. These ideas hearken to the ideas of Francis Bacon and to a general enlightenment ideal of progress, rationality, and the creation of better technology.

The early part of the scene is also interesting because of the contrast that is invoked again between the vulcanist or rapid and fire-based understanding of natural change exemplified by Anaxagoras in Act II and the gradual, water-like understanding of natural change identified with Thales. Naturally, the devil prefers the cataclysmic explanation and he describes how it was the cataclysm of his fall from heaven and subsequent violence that created the mountains that they now see.

Faust, more inclined to a gradualist approach, believes that is the gradual and often unseen forces of nature that have shaped the mountains and the valleys. These two approaches to nature are also seen in both character's general attitudes, especially in this Act.

There is also another event of note in the final scene. The Archbishop, realizing that the emperor used black arts to win the battle, has the emperor cede over vast taxing and revenue authority as well as the land that was promised to Faust. The Archbishop asks the emperor to sign over the authority in a contract reminiscent and parallel to the contract the devil made with Faust and the creation of paper money in Act I.

The emperor remarks that if the church keeps making demands, pretty soon he will not have anything left of his kingdom. Remember, though, that he has just completed a civil war brought on by the inflation caused by a similar contract with the devil. Goethe seems to be saying that temporal government is both hemmed in and seduced by easy

money and church requests. That is, the good ruler must skillfully navigate between revenue problems and relationships with the spiritual authority.

Act 5

Act 5 Summary

Scene 1 Open Country

This scene begins with a traveler coming upon the land that Faust has taken from the sea. He seeks an older couple, Baucis and Philemon who own a cottage and chapel on the outskirts of Faust's new land. The old woman, Baucis, greets the traveler, reaching the door of the cottage. The husband and wife once saved the traveler's life and he has returned to thank them. The woman tells the traveler to come in but to be silent because her husband is sleeping.

The husband Philemon, however, wastes no time in rising to greet the traveler. While eating a meal together, the traveler asks to know about the new land and empire that has arisen out of the sea nearby. Philemon tells the tale of how Faust's men completed the project in superhuman time, digging ditches and building dikes to drain the ocean from that part of land. Faust has even built a grand palace and planted fields of grass, crops and trees where the ocean once was.

Much of Philemon's description is ominous, however, and he seems to allude that some evil was involved in the construction project. He mentions the building of a canal in one night that was accompanied by the deaths of several workers. He also mentions that Faust wants to remove Philemon and Baucis from their land. Faust has offered them a hefty sum to move, but they like it where they are and have decided to stay. After his story, the three friends go to their chapel to pray to their God and to ring their church bells.

Scene 2 Palace

The next scene begins in Faust's new palace on his land taken from the sea. He is now 100 years old. Lynceus alerts Faust to the fact that several of his cargo ships are returning to port, presumably bearing treasure with them. Suddenly the bell from the cottage chapel begins to ring. This angers Faust greatly who despises the sound of the bell, which reminds him of church and of death. The sound reminds him that no matter his earthly success he has not yet conquered the ultimate enemy: death. His empire now stretches worldwide, an empire of commerce. Still, the existence of the church vexes him greatly.

Just then Mephistopheles with his three angry men disembark from their ship with massive amounts of treasure. Mephistopheles comments on how great Faust's plan is and is impressed with the amount of wealth they have been able to gain by it. The three angry men, however, are upset at the share that Mephistopheles has given them. The devil claims that there will be even more treasure the next day, which partially quiets the

demons. Mephistopheles greets Faust, explaining how his empire now stretches around the world.

Faust is still upset about the church, though, and tells Mephistopheles that no matter how much greatness and power he has been able to harness from the human mind, he has still not conquered the accursed church nearby that continues to vex him. Faust says that he has offered to buy their land but that they have not agreed to sell. Faust asks Mephistopheles to do something about it. The devil gathers his three angry meant to go to the house of Baucis and Philemon. At the end of the scene, Mephistopheles, ominously alludes to the theft and murder of Naboth and his land in the Old Testament by the king Ahab.

Scene 3 Deep Night

In this short scene, Lynceus tells of what has happened to Baucis and Philemon. The arrival of the devil and his demonic henchmen startle the old couple to such a degree that they die of fright. The traveler, upset at the death of his friends, puts up a fight but is killed by Mephistopheles and his troop. The three angry men then set the house and church on fire. This burns the building and cremates the three, now dead, inhabitants. Faust, upon hearing the news, is incensed. He claims that he only asked for the devil to attempt to buy the land from Baucis and Philemon, not to kill them. He curses the devil and his henchmen. On the balcony of his palace, Faust watches the smoke from the fire drift closer to his land.

Scene 4 Midnight

The scene begins with four grey women standing at the doorway to the palace. They are Want, Guilt, Care, and Distress. They comment that the door is fastened and the inhabitant rich, hence they will never be able to get in. It is true that Distress, Want, and Guilt have no place in Faust's palace, but Care believes she can slip in through the keyhole and along with her bring her brother: Death.

Inside the palace, Faust notices the appearance of the four women and the departure of only three. He laments that he is not a natural man and is bound by the knowledge of magic and the use of sorcery. Care comes in and announces herself. Faust tells her to leave but Care asks him if he has never known her in his heart. He responds that he has raced through life ever striving and never stopping; he has never been satisfied. Care retorts that he has only delayed his inevitable fall and he cannot go on striving forever. Faust, in agony, responds that Care or her sisters will never take him down. Care, leaving, curses him with blindness, claiming that all humans live their lives in blindness. Faust despairs, seeing that the end is near.

Scene 5 Great Forecourt of the Palace

The scene begins with Mephistopheles leading his Lemurs with torches to the palace. These Lemurs are monkey-like creatures of the night associated with death. Mephistopheles orders them to begin digging a grave, which they do while singing a song. Mephistopheles finds Faust and tells him that despite all of his accomplishments,

he is now bound for death. Faust calls to the foreman and asks how long until they have dug their trench, but Mephistopheles corrects him and says that they are not digging a trench, but rather a grave for Faust.

Faust, still dreaming of future accomplishments, tells how he will drain a new swamp to be inhabited by people like him who live to strive and will people his paradise with free and equal men. After this speech, the Lemurs take Faust and lay him in the grave. Mephistopheles comments that nothing could satisfy Faust. Faust dies at the stroke of midnight and the devil comments that once a man dies, everything he has built is just as if he never existed.

Scene 6 Burial

Mephistopheles, over the body, discusses how he will take his soul. He decides that he will produce his contract and take the soul immediately. Commenting that he has lost souls before, he opens up the ground to reveal hell. Several of the devils from hell come out and Mephistopheles gets excited to add another soul to his collection. Just then, the sky opens up and angels swarm down. The angels deal with the devil and eventually take Faust's soul with them.

Scene 7 Mountain Gorges

This scene begins in the mountain gorges, a heavenly scene populated by saints and angels. Several saints and fathers comment on the workings and power of love before addressing a chorus of blessed boys who died at birth. Their souls join with the fathers and the fathers tell the boys' souls that they will have to evolve over time to reach higher and higher forms. This parallels the homunculus's journey in the sea to higher and higher forms. The Angels bring Faust's soul and claim that because he was ever striving, he can be redeemed by love. Eventually a chorus comments at the end that it was the eternal feminine, which drew Faust upwards and cheated the devil.

Act 5 Analysis

Act 5 is extremely complicated, especially the last two scenes, and we will only deal with several key things here. First, there is the salvation of Faust. This may seem confusing. After all, did not Faust make an explicit contract with the devil for his soul? Did not Faust also engage in all kinds of evil practices including murder? Part of the explanation is the ability of the redeeming grace of God to redeem anyone, no matter how bad his or her crimes. This is not the whole explanation, though.

Part of what Goethe is doing in the final scene is combining Christianity with Classical Greek philosophy. We see this most explicitly in the blessed boys morphing into higher and higher forms. In this way, the afterlife is meant to resemble life on earth. Souls strive to reach higher and higher forms as men are meant to strive for higher and higher forms of life. The notion of striving is also related to one Greek notion of love, that of Eros. Eros is a type of love that Plato describes as striving.

Plato argues in the Symposium that through attraction to carnal beauty in a person, the force of Eros to love not just the beauty in their beloved, but also beauty in itself can draw a lover. This love of beauty can then become love of the good in itself. This seems to be what is going on in Faust. Faust starts out loving Gretchen for base reasons and then in Part II falls in love with Helen, the form of Beauty or the most perfect beauty. Then in the final scene he has come to love good itself through his eternal striving, by his dedication to Eros.

This notion of love is different, in important ways, from the typical Christian understanding of love, though there are some parallels in Dante. Faust's redemption then, is partly from grace and partly from his striving nature.

It is important to realize the devil's role in this act too. Here the devil is portrayed as the master, often in the background, of temporal pursuits. Faust has mastered nature and has expanded his empire across the world. He has even seemingly mastered the devil, who works for him and does his bidding. As death approaches however, the devil reminds Faust that his control has only been illusory and that death and time ultimately rule over everything. The devil, who is the master of chaos, dissolution, and darkness, revels in this role and does not understand how a man like Faust can, in the face of death, still continue to strive realizing that after he is gone, it will be as if he never existed.

The devil understands desire, but he does not understand striving or Eros. Eros is striving to ever-higher forms, while desire leads us away from the good and the beautiful. In the penultimate scene, the angels prick the devil with a tiny bit of love and he feels the power of that force ever so slightly. The contrast between the angels and the devil in the last two scenes is reminiscent of the devil's role in the beginning of Part I as a spirit of pure negation.

Characters

Faust

Faust is the subject of many medieval stories. In all of these stories, Faust sells his soul to the devil and in return receives knowledge and experience. At the end of the story, Faust's soul is taken by the devil. Many believe that these stories were based on a historical Faust who existed in Germany sometime in the 16th century, though this fact is not conclusively proven. Goethe subverts the typical Faust tale by redeeming Faust in the end. In Part I, God effectively makes a wager with the devil that the devil cannot corrupt Faust.

Faust, at this time, is a scholar and professor who is weary of his learning and aspires to greater knowledge of the universe and of man. Mephistopheles plays on this and makes a deal with Faust. He starts off his adventure falling in love with, seducing, and ultimately sending to her death, the virgin Gretchen. In Part II, his spirit seems to have been elevated and he seeks ultimate beauty in the spirit of Helen.

Faust travels with Mephistopheles who is his constant companion. The devil is really the only one who can understand Faust as he moves through time and space, though it is not clear how much Faust actually identifies with Mephistopheles. Sometimes Faust treats the devil as if he does not understand important things, which, as we see in the end, is correct. Ultimately Faust, despite his flaws has a desire to surpass all that has been done before. His chief characteristic is his striving nature. This is the feature that initially draws God's attention and finally transforms his soul into something more than the plaything of the devil.

Mephistopheles

Mephistopheles is the devil. He is the rebellious angel sent down by God to rule the demons in the depths and fated to tempt man. The devil has many guises in literature and the guise of Mephistopheles is particularly appealing. As Mephistopheles we see the devil as a highly intelligent and sardonic trickster. The human race is his plaything and he takes great pleasure in manipulating men to his designs. Although we do not see much of this side of him, there is also a deep sadness and despair that lies behind the surface of his character.

There are times, especially in the final scenes, where we do indeed feel sympathy for the devil. His nature has blinded him to all that is great and wonderful and though he can converse with God in Part I, he also seems completely alien to not only angels and God, but also Helen. He can only understand the base and the ugly. It is also clear that he is a character completely wedded to the modern period.

In Act II when the group travels to ancient Greece, Mephistopheles is quite comically out of place. He tries to find the witches and demons of Greece, but finds in them little of

what he finds familiar. He also does not understand Faust's striving nature. We see this in the first scene of Act 4 where Mephistopheles tries to tempt Faust with earthly goods that do not interest him in the least.

We see it later when the devil makes the comment that one would be better off not living at all than living an ultimately futile life that is annihilated by death. Of course Faust disagrees, which is exactly what separates the two and saves Faust.

Helen

Helen of Troy is the daughter of Leda and the god Zeus. She is said to be the most beautiful woman in the world and when she runs off from her Spartan husband Menelaus with the Trojan Paris, all the Greeks fight a ten year war to get her back. In Faust, she represents ideal beauty.

Lynceus

Lynceus is the lookout for Faust and several times warns him of oncoming danger. In Act III he fails to warn Faust of Helen's approach.

Philemon

Philemon is the old man who lives in the cottage and maintains the church near Faust's land. He does not agree with the changes Faust has made and ultimately dies of fright when the devil comes to force him to sell his house.

Baucis

Baucis is the wife of Philemon and the co-caretaker of the church whose bells torment Faust. She also dies of fright with her husband.

Anaxagoras

A Pre-Socratic Greek philosopher who believed the world was ruled by nous or mind. Scientific, at least by the standards of the time, he represents the Vulcanist world-view in Faust that explains natural processes by recourse to cataclysmic events involving fire and often explosions.

Thales

Thales was a Pre-Socratic philosopher who believed that everything was ultimately made of water. He is often considered the first philosopher. In Faust he advocates and

represents the gradualist explanation of natural processes that are analogous to the slow flow of water.

Wagner

Wagner is a colleague of Faust who lacks the genius of Faust. Once Faust disappears after Part I, Wagner takes over his position at the university. He uses the help of Mephistopheles to create a homunculus.

Homunculus

Homunculus, from the Latin, literally means "little man" and alchemists repeatedly tried to create homunculi out of other substances. It was typically thought at the time that homunculi could read minds and were very intelligent. In Faust, Mephistopheles helps Wagner create a homunculus that then transports Faust and Mephistopheles into the classical past. Lacking any form, the homunculus searches in ancient Greece for the perfect form, eventually convinced by Thales that the perfect form is in the water.

Objects/Places

Sparta

Sparta was a kingdom in Ancient Greece ruled by Menelaus at the time of the Trojan War. It was the home of Helen.

Medieval Castle

The castle in Act III represents the style of the 16th century German castle, gloomy but stout.

Arcadia

Arcadia was a part of Greece, close to Sparta. Helen and Faust retreat there to have their son Euphorion.

Helen's veil

Helen is pure spirit, but her veil has some corporeal existence. After she disappears, Faust wraps himself in her veil, which magically transports him to a mountaintop before turning into a cloud.

Phalanx

A Phalanx was a Greek military organizational unit. Typically a square several layers deep with soldiers, the spears of the soldiers would point in one direction. Formidable in the front, phalanxes are virtually undefended in the rear and sides.

Paper Money

Paper money was a relatively new invention in Goethe's time and in Faust he analogizes the contract between the King and the use of paper money to the contract for Faust's soul at the beginning of the play.

Theorboes

A type of bass lute used in the Mardi Gras Scene.

St. Elmo's Fire

A bright electrical discharge similar to lightning that can encase objects in certain circumstances. Mephistopheles uses St. Elmo's fire to frighten the rival emperor's troops in Act 4.

Thessaly

Thessaly is a part of ancient Greece north of Sparta. When Faust and Mephistopheles travel there, the devil is confused and surprised by the witches and vampires of the region.

Aegean Sea

The Aegean Sea is adjacent to the Mediterranean sea and east of Greece. Thessaly is a port on the Aegean and the Homonculus eventually merges with water in the sea.

Themes

Classical vs. Modern

The dichotomy between the classical and the modern approaches to life and art figure heavily in the second part of Faust for personal and stylistic reasons. Goethe, in his youth, achieves fame and renown as an author in the Strum und Drang or "storm and stress" style. This is an artistic movement that focuses on the emotional lives of the characters they deal with, particularly in youthful striving and love. In one of his earlier works, The Sorrows of Young Werther, the main character, in a fit of emotion, kills himself in the end.

This work is so powerful that it apparently leads to a rash of suicides all through Europe. Goethe sees the "modern" style as being, in many ways, similar to Romanticism. Romantic works focus on emotion and often-gloomy symbolism. Goethe, later in life, sees this as a type of decadence to be rejected. In Faust he portrays Mephistopheles as emblematic of this approach. The moderns know many things and, in their own way, are wise, but they also miss much that is important and good. For Goethe, the moderns see the world as divided between good and evil. The Classics, and by this he means the Greeks, see the world differently.

Later in life, Goethe rediscovers the classical authors and is drawn in by their sublimity and, what he sees as their Olympian beauty. To Goethe, the classics see the world not as divided by good and evil, but rather by ugly and beautiful. In some ways, the beautiful is the good to the Greeks. The embodiment of this ideal is in Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world. Faust is often between these two poles, but tending towards the modern, at least until the final scenes.

Eros (Striving) vs. Desire

Similar to the dichotomy between the classic and the modern is the dichotomy between Eros and desire in Faust. Eros is a Greek word that can be translated as love or even as desire, but the senses of the two terms, at least to Goethe, are different. In Plato's work, the Symposium, Eros is described as the force of attraction that draws someone to a beautiful person—that is, carnal or lustful desire.

If treated properly and if directed at an appropriate candidate however, Eros can lead someone to move from loving the beautiful person to understanding the person as an example of the form of beauty. In understanding the form, or perfect beauty, one is drawn to the form of the good itself, for Plato the highest of the forms. In this way, Eros or striving, leads a person through the different levels of perfection, from base desires up to contemplation of perfection.

Desire, on the other hand, is directed at lower objects. Desire for money or sex or fame is, by its nature, unquenchable and by trying to satisfy desires we only generate more

desires. The devil, who makes his home on the earth and in the even lower realms of hell, only understands desire. He tempts his prey by offering to give them the base desires that they crave. Faust, however, cheats the devil by transforming desire into Eros. The devil initially, in Part I, directs Faust's attention to Gretchen. He is smitten by lust, not love.

In the end Gretchen dies, but Faust's lust is transformed into a higher striving after perfect beauty in Part II, personified by Helen. After Helen disappears Faust strives after even higher aims, only to end in heaven, moving towards the ultimate form of the good.

Alchemy

Alchemy is a precursor to chemistry that combines, what we would now consider science with magic. The idea is to take base metals, such as lead, and transform them into precious metals like gold. This practice has a long history, though it is probably at it height in the middle ages, around the time of Faust. Faust is an alchemist and in Part I he summons several spirits and performs other alchemical tricks. In Part II we see Wagner, with the help of Mephistopheles, create a homunculus, another aim of many alchemists.

At the time, Homunculi are though to be magical beings of pure spirit that, through the proper techniques, an alchemist could create basically out of thin air. The quest to create precious metals out of base metals is not only a process that involves actual metals like lead and gold, though. Alchemists also see the process as applying to human beings. In all alchemical writings it is not clear whether the process is meant to apply to persons or metal or both. The idea is to take the base substance of a human person and, through several practices, transform it into a precious substance. The whole story of Faust can be seen as just this type of transformation.

In the end of the story, and despite the best efforts of the devil, Faust transforms himself from a mere man into a higher being. In the final scene in heaven, the fathers claim that this process must be repeated in heaven and a soul must transform itself, through striving, into ever-higher forms. The process of striving towards perfection is very important in Faust and it is represented in the alchemical process.

Style

Point of View

The story is written as a play and so the point of view is meant to be the point of view of the audience. The audience is not omniscient, but rather a type of impartial spectator to the action onstage. Oftentimes the audience will be given inside information by Mephistopheles, while Faust or another character is away from the scene, but the audience does not know anymore about the motivations and thoughts of the characters than what they are told and what they deduce on their own.

Still, through soliloquies and greater familiarity, there is a slight advantage given to the point of view of Mephistopheles and Faust. The audience often knows what Faust and Mephistopheles know, though the other characters on screen may be unaware. This is most strikingly true in Act III where Mephistopheles convinces the spirit Helen that she is in Sparta again to convince her to travel with him to Faust's castle. There are hints that the devil is just staging an elaborate play, but it is not until the very end that we completely realize what is going on.

There is another, particularly interesting shift of point of view in Act II as well. There we see the Homunculus, Faust, and Mephistopheles split up and go on their own quests. The narrative follows each one, but then shifts to another character if they happen to meet. Goethe executes this technique, which could be very confusing, in a seamless and masterful way that brings another layer of depth to the Act.

Setting

The settings in Faust are numerous, unfamiliar, and complicated. From the very first, mountainside scene, to the final scene on a mountain/heaven, we are taken to so many locations that it is apt to make one's head spin. We start in 16th century Europe at the court of an unnamed emperor. It is probably the Holy Roman Emperor Maximillian, but the text is silent on this point.

In the next Act we travel through space and time into ancient Greece to consort with long dead philosophers, mythological creatures, and Thessalonian witches. In the next Act we are first in a contrived Sparta, then a medieval castle, then a mountainside paradise. Next we are back in the 16th century with the emperor. Finally we end in the land that Faust has taken back from the sea to build his commercial utopia. This final setting is fascinating because it clearly shares many similar features with the Netherlands at the time of Goethe's life. The Netherlands is a kingdom that reclaims its land from the sea and starts a large commercial, republican empire.

Is this what Goethe sees as the ultimate type of human society? Even if he does, all is not well in Faust's kingdom and it seems that even somewhat human progress is built with the blood of its workers and it must annihilate those of the older generation who will

not go along with the new ways. The settings in Faust are so numerous and strange that it would be very difficult to actually stage it as a play.

Language and Meaning

Goethe is not only a great poet in the sense that he chooses great themes and creates great characters, he is also a master stylist and master of the German language. It is sometimes said that Shakespeare effectively creates modern English in his plays and this could also be reasonably said of Goethe, though Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into German deeply shaped the German language as well. Goethe makes constant and ingenious use of puns and double meaning, which translations can only hint at.

There is also the rhyme scheme and poetic style of Faust which is more approachable in translation. Faust ,like all epic poetry, uses an elevated and often overly metaphorical style. Goethe combines this high style with what can only be described as a "Lutheran" love of low German puns and vulgarities. In the beginning of Act III, mimicking Greek drama, there is no rhyme scheme. Helen, bound by classical conventions, later asks Faust to teach her how to speak in rhyme. This is symbolic of Goethe's desire to infuse the classical with modern forms.

Goethe employs his own unique rhyme scheme throughout much of Faust, though he varies it based on characters and for effect. Sometimes he even uses the Shakespearean Iambic Pentameter scheme. For Goethe, in the rhyme scheme and the language in general, form and substance are always merged. Indeed, his dedication to that principle is evident not only in the language of the poem, but also in the theme itself. The Homunculus is substance without form and Helen is form without substance. Both are fused together in Faust the man and Faust the play.

Structure

Like many of the other aspects of Faust the structure of the play is very complicated and unique. The play is divided into five Acts, all of which could stand alone if they needed to. That is, the acts are connected, but they are so rich within themselves that any of them could be turned into a separate play. Some of the Acts are actually structured to be individual plays. This is especially true of Act III.

Act III is basically a self-contained play about the romance and union of Helen and Faust. It is a three-scene play and there is even a play within a play within a play in Scene 1. Scene 1 takes place in ancient Sparta, or at least Mephistopheles means us to believe that. The scene is the exemplar of the classical style of ancient Greece and it models quite well, though with some interesting departures, the strict style of Euripides. Scene 2, however, takes place in Faust's castle and the style mimics more modern drama and, towards the end, becomes even operatic.

Scene 3 is a combination of both styles and is explicitly operatic. Goethe may have even envisioned the scene to actually be set to music. Goethe believed, with many of his contemporaries that opera, a rather recent invention for Goethe, was the fusing of classical themes and style with modern music and poetry. Many of the other Acts are equally intricate in their structure. The play as a whole owes more to Shakespeare in structure, a poet Goethe deeply admired, than to any of the Greeks.

Quotes

"Nature and mind—those words are infamous/ To Christians; for them atheists burn/ Because such talk is highly dangerous." (Act I, Scene 2, 176)

Mephistopheles: "The World Remains, now as before,/ One vast, huge fool forevermore." (Act I, Scene 3, 182)

Homunculus: "Romantic ghosts are all that you would know/ Real ghosts are classical and must be so." (Act II, Scene 2, 242)

Lynceus: "Threaten to destroy me: Beauty/Conquers anger and subdues." (Act III, Scene 2, 316)

Phorkyas: "Your old Gods have had their day,/ They are finished, let them be./No one knows them anymore." (Act III, Scene 3, 330)

Euphorion: "Whoever cries/In times of peace for war, Hopeless lies/With nothing to live for." (Act III, Scene 3, 335)

Faust: "Doing is all, and fame is naught." (Act IV, Scene 1, 348)

Emperor: "I could dismember my whole empire by this course." (Act IV, Scene 3, 375)

Faust: "The envious sound reminds me still/ Complete possession is not mine." (Act V, Scene 2, 379)

Faust: "The sound of bells. The lindens' bloom/ Give me the sense of church and tomb." (Act V, Scene 2, 382)

Faust: "I have but raced on through the world;/I seized on every pleasure by a hair." (Act V, Scene 4, 388)

Chorus Mysticus: "All Transitory/ Things represent;/Inadequate here/Become event,/Ineffable here,/Accomplishment/The eternal-feminine/Draws us onward." (Act V, Scene 7, 413)

Topics for Discussion

Explain the relationship between Faust and Mephistopheles.

What are each of the characters (Mephistopheles, Faust, and the Homunculus) seeking in Act II in the classical Walpurgis Night?

Explain the difference between Thales and Anaxagoras's views of nature in the play. Are Faust and Mephistopheles similar in their views to either of these characters? Which ones?

What is the eternal-feminine and what is its connection to Eros? Why does it draw us ever onward?

What is Faust's goal with the land he receives from the emperor? Does he achieve his goal?

Why do the angels and God spare Faust from the snares of the devil?

What becomes of Euphorion? What does he represent?