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## FAUSTUS (SCENES 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 AND 13)

### WHO IS FAUSTUS?

- Faustus is the play's **protagonist**. He is an academic at the university of Wittenberg.
- He makes a pact with Mephistophilis, one of Lucifer's demons.
- After twenty-four years with Mephistophilis as his personal servant, Faustus is taken away to Hell.

### STUDY FOCUS: INTELLECT AND AMBITION

A02

Faustus is dominated by two main character traits: intellect and ambition. It is the intellect that creates doubt when his ambition alone would simply carry him forward in his devilish contract, but it is also intellect that makes his ambition possible in the first place. Within these two, evidence can be found for a series of oppositions: Faustus is capable of stupidity and intelligence, courage and cowardice, cruelty and generosity. Faustus is filled with contradiction and so comes across as very human, especially in his ambition to better himself. To this extent Faustus is a **mankind figure**: a representative of each one of us. Faustus also tries to transcend that status, however, and this ambition to be greater than human is his downfall.

### THE CHARACTER OF FAUSTUS

Fundamental to a production of the play is deciding who Faustus is. Faustus feels intensely, and expresses his feelings in richly evocative poetic language, such as his description of his excitement at the prospect of magical powers ('How am I glutted with conceit of this!', 1.78 onwards) to his famous hymn of praise to Helen of Troy (12.89 onwards). He also values scholarship, in spite of his dismissive monologue in Scene 1. He follows his punishment of the Knight in Scene 10 with the words 'hereafter speak well of scholars' (lines 81–2).

Audiences need to see him as passionate, even though he believes himself to be logical: he is easily swept away by glamorous language and readily distracted by the shows which the devils put on each time he is about to reason his way through to the point of realising his need to repent. He has trouble telling the difference between reality and the imagination. It is an **ironic** aspect of the play that it shows Faustus's knowledge, which is about the real world, is actually impractical in comparison with an imaginative knowledge of virtue and godliness. Magic pretends to draw the imagination and reality together (and so make it unnecessary for the practitioner to detect any difference between them).

### SOLITARINESS AND SOCIABILITY

Faustus's behaviour reveals a tension between solitariness and sociability. He is most comfortable when thinking aloud on his own in the great **soliloquies** (1.1–63 and 78–99, for example) and he craves independence in his magic-making. The Scholars remind us, however, that his earliest intellectual feats took place in a community with a tradition of public, spoken **dialogue**: 'Faustus, that was wont to make our schools ring with *sic probo*' (2.1–2). Oddly, Faustus's greatest pleasures are taken when he is away from his friends, so that physical luxury is associated with the Devil and solitude from the human race, while rationality seem to go with a sense of his equals' community.

### STUDY FOCUS: CLASS

A04

Of humble origins himself (see what the first Chorus says about him), Faustus is immensely conscious of social class – though probably no more so than most people of Marlowe's period. Nevertheless, his habit of respect for nobility and disrespect for servants directly contradicts any Christian sense of human beings as equals – his little trick with the out-of-season grapes in Scene 11 is no greater for having provided them to a Duchess.

### KEY QUOTATIONS: FAUSTUS

A01

#### Key quotation 1:

- Faustus's desire for superhuman powers: 'A sound magician is a mighty god' (1.62)

#### Key quotation 2:

- Doubt, repentance and distraction: 'And long ere this I should have slain myself, / Had not sweet pleasure conquered deep despair' (7. 24–5).

#### Key quotation 3:

- Dawning realisation that he is mortal: 'What art thou, Faustus, but a man condemned to die?' (10.117).

### CONTEXT

A04

A 1974 Royal Shakespeare Company production, starring Ian McKellen as Faustus, placed all the action in Faustus's study, which meant that the location of three scenes had to be altered, and the scene with the Pope was cut altogether.



### GRADE BOOSTER

A01

Always provide specific examples for statements about a character or other aspect of the play, either by quotation or sufficiently detailed reference to an incident so that a reader understands the evidence on which you base your claim. Use the quotations in this Note as starting points for your study and revision but also collect your own examples.

## HOW TO WRITE HIGH-QUALITY RESPONSES

The quality of your writing – how you express your ideas – is vital for getting a higher grade, and **A01** and **A02** are specifically about **how** you respond.

### FIVE KEY AREAS

The quality of your responses can be broken down into **five** key areas.

#### 1. THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR ANSWER/ESSAY

- First, get **straight to the point or focus in your opening paragraph**. Use a sharp, direct first sentence that deals with a key aspect and then follows up with evidence or detailed reference.
- **Put forward an argument or point of view** (you won't **always** be able to challenge or take issue with the essay question, but generally, where you can, you are more likely to write in an interesting way).
- **Signpost your ideas** with connectives and references which help the essay flow.
- **Don't repeat points already made**, not even in the conclusion, unless you have something new to add.

#### TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

Here's an example of an opening paragraph that gets straight to the point, addressing the following question: **'Misusing supernatural powers is Faustus's greatest sin.'** **How do you respond to this viewpoint?**

*The opening Chorus passes judgement on Faustus's 'self-conceit', condemning him for 'a devilish exercise' involving 'cursed necromancy'. It might seem to the audience that misusing supernatural powers is his greatest sin. During the course of the play, however, a more complex picture emerges which reveals contemporary attitudes to the soul, free will, repentance and damnation as well as the 'vain pleasure' Faustus himself regrets in his final words to the Scholars.*

Immediate focus on task and key words and example from the text

#### 2. USE OF TITLES, NAMES, ETC.

This is a simple, but important, tip to stay on the right side of the examiners.

- Make sure that you spell correctly the titles of the texts, chapters, authors and so on. Present them correctly too, with double quotation marks and capitals as appropriate. For example, *'In Scene 1 of "Doctor Faustus" ...'*.
- Use the **full title**, unless there is a good reason not to (e.g. it's very long).
- Use the term 'text' rather than 'book' or 'story'. If you use the word 'story', the examiner may think you mean the plot/action rather than the 'text' as a whole.

#### EXAMINER'S TIP

Answer the question set, not the question you'd like to have been asked. Examiners say that often students will be set a question on one character (for example, Mephistophilis) but end up writing almost as much about another (such as Faustus himself). Or they write about one aspect from the question (for example, 'nightmarish terrors') but ignore another (such as 'civilised mind'). **Stick to the question, and answer all parts of it.**

### 3. EFFECTIVE QUOTATIONS

Do not 'bolt on' quotations to the points you make. You will get some marks for including them, but examiners will not find your writing very fluent.

The best quotations are:

- Relevant
- Not too long
- Integrated into your argument/sentence.

#### TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

Here is an example of a quotation successfully embedded in a sentence:

*An early indication of this is seen when the Chorus describes magic as 'sweet', in contrast to the 'chiefest bliss' Faustus should be seeking in heaven.*

Remember – quotations can be a well-selected set of three or four single words or phrases embedded in a sentence to build a picture or explanation, or they can be longer ones that are explored and picked apart.

#### 4. TECHNIQUES AND TERMINOLOGY

By all means mention literary terms, techniques, conventions or people (for example, 'paradox' or 'archetype' or 'Aristotle') **but** make sure that you:

- Understand what they mean
- Are able to link them to what you're saying
- Spell them correctly.

#### 5. GENERAL WRITING SKILLS

Try to write in a way that sounds professional and uses standard English. This does not mean that your writing will lack personality – just that it will be authoritative.

- Avoid colloquial or everyday expressions such as 'got', 'alright', 'ok' and so on.
- Use terms such as 'convey', 'suggest', 'imply', 'infer' to explain the writer's methods.
- Refer to 'we' when discussing the audience/reader.
- Avoid assertions and generalisations: don't just state a general point of view (*'Faustus resembles a Gothic villain because he's evil'*), but analyse closely with clear evidence and textual detail.

#### TARGETING A HIGH GRADE

Note the professional approach in this example:

*Marlowe's presentation of Mephistophilis is far more complex and subtle than the devils of the Morality Plays. His aim is to capture Faustus's 'glorious soul' – but rather than reveal this only to the audience, we see him make this explicit to his victim. He has many characteristics that we would regard as human, speaking of 'a terror to my fainting soul' when describing the damnation he wants Faustus to share with him. As the play progresses, Faustus appears to regard 'sweet Mephistophilis' more as a friend than a fiend.*

#### GRADE BOOSTER

**A02**

It's important to remember that *Doctor Faustus* is a text created by Marlowe – thinking about the choices Marlowe makes with language and plotting will not only alert you to his methods as a playwright but also his intentions, i.e. the effect he seeks to create.