

Dr Faustus

The Prologue

CHORUS

Not marching now in fields of Thrasymene,
Where Mars did mate the Carthaginians,
Nor sporting in the dalliance of love,
In courts of kings where state is overturn'd,
Nor in the pomp of proud audacious deeds,
Intends our Muse to vaunt her heavenly verse:

The Chorus start off by telling the audience what the play is *not* about:

- War;
- Love;
- Heroism.

Why?

CHORUS

Only this (Gentlemen) we must perform, ← Why 'only'?

The form of Faustus' fortunes good or bad.

To patient judgements we appeal our plaud,

And speak for Faustus in his infancy: ← A summary of

Now is he born, his parents base of stock,

In Germany, within a town called Rhodes;

Of riper years, to Wittenberg he went,

Whereas his kinsmen chiefly brought him up.

So soon he profits in divinity,

The fruitful plot of scholarship grac'd,

That shortly he was grac'd with doctor's name,

Excelling all, whose sweet delight disputes

In heavenly matters of theology;

↑
Faustus is very intelligent and soon gains a doctorate

so far will follow.

←
Even though his background is not an intellectual one, Faustus goes on to study divinity at the University of Wittenberg.

**What sort of picture do we have of
Faustus so far?**

CHORUS

Till, swollen with cunning, of a self-conceit,
His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
And, melting heavens conspired his overthrow.
For, falling to a devilish exercise,
And glutted more with learning's golden gifts,
He surfeits upon cursed necromancy:
Nothing so sweet as magic is to him,
Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss.
And this the man that in his study sits.
[Exit.]

The tone of
the prologue
now changes.

A reference to
Icarus who flew
too near the sun.
Why is this story
alluded to?

Metaphor of eating too
much to show link
between Faustus's
intellectual abilities
and his greed for more
(and self-indulgent)
knowledge which
leads to his study of
magic.

His desire to know magic
puts his chance of eternal
salvation in jeopardy

**What sort of picture do we have of
Faustus now?**

The Prologue gives us an opinion of Faustus:

- He is praised for his great intelligence and for rising above his lowly beginning.
- He is criticised for his intellectual ambition which has driven him to reach for dangerous knowledge.
- His intellectual abilities do not mean that he is necessarily a good person.

‘The Prologue tells us, in short, that the play's protagonist lives in a Christian universe that places limits on the pursuit of knowledge.’

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