

BRITISH DRAMA

UNIT I

DOCTUR FAUSTUS

by Christopher Marlowe

Summary

Prologue

The Chorus enters and introduces the plot of the play. The Chorus gives the details of Doctor Faustus. He was born in Rhodes. He was well educated at Wittenberg, a famous German University and became a doctor of Divinity. He was not satisfied with the traditional forms of knowledge and so he decided to practice magic and fell to necromancy to gain more power, wealth and honour. Faustus's conscience warned him not to indulge in magic but his desire made him to learn the subject. His friends Valdes and Cornelius instructed him in the black arts. This paved way to begin a new career as a magician by calling Mephistophilis, a devil. He appeared before Doctor Faustus in an ugly shape. Faustus wanted to change his shape and he reappeared as Franciscan Friar. Mephistophilis advised him to give up Black magic but Faustus was stubborn and wanted to earn name and fame by serving the Satan. Even Faustus's servant Wagner could also call the devils.

Faustus's mind wavered between Satan and God. The good Angel advised him not to continue but the bad Angel convinced him to sacrifice his soul to the devil. Faustus signed a bond with his blood and gave it to the Mephistophilis and gained power of the spirits.

Mephistophilis explained about the Hell and brought a she-devil to be his wife. He gave a book on magic to Faustus.

Faustus again wavered between good and evil. He was eager to know about the hell and heaven from Mephistophilis. But he was not able to get any response from Mephistophilis. So Faustus got angry and called for Christ. Lucifer, Beelzebub and Mephistophilis entertained him with a parade of the Seven Deadly Sins. At the end of the show Lucifer gifted a book on magic to Faustus.

Faustus along with Mephistophilis went to Rome to surprise the Pope. He became invisible to the eyes of Pope and made tricks and disappeared.

There was magic everywhere. Robin one among the ostlers displayed magic. Faustus wanted to demonstrate his magic again at the court of the emperor of Innsbruck.

There Faustus called the spirit of Alexander the Great and his paramour.

Doctor Faustus went back to his home again. There he met a Horse Courser who purchased the horse of the doctor for 40 Dollars. In spite of the warning given by Dr Faustus, the Horse Courser rode the horse into water and the horse turned into a bundle of hay. The Horse courser was shocked and ran to the doctor and pulled his leg and promised him to pay more.

Faustus then pleased the Duke and the Duchess of Van Holt by providing them the grapes. He then dined with the scholars and brought Helen visible to others. An old man reprimanded them and warned Faustus that Christ alone could save Faustus

provided he regretted. But Mephistophilis appeared before him and scolded Faustus. Faustus again changes his intention and asked Mephistophilis to bring Helen.

Faustus spent 24 years and he was at the verge of death. He conversed with the scholars and told them that he could not be saved. He prayed to God. He was in agony. At 11.30 onwards death was very closer to Faustus and when the clock struck at 12 his soul was taken by Lucifer. Thus Faustus lost this life.

Introduction to the Playwright

Christopher Marlowe was an English playwright, poet and translator of the Elizabethan period. His plays are known for the use of blank verse. He is also known as a poet of the English Renaissance. His major works are Tamburlaine the Great, Part 1, Tamburlaine II, the Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, the Jew of Malta, Edward II. His minor works are the Tragedy of Dido, Hero and Leander and the Massacre at Paris.

Marlowe's play Doctor Faustus contains a number of characters but all are weak. All the minor characters have been used to strengthen the character of Faustus. They focused on one main purpose of expressing the psychological condition of Faustus from various angles. Faustus lacks determination as he wavers very often. He is not steady in taking decisions. Faustus's character is an example for many who wavers between truth and delusion.

Short questions

- 1 What trick does Faustus play on the Pope?
- 2 What does Faustus study?
3. What is necromancy?
4. Who speaks in the Prologue?
5. Where does Faustus go to study?

UNIT II

THE ALCHEMIST

by BEN JONSON

SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Lovewit a gentleman is forced to leave his house due to the outbreak of plague in London .He leaves the house in charge to his butler Jeremy. But Jeremy makes use of this opportunity to utilize the house to involve in illegal affairs.

He changes himself into Captain Face and seeks the help of Subtle, a fellow Conman and Dol Common. The play opens with an argument between Subtle and Face about the division of riches which they possess and to which they are to accumulate in future. Dol Common intervenes them and suggests them to work in a team to succeed.

Dapper,a lawyer's clerk is their first customer. He wishes to win in gambling and so he asks Subtle to help through his necromantic skills. The second one named Drugger,a tobacconist wants to establish profitable business. The third one is Epicure Mammon,a wealthy man expresses the desire to possess the philosopher's stone .He believes that the stone will bring him wealth. Surly stands with him to the idea of alchemy. He believes that the stone will turn all the base metal into gold. But Surly suspects Subtle to be a thief. Subtle becomes angry towards Ananias, an Anabaptist and asks him to return with more senior member. Drugger returns and is given false advice about setting shop.He also informs that rich young widow (Dame Pliant) and her brother have arrived in London. Subtle and Face plan to win the widow

The Anabaptists return and pay for goods which are to be turned into gold. Those goods are actually Mammon's goods. Dapper returns and he is informed that he shall meet the Queen of Fairy soon. Drugger brings Kastril and is told that Subtle is a skilled match -maker.Drugger is informed about the appropriate payment which might pave way to win the hands of the widow.

Dapper is subjected to humiliations. Mammon is introduced to Dol. He has been informed that Dol is a nobleman's sister who has gone mad.Kastril and his sister come again. Kastril is being taught about the lesson in quarreling .The widow captivates both Face and Subtle. They quarrel with each other.

Surly disguises himself as a Spanish noble man in order to find out the truth .Face and Subtle believe that Surly doesn't know English. Dame Pliant is convinced by brother to go off Surly. There is a sudden explosion from the laboratory. Kastril is in search of Mammon who leaves. Surly at last reveals his true identity to Dame Pliant in anticipation also reveals his identity to Subtle and Face. Drugger is asked to find out a Spanish costume if he wishes to have a chance of claiming the widow. Dol brings the news that the master of the house has returned.

Lovewit's neighbour informed him that the house had many visitors during his absence. Face is now Jeremy and he tells the master that the house was locked

because of the plague. Jeremy was not able to conceal thereafter. He promises Lovewit if he forgives him, he shall help him to have a rich widow. Dapper meets the 'Queen of fairy' and she departs happily.

Drugger returns the Spanish costume and is sent to find a parson. Face tells Subtle and Dol that he has asked for forgiveness from Lovewit and added that police officers are on the way. Subtle and Dol have to go empty handed .

The victims arrive again. Lovewit has married the widow and claimed Mammon's goods. Surly and Mammon went with disappointment. The Anabaptist and Drugger are expelled. Kastril accepts his sister's marriage to Lovewit. Lovewit accepts the servant and Face asks for the audiences' forgiveness.

Introduction to the playwright

Benjamin Johnson was born on June 11, 1572 in London and died on August 6, 1637. He was an English dramatist, poet and a literary critic. Johnson was known as the most learned poet of the age. His major works are the comedies 'Everyman in his Humour'-1598, Volpone 1605, Epicoene of The Silent Woman 1609, The Alchemist 1610 and Bartholomew Fair 1614 .

The play Alchemist was first performed in 1610 by the King's men. This play is considered the best of Johnson's plays. The play fulfills the classical unities and depicts the vices of the society.

The play alchemist starts in a house where the master Lovewit has departed to Kent to be safe from the plague. The housekeeper Jeremy with two of his friends Subtle and Dol make use of the house to execute their plan. All the three change their identities in order to earn money by receiving others. They make others believe that Subtle is a doctor and has power to transform metal in to Gold. People who are greedy and in need of more money are deceived by the trio. Kastril and his widowed sister who come to the house in search of husband and on the other hand, Lovewit the master of the house marries this woman because of her money.

Short questions

1. What are Subtle and Face doing as the play opens?
2. In whose house is the play set ?
3. Who is the first one to be deceived by Subtle and his friends?
3. What is that dominate all the characters in the play?
5. What is Alchemy?