Faust

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

The son of Johann Caspar Goethe and Catharina Elizabeth Textor, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born into a life of privilege: he received his education from private tutors, and as a young boy was trained in the arts of dancing, horseback riding, and fencing. He also developed an early interest in literature, especially the Homeric epics of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, the Old Testament, and the poetry of Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock. From 1765 to 1768, he studied law in Leipzig, and, while these studies ended in illness and failure, Goethe soon recovered himself and developed influential friendships with intellectuals and artists like Johann Gottfried Herder, who introduced him to Shakespeare, who catalyzed Goethe's literary awakening. With his ambitions at a new height, Goethe went on in 1774 to compose the book that brought him instant international celebrity, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, a pioneering classic of the *Sturm und Drang* ("Storm and Stress") literary movement, which valued the heightened expression of intense passion. On the strength of this novel, Goethe was invited to the court of Duke Carl August in Weimar, where he would live for the rest of his life, serving as an adviser, diplomat, and statesman. During this period, he also began developing and refining what would become *Faust*, his most important literary work, though it would take him some sixty years to bring it to completion. In the meantime, Goethe produced not only poetry, drama, and fiction (including his famous novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprentice* [1795-1796]), but also scientific works, the most famous of which is his *Theory of Colors* (1810), a challenge to the Newtonian theory of optics. After one of the most fruitful and diverse imaginative careers in human history, Goethe died in his Weimar home in 1832, of apparent heart failure. He is today considered the single most important writer Germany has ever produced, the peer of Dante and Shakespeare.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Faust actively engages with all of human history leading up to Goethe's own time, including that of Classical Greece (510-323 BC), the Middle Ages (500s-1500s AD), the Enlightment (1620s-1780s AD), and Romanticism (late 1700s-1800s AD). The poem critiques medieval culture and the Enlightenment rather severely, in the persons of Mephistopheles and Faust/Wagner, respectively. Medievalism is represented as backward-looking and self-satisfied, with knowledge based on authority rather than on independent critical thinking. The Enlightment, in contrast, is represented as mechanically, barrenly rational, devoid of imagination and in conflict with nature, as Wagner is able to create the unnatural Homunculus only with the catalyst of the devil. The poem instead presents Classical Greece as a valuable cultural model, with its humanism and ideals of good proportion and order, which Goethe saw as a much-needed corrective to the fiery, rampant individualism, passion, and imaginative overreaching of the Romantic movement of his own time, of which Faust becomes the most obvious representative in the poem.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Goethe's *Faust* is a dramatic poem that incorporates the entire Western literary tradition. It houses wild pageants littered with figures from Greek mythology, including griffins, sphinxes, harpies, and Helen of Troy from Homer's *Iliad*. The ambition of the poem can only be compared with Dante's *Divine Comedy*, as both seek to present an absolute vision of the cosmos in its totality (compare Goethe's *Faust* with Christopher Marlowe's daring but altogether more minor tragedy *Doctor Faustus* [1604], and the infinite magnitude of Goethe's conception of the same material will become clear). However, Goethe not only looks to the great books of the Western canon, but also incorporates German folk traditions into *Faust*, including the legend of Faust itself, which he quite likely encountered early in his life, as the legend was often adapted in Germany for puppet plays. Goethe's influence on other writers has been extensive, and can be seen in authors as diverse as Thomas Mann, who wrote a novel modeled on Goethe's *Faust* titled *Doctor Faustus* (1947), as well as Mikhail Bulgakov, who also looked to Goethe's *Faust* in writing his Soviet satire, *The Master and Margarita* (1967).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Faust*
- **When Written:** 1772-1831
- **Where Written:** Leipzig, Weimar, Italy, and elsewhere
- **When Published:** 1832 (although fragments appeared throughout Goethe's lifetime)
- **Literary Period:** Weimar Classicism
- **Genre:** Closet drama; cosmological epic
- **Setting:** Heaven and earth, from Leipzig to Greece
- **Climax:** Faust dies, and the devils and angels skirmish with one another for his immortal soul
- **Antagonist:** The devil, Mephistopheles

EXTRA CREDIT

The Living Garment of Poetry. Goethe wove his great poem from a great many poetic sources. In a conversation recorded by Goethe's associate Eckermann, the poet defends his practice as follows: "The world remains always the same; situations are repeated; one people lives, loves and feels like another; why should not one poet write like another?"

Goethe, the Original Superman. The nineteenth-century German philosophy Friedrich Nietzsche received Goethe's *Faust* with enthusiasm. In his *Twilight of the Idols*, he wrote approvingly of the poet: "He did not sever himself from life, he placed himself within it… What he aspired to was totality; he strove against the separation of reason, sensibility, emotion, will. Goethe conceived of a strong, highly cultured human being [Faust] who, keeping himself in check and having reverence for himself, dares to allow himself the whole compass and wealth of naturalness, who is strong enough for his freedom."

PLOT SUMMARY

After a prelude set in the theater, where a production of *Faust* is to be staged, as well as a prologue in heaven, where the devil Mephistopheles declares to the Lord his intention of tempting the great scholar Heinrich Faust to damnation, the play opens on a narrow, high-vaulted **study**, where Faust is sitting restlessly. He has studied and mastered all fields of human knowledge, from law to theology, but is nonetheless dissatisfied. And so, in his restlessness, he turns to magic, through the arts of which he hopes to understand the very inmost forces of the universe. He summons **the Earth Spirit**, the force that organizes and sustains nature, but the Spirit resents Faust's arrogance and vanishes. Faust's assistant in scholarship, Wagner, then enters the study, and he debates with his master on the values of book learning. However, Faust breaks off the discussion and dismisses his assistant; he is sick to heart with verbiage, the monotony of intellectual pursuits, and he despairs of ever overcoming his limitations. Consequently, he resolves to kill himself by drinking poison from a vial—but the sounds of church bells and heavenly music restore his will to live.

Some time soon after, Faust and Wagner are taking a walk outside the city gates. It is a beautiful spring evening, and Faust praises the beauties and harmonies of the natural world. As night falls, however, the two scholars see a black poodle circling them, in whose wake Faust perceives swirling fire. The ominous dog follows Faust back to his study, where it begins to growl and grow to a monstrous size. In response, Faust intones a magical spell, which forces the poodle to reveal itself for what it really is: the devil Mephistopheles in disguise. In time, the despairing, pessimistic and restless scholar makes a deal with this subtle devil, going so far as to sign the contract devised between the two with blood: in exchange for a lifetime of the devil's servitude, Faust, if he is ever absolutely satisfied with earthly life and slips into idleness, must yield up his immortal soul to damnation. The deal struck, the two mount Mephistopheles's cloak, which they can ride through the air to wherever they please.

Faust and Mephistopheles' first stop is Leipzig, where the two provide abundant free wine to patrons in Auerbach's wine-cellar only for the wine to turn to terrifying fire. Their next stop is the witch's gloomy kitchen, where Faust sees in a mirror the fantastic image of a beautiful woman that arouses all his passion; he also drinks a potion that makes him thirty years younger. Now he'll see a Helen of Troy in every skirt, the devil chortles.

Soon after, Faust sees the beautiful, innocent Margarete (also known by the nickname Gretchen) for the first time, who passes him on a street having just received confession. It is love at first sight, at least for Faust; he demands that Mephistopheles aid him in wooing and winning this young woman. The devil agrees, secretly lavishing treasures upon her and arranging for her and Faust to meet at her neighbor Martha's house, where Faust declares his love for her, which she returns. In order to physically consummate their union, Faust asks his lover to pour three drops of potion into her protective mother's drink, which will put her mother into a deep sleep. Trusting her lover, Margarete does this, and the two make love in the night, then Faust departs. Margarete becomes pregnant as a consequence. Time passes swiftly and painfully; Margarete's mother dies as a result of the sleeping potion her daughter slipped her, and poor Margarete herself becomes ostracized in her community for becoming pregnant outside of marriage. One night her brother, the soldier Valentine, comes to her door, outraged by his sister's dishonorable conduct and eager to shed the blood of the man who seduced her. Right on cue, Faust and Mephistopheles enter and approach Margarete's door, the devil singing a bawdy song, all of which suggests to Valentine that these two are responsible for his sister's fall from grace. He threatens the two, Faust duels him at sword point with the devil's magical aid, and the doctor ends up murdering the soldier. Faust and the devil flee. Soon thereafter, Margarete stands in a cathedral seeking forgiveness, but she is so hounded by the burden of her guilt that she faints.

Having fled the scene of their crime, Faust and Mephistopheles reappear some months later on Walpurgis Night, a celebration held on the summit of Brocken in the devil's honor, attended by witches, warlocks, and all manner of evil spirits. The two watch an amateurish, phantasmagoric play staged in the mountains, after which the devil reveals to Faust that Margarete is miserable and despairing in prison—for killing her newborn child. Faust curses the devil for concealing this news, and vows

then and there to free his beloved. The two hurry away on a black horse through the night, arriving at the prison a little before dawn. Faust steals a jailer's **keys** and unlocks Margarete's cell, but in a state of delirious grief she refuses to leave with him, preferring to wait for her execution, scheduled for the coming morning. After Mephistopheles threatens to abandon him, Faust leaves his beloved to her fate, though a voice from the heavens cries out that the young woman is, in fact saved. Thus ends Part I of Goethe's *Faust*.

Part II opens several years later. While Part I focuses on Faust's quest for human love, Part II focuses on his quest for earthly power and control over natural forces. To this end, Faust and Mephistopheles insinuate themselves into the Emperor's court, which is currently addressing the social, military and economic issues distressing the imperial realm. The devil, plying the young Emperor with flattery, suggests a short-term solution to the problem, namely digging up treasures buried long ago by people fleeing from the barbarian invasion of Rome. Reluctantly, the court comes to agree that this is a prudent course of action. To celebrate the resolution, a lavish Masquerade is held, during which Faust, disguised as Plutus, creates a fiery illusion that both terrifies and entertains the Emperor. During the Masquerade, the Emperor also signs a note of paper money, which Faust and Mephistopheles suggest be printed in order to alleviate the economic hardship of the imperial realm. The Emperor does not remember signing the note, but with this influx of credit the empire enjoys a false sense of prosperity. The Emperor grants Faust and Mephistopheles a fiefdom in thanks, and appoints them to collaborate in directing the Imperial treasury.

The Emperor also requests that the magicians provide the court with entertainment, specifically by summoning the famously beautiful Helen of Troy, over whom the Trojan War was fought, and her lover Paris. To this end, Faust enters a realm of nothingness where ghosts of past existence dwell. Here the magician encounters the mystical Mothers and uses a magical key Mephistopheles gave him to summon the shades of Helen and Paris. Back in the imperial palace, these two lovers appear on Faust's command, but are received by the courtiers in attendance lukewarmly at best. Faust himself, however, passionate as he is, falls in love with Helen. When Paris abducts her, as he is wont to do, the magician in a rage touches his phantom figure with Mephistopheles's key, and both Helen and Paris consequently vanish. Darkness and noisy confusion ensue in the hall.

Despondent, Faust returns to his study with Mephistopheles, where little has changed. Wagner, for his part, is now regarded as the most brilliant scholar living, and his fame eclipses that of even his dear mentor Faust. Wagner has been concocting in his laboratory, by unnatural scientific means, the Homunculus, a little flame-like man who lives in a glass vial. Though Wagner could not bring the thing to life on his own, the devil's arrival on the scene seems to catalyze the birth of this creature, for its vial vibrates when Mephistopheles enters and Homunculus speaks for the first time. Homunculus suggests that he and the devil take Faust to Greece, to raise his spirits by partaking of the pleasures of Classical Walpurgis Night. The three fly off on Mephistopheles's cloak, leaving Wagner to his studies.

During Classical Walpurgis Night, all the figures from Greek mythology are roaming: griffins, sphinxes, and harpies, nymphs and satyrs. Faust, Mephistopheles, and Homunculus split up to go on little quests of their own. Faust goes to the healer Manto's temple, which doubles as a portal to Hades, the Grecian Underworld, where Faust hopes to rescue the shade of Helen. Mephistopheles seeks erotic adventure with Thessalian witches, and ends up disguising himself as the monstrous hermaphrodite Phorkyas. Finally, Homunculus quests to achieve a proper existence, which he discovers on the Aegean Sea, the origin of all natural life. The shape-shifter Proteus transforms into a dolphin, on whose back Homunculus rides to the open waters. There the little creature glows, fiery with love. He breaks his vial, and his fiery being embraces the waves—the unnatural product of science reconciled to the natural world.

Meanwhile, Faust is granted his request that Helen be released from her ghostly afterlife to live again in a timeless moment. She is presently in the halls of her husband Menelaus after the Trojan War has ended, but Phorkyas-Mephistopheles warns her that her husband intends to murder her. The devil offers to instantly transport her and her companions to the fortress of a powerful and magnanimous lord, none other than Faust, of course, and Helen accepts this offer. As the devil promised, she and her companions are instantly transported to the inner courtyard of Faust's fortress. Helen is warmly received by its master, and the Grecian woman of ideal beauty and the Germanic man of earthly power fall in love; she grants him her hand, and the two are overwhelmed by joy. Menelaus's armies march on Faust's fortress, but are swiftly and resoundingly pushed back. Soon after, Faust and Helen give birth to a brilliant genius of a child, Euphorion, who is nothing less than Poetry incarnate. However, Euphorion inherits his father's fatal restlessness, and perishes after scaling the sky and falling. As quickly as Faust and Helen were wed, they are parted: after Euphorion's death Helen leaves for the Underworld, there to live always with her fallen child. Faust rides away in a cloud made of Helen's garments, in grief.

On a mountaintop, Faust tells Mephistopheles that he has one final grand project: he desires to create new lands by driving the sea back on itself. The only problem is that he requires a coastal fiefdom—a seaside country of his own to rule—to do so. Just then are heard the sounds of drums and warlike music: the devil explains that the Emperor is at war, because the false sense of prosperity created by the paper money circulating in the Empire led the emperor to attempt to govern his people while also enjoying a life of excessive pleasure; this in turn has

led to anarchy and rebellion. The devil suggests that Faust help restore peace, with the hope that he will be rewarded a coastal fiefdom for his efforts. Faust agrees, and the Emperor, with some reluctance, accepts the aid of the devil and magician in putting down the Anti-Emperor. By summoning three great warriors, the Three Mighty Men, and by deploying black magic, Faust and Mephistopheles preserve the Emperor's rule and earn their desired reward: a fiefdom by the sea.

Many, many years pass. Faust, now one hundred years old, has spent half a lifetime in his project of creating new lands, and has almost achieved his goal. He has ruled his fiefdom wisely and justly. However, one little property remains beyond his reach, a cottage and nearby linden grove belonging to an old married couple, Baucis and Philemon. Faust obsessively desires their property, and at last gives into the temptation to unjustly seize what is not his: he orders the devil and the Three Mighty Men to peaceably displace the old couple and seize their property. They follow the order, but much more violently than Faust would have it, with explosions, fire, and death. Despairing and exhausted, Faust retires to an inner chamber of his palace, where Care, personified as a gray woman, assails him with the burden of his guilt. Even after she blinds him, however Faust denies her power, and resolves to bring his plans to completion. He orders his workmen to rise and resume their labor of building a canal in order to drain a contaminating marsh.

Meanwhile, Mephistopheles summons the dead to rise and begin digging Faust's grave, for the great man's death is near. Faust has a final vision of people living and working happily in green fields, autonomous, a vision of highest happiness that blesses Faust with his highest moment on earth. He falls back, deceased, and the dead bury him while Mephistopheles summons the hordes of hell in anticipation of arresting Faust's soul and dragging it down to damnation.

However, when Faust's soul begins to rise from the earth, angels intervene, raining down roses on the devils, driving them back into hell despite Mephistopheles's protests. The roses have a rather strange effect on Mephistopheles: he has a sudden urge to make love to the angels. In his lust-blindness, the devil loses Faust's soul, for as Faust's restlessness led him into temptation, so too did it deliver him from evil. The angels escort Faust's soul into heaven, where the penitent soul of Margarete pleads with the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, to forgive Faust for his sins. Mary instructs Margarete's soul to fly upward, for Faust's will follow hers to eternal salvation. A mystical chorus concludes the drama. They sing that all that is transitory is only a symbol; what is impossible on earth is done in heaven; what can't be described below in heaven exists as a fact. They conclude that Eternal Woman shows us how to rise to heaven. Thus ends Goethe's *Faust*.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Heinrich Faust – The intelligent, learned, and **nature**-loving Faust begins the drama as a scholar bitterly dissatisfied with the limitations of human knowledge. He wants to be nothing less than a god, and he knows that his books cannot help him to this end. In his despair, he makes a deal with the devil Mephistopheles, who promises to serve him by means of black magic on one condition: if Faust ever yields himself to idle pleasures and sloth—if he ever spiritually stagnates—the devil wins the man's immortal soul. Faust agrees, and with Mephistopheles at his disposal he undertakes a lifelong quest for meaning and transcendence. But Faust is essentially restless and never satisfied. His love affair with Margarete brings him only fleeting joy, and results in Margarete's tragic downfall and death. His marriage to the Classical Greek ideal of beauty, Helen of Troy, likewise leads to tragedy in the death of Faust and Helen's son, Euphorion. After these failures to attain to lofty ideals of love and beauty, Faust learns to accept his limitations and turns his efforts to the earth, becoming a generally just but also rather severe ruler of a seaside kingdom. He also grows increasingly resistant to Mephistopheles, and, in his final hours, resolves to renounce magic and create a Utopian kingdom with justice, prosperity, and love for all. Faust never does spiritually stagnate and so his soul is ultimately saved. In heaven, it follows Margarete's soul into the higher spheres of divine love.

Mephistopheles – Mephistopheles is the devil himself, who offers his services to Faust in the hopes of winning the great man's soul. He has a gentlemanly if antagonistic relationship with the Lord God, acknowledging that, though he himself always wills evil, he ultimately only contributes to the good which God ordains. For this reason, the devil is rather bored with creation and his role in it, preferring random to destruction over any kind of purposeful activity. He is, in short, the spirit of eternal negation, a sarcastic character given to the commission of vicious pranks and monstrous crimes. The devil is truly impotent in the end, however, capable only of deceptions and illusions. So it is that the virtuous characters in the play, like Gretchen and Helen, always perceive at once that Mephistopheles is a repellent creature. Furthermore, Mephistopheles's influence is limited only to his home in the North, for he is a medieval European figure, not familiar with, or fluent in, the Classical world of myths. When he and Faust go to Greece for Classical Walpurgis Night, for example, the devil is a stranger in a strange land, obsessed with sin and flesh in a culture that thinks only in terms of the beautiful and the ugly. The devil then fails to win Faust's soul when he is distracted by sudden lust for the angels who are scattering roses from above.

Margarete/A Penitent – Also known as Gretchen, a shortening of her given name, Margarete is a beautiful, innocent, poor

young woman with whom Faust falls madly in love and who in turn falls in love with him. The two become involved in a torrid love affair, and one night Faust tells Margarete to administer a sleeping potion to her controlling mother so that the two lovers can consummate their relationship. This act, however, is the beginning of Gretchen's end: the potion kills her mother, Gretchen becomes impregnated by Faust, and the community shuns her for her having sex outside of marriage. After Faust murders her brother Valentine, Gretchen becomes further haunted by her guilt and her yearning for innocence. She murders her newborn infant to free it from this world, and is consequently **imprisoned** and sentenced to death by beheading. Though Faust attempts to liberate her, Gretchen at last refuses to leave her prison with him. As Faust and Mephistopheles fly from her cell, however, a voice from the heavens announces that Gretchen is saved, to spend eternity in heaven despite her sins. At the end of the play, Gretchen's soul, referred to as a penitent, successfully appeals to the Blessed Virgin Mary on behalf of Faust's soul. Mary then instructs her to rise, so that Faust can follow her into eternity.

Wagner – Wagner is Faust's assistant in scholarship, a bright, clear, and striving man. Unlike Faust, however, Wagner has faith in the power of knowledge, reason, and science to satisfy humankind's deepest needs, and he prefers his books to **nature**. Though Mephistopheles soon replaces Wagner as Faust's assistant, Wagner makes another appearance in Part II of the drama. By that point, Wagner is himself the master at the university, rivaling even the great Faust in brilliance and fame. He is also working on an experiment in his **laboratory**, the unnatural creation of life from inorganic materials. Accelerated by the devil's presence, the experiment is a success, yielding Homunculus. In the end Wagner remains (like Faust) isolated and troublingly concerned with violating the laws of nature. He represents the relative successes and dramatic human failures of the Age of Enlightenment.

Homunculus – The Homunculus, unnaturally synthesized by Wagner in **the laboratory**, is a little flame-like man who lives in a glass **vial**. Ironically, this creature, who represents the highest achievement of Enlightenment science, is more human in his desires than his creator. Rather than sit in a lab all day, Homunculus wants to experience the world, to evolve, and to achieve what he calls a proper existence. To this end, he journeys to Greece with Faust and Mephistopheles for Classical Walpurgis Night, where he rides the shape-shifting Proteus out into the Aegean Sea, the origin of all natural life. In the midst of the waves, the creature learns about nature's laws and, with fiery passion, he shatters his vial to give his unnatural body to the natural waters, an act of loving sacrifice that makes him one with **nature**. Homunculus's reconciliation with nature anticipates Faust's own reconciliation with the divine order.

Helen of Troy – Helen of Troy is the ideal of beauty in Classical Greek culture and one of the main characters in Homer's epic poem the *Iliad*. In the *Iliad* she is kidnapped by the Trojan prince Paris, and for her husband, the Greek chieftain Menelaus, raises a great army to recover her. In *Faust*, however, Helen and her culture of the good, the beautiful, and the true have long since departed from the world. Faust summons the phantoms of Helen and Paris to the Emperor's court and, though no one else present truly perceives Helen's beauty and nobility, the magician himself does, powerfully. He at once falls in love with her, but thinks that he cannot possess her until he understands Greek culture in full, so he journeys to Greece for Classical Walpurgis Night. Faust succeeds in restoring Helen to life, but Phorkyas-Mephistopheles spiritually vexes the Greek woman such that she is, although unchanged in beauty, doubtful of herself. Perhaps this is why the marriage of Faust and Helen, of Romanticism and Classicism, ends in tragedy, the death of Faust and Helen's son Euphorion. After Euphorion's fall, Helen leaves the world for good to be with her son in the Underworld, a phantom once more.

Euphorion – The son of Faust and Helen, Euphorion is a beautiful, brilliant boy, a pure figure bathed in light. Euphorion represents the union of Faust's striving, Romantic culture and Helen's harmonious Classical Greek culture—but the boy has, tragically, inherited too much of his father's ambitions to transcend natural limits. Euphorion chases a radiant chorus girl into the sky and falls to his death, marking the failure of the modern world to successfully integrate its Greek model. Goethe modeled this character on an English poet he admired, Lord Byron, who died fighting in the Greek War of Independence (1821-1832).

The Emperor – The Emperor is young, pleasure-loving, and surrounded in his court by fools, fakes, and flatterers. He impulsively welcomes short-term solutions to problems that threaten to ruin his realm, like printing paper money at Faust's suggestion, but such solutions tend to cause more problems than they resolve. After the circulation of paper money creates a false sense of prosperity in the empire, the Emperor himself neglects his responsibilities, choosing instead to lead a dissolute life of drinking and reveling.

The Manager – The Manager, along with the Dramatic Poet and Player of Comic Roles, is staging a production of *Faust* for a German theater in the "Prelude on the Stage" scene. He advocates presenting plays with lots of action and variety, as well as elaborate scenes and special effects, the better to sell tickets to all kinds of theatergoers. He represents the pragmatic, populist perspective on art: distributing, selling, and entertaining.

The Dramatic Poet – The Dramatic Poet, along with the Manager and Player of Comic Roles, is staging a production of *Faust* for a German theater in the "Prelude on the Stage" scene. He believes, in contrast to the pragmatic Manager, that it is the poet's fundamental right to express his dreams and visions in an eternal poetic form, to be handed down to posterity.

Scorning the idea of merely entertaining people, the Dramatic Poet represents the aesthetic, visionary perspective on art: creating true, beautiful poems that exist only for their own sake.

The Player of Comic Roles – The Player of Comic Roles, along with the Manager and the Dramatic Poet, is staging a production of *Faust* for a German theater in the "Prelude on the Stage" scene. Like the Dramatic Poet, he too is something of an artist, though he knows that posterity cannot enjoy his performances because they occur only in the present. He is also like the Manager in advocating for entertainment value, in giving people what they want, though with less of an emphasis on action and stage effects and more of an emphasis on representing the gamut of human experience.

The Earth Spirit – The Spirit to whom Faust prays while reading from Nostradamus' book of magical symbols, **the Earth Spirit** oversees the constant change of the physical world, working at the loom of time to fashion the living garment of God. As a representative figure of nature, it operates more as a symbol than as a character, but the Spirit does briefly appear at Faust's summons. Faust says that he feels close to the industrious Earth Spirit, but the Spirit disowns him.

The student/the baccalaureate – A dull, warm student just beginning his studies under Faust, the student comes knocking at his professor's **study** seeking wisdom but is instead received by Mephistopheles, who is disguised as a scholar in cap and gown. The devil advises the student to focus on words over meanings, among other generally unsound intellectual habits, and the student takes his bad words to heart. Later, after graduating and becoming the baccalaureate, the student complains to Mephistopheles, again in disguise, that his education has been nothing but lies told by the old to the young, with the old not even believing the lies they told. Mephistopheles calls him a pompous ass for thinking that original thoughts still exist.

Valentine – Margarete's brother and a soldier, Valentine is outraged by the knowledge that his sister has compromised her honor by taking on a secret lover (Faust). Outside of his mother and sister's house, he challenges Faust to a duel, but with Mephistopheles's magical aid Faust mortally wounds the soldier. Before he dies, Valentine tells his sister that she might as well become a whore. He wishes he could kill her himself, and tells her that in her dishonor she gave his heart the fatal blow.

The Chancellor-Archbishop – A political realist and high-ranking Catholic official who hides his true motives under a mask of piety, the Chancellor-Archbishop tells the Emperor that evils afflict his realm. He is also the only counselor who openly challenges Mephistopheles's proposal that the Emperor resuscitate his state by digging for hidden gold. He does this not to protect the empire, however, but to consolidate his own power by maintaining the integration of Church and State. Later, the Chancellor-Archbishop squeezes lands, taxes, and tithes from the Emperor in exchange for hushing up the fact that his victory over rebels came only because of an alliance with the devil himself.

The Astrologer – One who divines the future from the positions of the planets, the astrologer is a trusted counselor in the Emperor's court who in the "Throne Room" scene of Part II claims that buried gold is indeed as readily obtainable as Mephistopheles says it is. He represents the false, flattering authority which power often relies on, to its peril.

Paris – Paris is a character from Homer's *Iliad*, who initiated the Trojan War by kidnapping the Greek beauty Helen, and who appears in *Faust* as a phantom after being summoned to the Emperor's court by Faust himself. Living in a lesser culture than that of Classical Greece, no one in the Emperor's court perceives Paris's nobility and beauty. The men just criticize his effeminacy, and the women just sexualize him. After Paris's phantom once again attempts to abduct Helen, Faust, who by now is deeply in love with her, touches Paris with a magical **key** and makes him vanish.

Erictho – A witch from Thessaly. She surveys the field where Julius Caesar defeated Pompey in the Great Roman Civil War, and reflects on how human beings arrogantly assert their power over one another even though they are not even capable of governing their own appetites. Erictho concludes that this leads to bloodshed and suffering.

Chiron – A centaur (a creature with the upper body of a man and the lower body of a horse) who leads Faust to Manto's temple on Classical Walpurgis Night. Chiron is a great educator and skilled in medicine. He represents the partial integration of the intellectual and the sensual which Goethe so admired in Classical Greek culture.

Manto – Manto is a healer and seer who lives in a temple at the base of Mount Olympus, home to the Greek gods. She approves of Faust's desire for ideal beauty as personified by Helen of Troy, and agrees to escort Faust into Hades, the Greek underworld, so that he can restore Helen to life.

Anaxagoras – Anaxagoras is a pre-Socratic philosopher whom Homunculus consults about achieving a proper existence. In contrast to Thales, Anaxagoras believes that nature was created violently, by fire and volcanic explosion (a theory called Vulcanism). He encourages Homunculus to become a king of a mountain, but Homunculus instead follows Thales to the sea.

Thales – Thales is a pre-Socratic philosopher whom Homunculus consults about achieving a proper existence. In contrast to Anaxagoras, Thales believes that nature was created tranquilly, by water (a theory called Neptunism). He leads Homunculus to the Aegean Sea, the origin of all life, where Homunculus succeeds in escaping **his vial** and becoming reconciled to the **nature**.

Proteus – Proteus is a shape-shifter who helps Homunculus ride out into the midst of the Aegean Sea, where the unnatural creature transcends **his vial** and reconciles himself to the natural world. Proteus represents, in contrast to Chiron, the complete integration of the intelligence and sensuous feeling, and so exemplifies Classical Greek culture for Goethe.

Menelaus – Menelaus is a Greek chieftain and Helen's husband, who, in Homer's *Iliad*, successfully leads the Greeks to war against the Trojans after Paris kidnaps his wife. In *Faust*, Menelaus leads an army against Faust's fortress after the magician draws the beautiful Helen there and declares his love for her, but Faust's army of barbarians swiftly repels Menelaus's forces.

The Three Mighty Men – Goethe derives the Three Mighty Men from the Bible, where they assist the Biblical hero David defeat the Philistines. In Goethe's drama, one of the Three Mighty Men is young and eager for bloodshed, one is mature and eager for treasure, while the last is old and conservative. Together, they work for Faust in assisting the Emperor to quell the Anti-Emperor's rebellion. Later, the brutes go against Faust's gentler orders by killing Baucis and Philemon.

Baucis and Philemon – Characters whom Goethe derived from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Baucis and her husband Philemon own an estate that includes a cottage, a grove of linden trees, and a chapel, where the couple happily lives in peace. After building his seaside kingdom, however, Faust becomes obsessed by the fact that he himself does not control their estate—it is the last piece of land in Faust's kingdom that eludes his grasp. Unjustly, Faust orders Mephistopheles and the Three Mighty Men to seize the property, although with due compensation and without violence. Instead the devil and his thugs murder Baucis and Philemon, along with a traveler staying with them, an act that outrages Faust and leads him, at last, to renounce the use of magic.

Want, Debt, Distress, Care, and Death – Five dark siblings who personify the afflictions for which they're named, these figures approach Faust's palace toward the end of the play. Of the sisters—Want, Debt, Distress, and Care—Care alone gains entrance. She threatens Faust, but he defies her even after she blinds him. Instead of becoming paralyzed with worry and frustration, Faust instead resolves to continue realizing his great design for a Utopia on earth without the use of magic. Death, the brother of the other four, at last comes for Faust, but though Faust's body dies, his immortal soul rises into eternity.

Pater Ecstaticus, Pater Profundus, and Pater Seraphicus – In English, the Ecstatic Father, the Father of the Deep, and the Angelic Father, these three are religious hermits who live in the mountains and gorges. Faust's soul flies past them as it ascends into heaven. They sing of the Lord God's infinite love, which He expresses in the form of **nature**.

The Blessed Virgin Mary – In Catholicism, the Blessed Virgin Mary is a saint and the mother of Jesus Christ. She represents love and forgiveness. Margarete prays to a statue of Mary after being corrupted by Faust, and in the final scene Mary instructs the penitent soul of Margarete to lead Faust's soul into the higher spheres of heaven.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Lord – God, the creator of earth and heaven who permits Mephistopheles to attempt to tempt Faust to his damnation, confident that a good man's intuitions will not permit him to stray from the path of righteousness.

Raphael – One of the three archangels in the "Prologue in Heaven" who behold and celebrate the mysterious splendor of the Lord's creation. Raphael sings of the sun.

Gabriel – One of the three archangels in the "Prologue in Heaven" who behold and celebrate the mysterious splendor of the Lord's creation. Gabriel sings of the revolutions of the earth, night, day, and the surging of the sea.

Michael – One of the three archangels in the "Prologue in Heaven" who behold and celebrate the mysterious splendor of the Lord's creation. Michael sings of the storms that sweep from land to sea and back again.

Frosch – One of the four revelers whom Mephistopheles tricks in Auerbach's wine-cellar. Frosch enjoys singing and Rhine wine. He tries to fluster the devil, but the devil gets the better of him.

Brander – One of the four revelers whom Mephistopheles tricks in Auerbach's wine-cellar. Brander is a simple-minded, merry man who sings a song about a rat that is fatally poisoned, which makes it feel like it is falling in love.

Siebel – One of the four revelers whom Mephistopheles tricks in Auerbach's wine-cellar. Siebel was recently made a fool of by his promiscuous lover and pities the poisoned rat in Brander's song.

Altmayer – One of the four revelers whom Mephistopheles tricks in Auerbach's wine-cellar. Altmayer is the most skeptical of the devil's promise of wine.

The witch – In her kitchen, the witch brews elixirs with the assistance of a group of apes. Mephistopheles and Faust come to her to acquire an elixir that will make Faust thirty years younger, which she provides.

Dame Martha Schwerdtlein – A wealthy gentlewoman and neighbor of Margarete. Mephistopheles deceives Martha, telling her that her perhaps philandering husband is dead and buried in Padua. While Faust seduces Margarete in the garden, Martha makes a pass at the devil, but without encouragement or success.

Lieschen – A village girl who gossips with Margarete while the

two draw water from the well together. Lieschen sharply criticizes a girl named Barbara for getting impregnated out of wedlock. She represents how mercilessly harsh and judgmental society can be when its members violate social conventions.

Oberon – The king of fairies, taken from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, featured in the play Faust and Mephistopheles watch together on Walpurgis Night in Part I.

Titania – The queen of fairies, taken from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, featured in the play Faust and Mephistopheles watch together on Walpurgis Night in Part I.

Plutus – The stately, confident Greek god of wealth who flies in during the Emperor's Masquerade in the "Great Hall" scene of Part II, Plutus is really Faust in magical disguise. He brings with him gold that turns to fire, a trick for which the Emperor forgives him readily.

Pan – The horned and goat-legged Greek god of flocks and herds, Pan is really the Emperor in disguise, led by gnomes to a fountain of fire during the Masquerade in the "Great Hall" scene of Part II. He represents secular authority tempted by earthly pleasures, like wine and revelry.

The Mothers – Mythical beings who dwell in the realm of eternal Nothingness, the Mothers protect the immortal images from ages past. Faust bravely descends to their realm, armed with a **key** that he uses to liberate the phantoms of Helen of Troy and her lover Paris.

Nicodemus the Famulus – Wagner's loyal assistant in scholarship, just as Wagner himself was earlier in the play Faust's assistant. Nicodemus shows Mephistopheles to Wagner's **laboratory**, where the scientist is attempting to produce Homunculus.

The Phorcides – Three witch-sisters who share one eye and one tooth between them, born in darkness and related to all that is nocturnal, the Phorcides transform Mephistopheles into Phorkyas after he flatters and entreats them. They are the embodiment of absolute ugliness.

Phorkyas – A monstrously ugly and hermaphroditic hag, Phorkyas is really Mephistopheles in disguise. Phorkyas-Mephistopheles convinces Helen that her husband Menelaus intends to kill her and the Trojan women in her company, and offers to transport Helen and her companions to Faust's fortress.

Nereus – A prophetic sea-god, Nereus advises Homunculus to speak to Proteus in his quest to achieve a proper existence. Nereus complains, justifiably, that people never take his advice, because they're too eager to become gods themselves.

The Anti-Emperor – After the Emperor neglects his duties and his realm falls into anarchy, the Anti-Emperor emerges as the figurehead of the rebellion launched to overthrow him. However, the Anti-Emperor's forces are defeated by the Emperor with the aid of Mephistopheles's black magic.

Doctor Marianus – An aged hermit and theologian dedicated to the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Doctor Marianus is present during Faust's ascent into heaven.

Magna Peccatrix, Mulier Samaritana, and Maria Aegyptica – Derived by Goethe from the Biblical tradition, these three women lived in sin but achieved salvation through penitence. In the final scene of *Faust*, they successfully appeal to the Blessed Virgin Mary on behalf of Margarete's soul.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

REASON AND PASSION

Goethe wrote *Faust* against the backdrop of the Age of Enlightenment (1620s-1780s) and the Romantic period (1700s-1800s). Pioneers and supporters of the Enlightenment—like the philosopher Rene Descartes and the physicist Sir Isaac Newton—valued human reason and scientific inquiry over all other ways of thinking about the world. The Romantics, in contrast—like the poets William Wordsworth and Lord Byron (Goethe's model for the character Euphorion)—reacted against what they perceived to be Enlightment thinkers' mechanical and sterile rationalism, instead privileging individualism, blazing passion, and the creative power of the imagination.

Goethe sought to synthesize these two positions, to reunite reason and passion. His ideal person is neither strictly rational nor disorderly in their passion, but someone who uses reason and emotional imagination together to understand, and to act positively and purposefully on, the world. Goethe found in the culture of Classical Greece—as created by poets like Homer and philosophers like Aristotle—a model for just such a synthesis. As he himself says, "Of all people, the Greeks have dreamt the dream of life best," because, to Goethe's mind, the Greeks cultivated passion as moderated by reason and reason as animated by passion, just as they balanced the needs of the individual with the needs of society as a whole.

Like the poet who created him, Faust lives in an age torn between rationalism and Romanticism, and he, too, is striving to reconcile his insatiable desire to understand the world with his wild imagination. By the time the play begins, he is a scholar already disillusioned with reason, the fruits of which he finds severely limited and spiritually unsatisfying. He therefore turns to the irrational art of magic, which he hopes will transform him into a god with the power to realize his imagination on earth—a characteristic Romantic fantasy. The play of *Faust*, when looked

at from this perspective, can be understood as tracing its protagonist's development from a magic-wielding Romantic quester who acts on passion with often tragic consequences—as his whirlwind love affair with Margarete culminates in the young woman's death—into, by the end of the play, a spirited but nonetheless rationally moderate ruler of a kingdom who, in his highest moment, envisions himself applying reason and imagination together in creating a just and prosperous society, a fulfillment of the Classical ideal.

Goethe also imagines the synthesis of rationalism and Romanticism in another character in *Faust*, namely the little flame-like man in **a vial**, Homunculus. Homunculus is an unnatural creation of Enlightment science who, like Faust, quests like a Romantic to escape his limitations, represented by the vial in which he lives, and achieve what he calls a proper existence. To this end, on Classical Walpurgis Night he falls in with the Greek philosopher Thales and the Greek sea-god Proteus, representatives of the Classicism Goethe so admired. These spiritual guides introduce Homunculus to the Aegean Sea, the great stage for so much of Greece's cultural heritage (Homer's *Odyssey*, for example, is largely set in and around the Aegean) and also the natural origin of life. With what Thales calls "passion's imperative," Homunculus offers his unnatural body up to the natural waters, thereby breaking his vial and becoming one with the world, a fate which anticipates Faust's ascension into heaven. Contrast this fate with that of the brilliant boy Euphorion, the son of the Romantic Faust and the Classical Helen of Troy, who pursues not an understanding of **nature** but only perfect unattainable beauty, which results in the boy's fall and death.

THE HUMAN DESIRE FOR MEANING AND TRANSCENDENCE

Faust is driven by his desire to understand the meaning of life and to connect with the infinitude of **nature**. From one perspective, this makes him like everyone else, as we all desire meaning and to be part of something larger than ourselves. But Faust is *extraordinary* in a variety of ways: in his incredible intelligence and his vast knowledge, but especially in his manic restlessness and relentless ambition that leaves him dissatisfied with all of his achievements, always yearning for something more. He wants to transcend, or go beyond, merely rational human knowledge, which, like all things human, is also uncertain. He wants to understand the fundamental laws that govern the world, no matter the means and no matter the cost. In short, he wants to transcend his humanity and become a god, with a god's omniscience and active creative power. And Faust is not alone in his desire for transcendence: Margarete finds in her love for Faust an opportunity to transcend the spiritual littleness of provincial life, Homunculus seeks to break from **the vial** in which he was created and achieve a proper existence, and Euphorion desires to scale the sky in pursuit of perfect beauty.

As lofty as Faust's aspirations may be, however, his story is nonetheless a cautionary tale. His restlessness leads him downward into despair, suicidal thoughts, and acts of cruelty. He discovers in his love for Gretchen a spiritual connection with the world, for example, but this joy comes at an enormous price: the poisoning of Gretchen's mother, Faust's cold-blooded murder of Gretchen's brother Valentine, and Gretchen's ostracization and descent into murder and madness. What's more, Faust's joy is always short-lived, and the magician always sinks to new moral lows in seeking to reach new spiritual heights. He indirectly causes a rebellion in the Emperor's realm by causing economic unrest, then goes on to profit from this war by slaughtering the rebels with black magic and, for his services, extracts from the Emperor his own seaside country to rule. Every spiritual gain has its price, but Faust all too often makes others pay for his pleasure and power.

And yet at the end of the play, despite all of his crimes and sins, Faust is forgiven and ascends into heaven, accompanied by a host of angels. Paradoxically enough, his saving grace seems to be precisely his restless desire for transcendence—which is the very thing that got him into trouble in the first place! Faust's deal with the devil, after all, holds that if Faust ever surrenders himself to pleasure and idleness, if he has an experience that satisfies him absolutely, then the devil would win his soul. Faust's desire for transcendence protects him from any such complacency.

Many critics of the play find this paradox cheaply ambiguous or even downright confused on Goethe's part. In Goethe's defense, we might say that his highest value as a poet has little to do with morality and justice, but rather has everything to do with inexhaustible, purposeful striving—in the pursuit of love, say, or in the building of a prosperous and just society, which is Faust's great design at the end of the play. The play seems to suggest that while the striver should not will evil, neither should he or she shrink from it. In our pursuit of meaning and transcendence, we also learn more about our limitations, as Faust learns that he cannot be a god, but can only achieve earthly power. This knowledge of our limitations, in turn, enables us to act to the best of our abilities, and so it is that Faust eventually gives up his quest for the Infinite and settles on making life better for the men and women he rules. In the world of *Faust*, the desire for transcendence and the frustrations of this desire can spur us on to bad, but also to good, to acts of creation, so long as we act with knowledge of our limitations.

PLEASURE AND LOVE

As Margarete insightfully observes, Mephistopheles is bored with creation, for he has seen everything under the sun and moon, and he would like nothing more than to annihilate the world. Of

course, Mephistopheles can't annihilate the world, and so instead he entertains himself by leading human beings into temptation through pleasure—everything from the fiery wine he serves to patrons in Auerbach's wine-cellar to the paper money he urges the Emperor to print and circulate in his realm. Pleasures like these, merely physical and ultimately meaningless, distract people from their quests for meaning and from purposeful, creative action. The people who enjoy such pleasures in the play, like the wine-cellar patrons and the gossipy water-bearer Lieschen, tend to be ordinary and self-satisfied. Such folk, Mephistopheles tells us with a wink, "never sense the devil's presence, / not even when his hands are on their throats." Interestingly, it is possible to draw an even more direct comparison between such pleasure-ruled people and the devil, as there isn't much difference between Mephistopheles relieving his boredom with the "pleasure" of tempting people into frivolous pursuits, and the people engaging in those frivolous pursuits rather than engaging directly with the beauty and wonder of creation. Both acts are empty. Mephistopheles, essentially, ruins people by making them into mirrors of himself, of his own frivolous response to boredom.

Contrasted with mere pleasure in the play is love. Love perhaps begins as a desire for sexual union between two people—as it does between Faust and the ideally innocent Margarete, and later between Faust and the ideally beautiful Helen of Troy—but it also has the potential to become a spiritual experience, the experience of transcending oneself by merging with another soul. The play imagines love as extraordinary, even heroic, hurling those possessed by it into intense joy, imagined as contact with eternity. Yet most love in *Faust* ends in despair. Lovers must live in a society that will judge and destroy them (as it does to Margarete), and lovers also live in time, subject to violent change that can make sustaining their love impossible. That being said, the play does present one love that endures: that which extends from the Lord to his creation. This love is absolute and unchanging, and one might argue that the characters who reject simple pleasure and strive for more, for a more fundamental connection with other people and the universe, are in fact striving to fully experience that eternal love.

PARTS, WHOLES, AND LIMITS

Early in the play, Faust studies the sign of the Macrocosm, which presents to him the whole universe in its harmonious unity, all of its parts related to one another and to the whole that they make up. Although this vision ultimately leaves Faust desiring more, the ability to act and not just contemplate, it is nonetheless central to an understanding of *Faust*. Essentially everything good that occurs in the play results when actions are carried out harmoniously, with their whole context in mind, while bad results arise when actions are carried out as though they were wholes in themselves and not merely parts. In other words, the play privileges the macrocosmic (universal) over the microcosmic (individual) perspective. Even the structure of the play emphasizes this principle: the "Prelude on the Stage" reminds us of the economic and theatrical contexts of *Faust*, while the "Prologue in Heaven" reminds us that what happens on earth, like the tragedy of Faust itself, is only a symbol, to Goethe's mind, of the divine whole which contains all of **nature** and all of us.

The Lord of all creation, God Himself, has the ultimate macrocosmic perspective of the world, understanding as he does how all the parts of His creation relate to and harmonize with the whole, from heaven to earth to hell. Even the most negative part of His creation, Mephistopheles, ultimately does macrocosmic good while he attempts to perform evil. Faust's desire for transcendence is essentially a desire to wholly understand the macrocosm and act in harmony within it. Ironically enough, this desire brings him into conflict with the world, as when he orders the devil and the Three Mighty Men to seize Baucis and Philemon's cottage and the lands surrounding it. The episode epitomizes the folly of acting without a fuller consciousness of one's context—it is foolish, after all, to send the devil out on a peaceful errand (Mephistopheles ends up killing Baucis and Philemon), just as it's foolish to act shortsightedly, as the Emperor so often does, in printing paper money and falling into a life of wanton pleasure. Faust's tragedy, his dissatisfaction with life which leads him into crime and which follows him to his death, comes about to a large extent because no single person can hold the world in their head and their hand, yet Faust attempts to do exactly this. Thus the drama suggests that one should strive tirelessly to understand the world, but with a sense of one's limitations, or, put another way, a sense of the fact that one is but a small part of the whole.

INTELLECTUALISM AND THE VALUE OF WORDS

The play examines intellectual pursuits primarily through the lives of Faust, Wagner, and the student/baccalaureate, all of whom are, at least at some point in their lives, scholars who live for and learn from books alone. Faust comes to reject such a life as unsatisfying, too much of a wild goose chase full of empty words and navel-gazing. Wagner, the more rationalistic and committed scholar of the two, is content to work within the limitations of human knowledge, preferring a life of libraries and **laboratories** to a life among **nature** and other people. Eventually, Wagner succeeds in simulating the creation of life with his Homunculus, which represents in the drama the pinnacle of achievement for Enlightment science—but Homunculus then follows Faust in seeking transcendence, which suggests that the drama as a whole privileges the search for the meaning of life over narrow

scholarship, however successful it might be. If Wagner exemplifies the best of scholarship, it is the student/baccalaureate who exemplifies the very worst, being as he is easily influenced by authority, superficial in his studies, unoriginal in his insights, and pompous. It may well be as Mephistopheles says: there's no wise or stupid thought that has not been thought already.

Closely connected to the play's examination of intellectualism is its evaluation of words, which can so often be empty, disconnected from what they refer to. Faust, for one, comes to reject his scholarly life in large part because he finds that books peddle no more than empty words. Far from finding this state of affairs distressing, Mephistopheles revels in the big, meaningless words of philosophers, and he encourages the student to put all his faith in words, memorizing them and accepting them from authorities without critical thinking. That this is the devil's advice, of course, should deter us from following it. Faust, for one, comes to have faith only in actual feeling, regardless of how one names one's feelings. He tells Margarete: "Imbue your heart with this immensity [of the universe], / and when you wholly feel beatitude, / then call it what you will— / Happiness! Heart! Love! God! / I have no name to give it! / Feeling is everything, / name is but sound and smoke…" This is the man, after all, who says that God created the universe not with the Word, as the Biblical Gospel of John states, but with the Act. However, at the end of the drama, a mystical chorus suggests that words can still be meaningful as transitory symbols that do not refer to, but gesture toward the presence of, indescribable eternity. Words cannot reveal the face of the Lord God, the play suggests, but they can *reflect* His face.

POLITICS

If the play portrays intellectual life as misguidedly valuing narrow research and mere words over substance, political pursuits in *Faust* tend to be compromised by greed, shortsightedness, and corruption, with disastrous results. This is nowhere clearer than in the episode of the Emperor who succumbs to Mephistopheles' flattery and his own greediness when he decides to address his realm's economic problems by searching for hidden gold rather than by designing a more sustainable solution.

The Emperor, surrounded as he is by courtiers who flatter him for their own self-interested purposes, never learns from his mistakes. Soon after his search for gold he agrees to print paper money at the behest of Faust and the devil. This is a short-term solution to economic woes, and one that only ends up compounding the problem—riding the false sense of prosperity created by the paper money, the Emperor falls into a life of luxury and wanton pleasure which diminishes his capacity to rule, and this, in turn, gives rise to anarchy and bloody rebellion.

Compare the Emperor's troubles with the episode of the pygmies and cranes which unfolds on Classical Walpurgis Night, where the physically tiny pygmies mindlessly conquer, fight, and die for control of a newly created mountain—an episode which literally suggests just how absurd political actions can be when their masterminds and supporters lose sight of their own tiny stature in the universe.

Unguided by authentic wisdom, by a sense of how one's actions relate to the thoughts and acts of the rest of the world, politicians blind themselves to the long-term by focusing on the short-term. By the end of the play, Faust alone understands that political rulers must give everything they have in guaranteeing prosperity for their subjects and justice for the societies they lead—though he dies before he can realize his Utopian vision.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

FAUST'S STUDY AND WAGNER'S LABORATORY

Faust's study symbolizes the failure of scholarship to satisfy the human desire for meaning. It is crammed with authoritative, dusty books that Faust, for one, dismisses as containing empty words. In fact, the study is so crammed as to cramp Faust and spiritually entomb him. It is no wonder, then, that some of his most desperate acts take place here, like his interrupted suicide attempt and his making a deal with Mephistopheles. The intellectual stagnation symbolized by the study is perhaps most forcefully presented in Mephistopheles's speeches to the young student who pays him a visit there. The devil champions rote memorization over critical thinking, mindless acceptance of old and outdated intellectual authorities, and big words over meaning and substance. The restless, ever-curious Faust, on the other hand, feels much more at home in **nature**, where his imagination is free and his creativity can act upon and change the world.

Wagner's laboratory is similar to Faust's study in being a center for human learning, but it proves more productive. Wagner, after all, succeeds in creating the Homunculus, who, however unnatural, is very much alive—unlike Faust's "dead" books. What accounts for this relative productivity is this: the laboratory is not a place where intellectual authority is blindly admired, but rather a place where the human mind interacts with and works on natural phenomena in the form of scientific inquiry. The laboratory, then, symbolizes the relative successes of science during the Age of Enlightenment. But it also symbolizes the rather stark limitations of science. Wagner cannot create Homunculus on his own, as the devil's magical

presence, it would seem, is required to turn a science experiment into a living being. Moreover, Homunculus himself, like Faust before him, promptly leaves the laboratory in favor of nature, the only environment in which he can hope to discover the details of the world's workings and achieve a proper existence, as he later does in the Aegean Sea. The laboratory of the Enlightenment may produce the seed of knowledge, the play suggests, but it cannot bring that seed to fruition as nature can.

NATURE AND THE EARTH SPIRIT

Early on in the play, Faust conceives of nature as posing the ultimate mysteries to the human mind, mysteries that he is hell-bent on solving. He desires to learn what binds the universe together in the very depths of its being, and to contemplate all the forces that move the heavens and the earth. To this end, he summons the Earth Spirit, a personification of nature who explicitly symbolizes the constant changes of the natural world, day and night, summer and winter, life and death, ebb and flow. In short, the Spirit symbolizes the macrocosm in which human beings live and act, and is the changing expression of the eternal will of God. The Spirit judges Faust unworthy of forming a pact with him, however, as the magician is first too frightened and then too arrogant. And so it is that Faust instead contracts himself to Mephistopheles, who, in contrast to the Earth Spirit, is sarcastic and shallow, skeptical and negative.

Nonetheless, nature provides Faust with his moments of most sensitive feeling and deepest enjoyment, as in the "Forest and Cave" scene of Part I. After he has fallen in love with Margarete (significantly in a garden, the environment where nature harmonizes with human artifice), Faust himself thanks the Earth Spirit for both teaching him to know his fellow creatures and revealing him to his own self—even for teaching him that nothing perfect can ever be man's. Nature, then, also comes to symbolize the joy one can experience in understanding the whole of which one is a part, as well as the joy one can experience in acting within one's limitations. Faust may not be able to become a god, but he can achieve the humbler transformation of falling in love with another person, thanks to the erotic urges with which nature endows human beings.

It is not until the end of the play, however, that Faust both fully understands and can act harmoniously with nature. This is embodied by his great project of creating new lands by artificially driving the sea back upon itself, much as God made dry ground appear as distinct from the formless sea on the third day of Biblical creation. Nature becomes, at last, the aged Faust's motive and joy, the canvas that both limits his imagination but which also empowers him to create, and the abundance that sustains the kingdom and society he builds.

PRISONS AND KEYS

For Faust, as for Hamlet in Shakespeare's Hamlet, the world is a prison, confining him, shackling his imagination, and limiting his power. His **study** is a prison made out of books, dead authorities and empty words. His body is a prison that he attempts to escape by means of suicide, only to be interrupted. His deal with Mephistopheles could see him condemned to that most miserable and inescapable prison of all, hell itself. However, Faust is a uniquely restless and resourceful prisoner, always seeking means of escaping from himself, of becoming more than he is. Magic, **nature**, love, and earthly power in the service of human society are all keys that he uses to escape his unnecessary limitations and achieve freedom and enjoyment.

To emphasize and refine the idea of imprisonment and liberation, Goethe includes in Faust several literal prisons and keys. Margarete, for example, is imprisoned for murdering the child she and Faust conceive together, and Faust steals a jailer's keys in order to liberate her and save her from her impending execution. Margarete understands, however, as Faust does not, that her prison is not physical, but is more truly the haunting guilt she experiences after the deaths of her mother, brother, and child. This is a prison that is inescapable other than through profound penitence. Homunculus is trapped in a prison as well, the vial in which he unnaturally crystallized in **Wagner's laboratory**. His key, metaphorically speaking, is exposure to the Classical Aegean Sea, which the play holds up as the natural origin of life, where he experiences a passion so strong that his vial shatters. Finally, there is the key that Mephistopheles gives to Faust so that he can descend to the realm of the mystical Mothers, a Nothingness where Faust hopes to find his All. He uses the key to liberate back into life the shades of Helen of Troy and her lover Paris, and so the key also becomes a phallic symbol, that which unlocks from the feminine Nothingness new life. Try as he might, however, and despite being armed with so many keys, it is only after his death and ascension into heaven that Faust's soul truly achieves freedom.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Princeton University Press edition of *Faust I & II* published in 2014.

Prelude in the Theater Quotes

When Nature, unconcerned, twirls her endless thread
and fixes it upon the spindle,
when all creation's inharmonious myriads
vex us with a potpourri of sound,
who then divides the strand monotonously unreeling
and gives it life and rhythmic motion,
who summons single voices to the general choir
where music swells in glorious accord?

Related Characters: The Dramatic Poet (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 142-149

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, two of the "form characters" of the poem, the Dramatic Poet and the Stage Manager, bicker over how best to put on a play of *Faust*. The Manager takes the position that the goal of a play is simple: to entertain a drunk, lazy audience. The Poet, however, takes a lofty, Romantic view of things: he thinks of himself as a kind of mastermind, organizing the chaotic "parts" of a play (its characters, its singers, etc.), and of a play's story, into one organized whole. The Poet makes a complicated analogy, comparing his duty as a poet to that of God, who organizes the different discrete parts of the natural world into one harmonious whole.

Goethe arguably presents his own view most clearly here--he sees himself as the "God" of his fictional world, imposing order and control upon his characters in order to create something beautiful and harmonious. And as with God, Goethe doesn't see himself as a mere entertainer or a businessman: his goal is to transform his disorderly audience of drunks into a more pious, educated group--he hopes to pass on some lessons and observations about good and evil, art, life, etc.

So now upon our modest stage act out
creation in its every aspect,
and move with all deliberate haste
from heaven, through the world, to hell!

Related Characters: The Manager (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 239-242

Explanation and Analysis

The Stage Manager now prepares to begin the play. The Manager knows that the Poet has planned out a great, epic saga, in which the characters will travel between heaven and hell. To prepare the audience for what's to come, perhaps, the Manager talks about the stage sets his production will use: sets that imitate heaven and hell, perhaps, but don't replicate them perfectly.

It's a mark of the radical nature of Goethe's poem that he felt the need to insert a prologue of this kind: the play was neither comedy nor drama, and was far more ambitious than anything the German theatergoer of the era would have been used to seeing. The passage also reinforces one of Goethe's key ideas: the poem is a fictional world, designed to imitate and in some ways enhance the qualities of the real world. The sets onstage might be flimsier than the real world, it's true, but the characters will speak in heightened language, increasing the drama of the poem. In such a way, the poem will mimic and yet also go beyond the limits of reality.

Prologue in Heaven Quotes

Angels gain comfort from the sight,
though none can fully grasp Your Being,
and all the grandeur You have wrought
still has the splendor of its primal day.

Related Characters: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael (speaker), The Lord

Related Themes:

Page Number: 267-270

Explanation and Analysis

In this second prologue, the angels of heaven gather around God and praise him for the majesty of his creation: God has created the universe, something so vast and complex that nobody can understand it.

The passage is important because its explicit meaning seems to be somewhat contradicted in the poem itself. Here, we're told that none but God could conceive of the whole world in all its majesty. And yet we've just gotten done listening to a poet (something of a stand-in for Goethe, perhaps) who claims to have built an entire *fictional* world on the stage, whose complexity attempts to equal that of the real world created by God. So Goethe seems to acknowledge God's grandeur (thus remaining pious and

humble) while *also* aspiring to replicate such grandeur in fiction. Goethe, one could argue, is something of a Faust character himself: taking on God's awesome power, in the sense that he makes himself the "God" of his own writings.

I merely see how mankind toils and moils.
Earth's little gods still do not change a bit,
are just as odd as on their primal day.
Their lives would be a little easier
if You'd not let them glimpse the light of heaven—
they call it Reason and employ it only
to be more bestial than any beast.

Related Characters: Mephistopheles (speaker), The Lord

Related Themes:

Page Number: 280-286

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mephistopheles (an incarnation of the devil) visits heaven and greets God. Mephistopheles tells God that he feels sorry for humanity (or at least he's pretending to feel sorry), as humans have been blessed and cursed with the gift of reason (the "light of heaven"). Because of their intelligence and ambition, however, humans are able to cause each other great pain and suffering; they use intelligence to do evil.

It's interesting to think about where Mephistopheles is right and where he goes wrong in his judgment of humanity. Certainly, Mephistopheles is right, in Christian terms, to suggest that knowledge is the source of evil: it was eating from the Tree of Knowledge, after all, that brought Adam and Eve out of Paradise. Furthermore, Mephistopheles's point about wisdom being used for evil seems even truer today than it did during Goethe's lifetime (think of all the geniuses who've used their talents to build bombs and cheat people out of their money). And yet where Mephistopheles sees wisdom as the source of evil and nothing else, God seems to see wisdom as a potential path to redemption and salvation. In this passage, we see the basic theme of Faust: the insufficiency of knowledge, or rather, the path from knowledge to salvation.

Part 1: Night (Faust's Study 1) Quotes

I've studied now, to my regret,
Philosophy, Law, Medicine,
and—what is worst—Theology
from end to end with diligence.
Yet here I am, a wretched fool
and still no wiser than before.

Related Characters: Heinrich Faust (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 354-359

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we're introduced to our protagonist, Faust, a wise man who's studied all the knowledge of the world and come up strangely lacking. Faust supposedly knows everything there is to know about Philosophy, Medicine, Theology, etc.--and yet his knowledge brings him no satisfaction (confirming Mephistopheles's theory, expressed in the previous quote; knowledge causes unhappiness).

It's been suggested that Faust is something of a "stand-in" for Goethe himself: Goethe was one of the most educated, talented, and intelligent people of all time. Just as Faust sees human knowledge as somehow insufficient, Goethe's writings paved the way for Romanticism, the cultural movement that placed value on individual freedom and intuitive wisdom, rather than merely the soulless accumulation of knowledge (the Enlightenment worldview). When humanity's knowledge is limitless, there's still something missing from life: a sense of belonging, love, and joy. It's telling, then, that Faust is all alone in this scene: his knowledge and education have deprived him of intimate connections with his fellow human beings.

No dog would want to linger on like this!
That is why I've turned to magic,
in hope that with the help of spirit-power
I might solve many mysteries,
so that I need no longer toil and sweat
to speak of what I do not know,
can learn what, deep within it,
binds the universe together,
may contemplate all seminal forces—
and be done with peddling empty words.

Related Characters: Heinrich Faust (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 376-385

Explanation and Analysis

In the absence of help from Philosophy, Theology, etc., Faust turns to magic in the hope of bringing comfort to his soul. Faust is an educated man, and yet the world's established, preexisting knowledge seems dry and useless to him: it educates him but doesn't *nourish* him. Magic, on the other hand, appeals to Faust because it's undiscovered, and has the potential to give him truly godlike knowledge. Here Faust would truly be a stranger in a strange land, investigating a mysterious, uncertain discipline.

Because the passage shows Faust venturing into the unknown, it tells us a lot about his character. We knew that Faust was dissatisfied with his lot in life, but here, we see that he's still energetic and adventurous enough to try something new. Faust has internalized all the world's knowledge, but his knowledge hasn't made him dull or cautious: on the contrary, it's just made him hungry for more knowledge. Indeed, his restlessness and ambition are arguably his defining qualities, those that bring about both his downfall and his salvation.

The passage also conveys some of Faust's arrogance and hubris: instead of accepting his status as God's servant, he wants to know the mind of God and understand the forces that bind the universe together. Like so many of the fictional magicians and mad scientists whom Goethe's Faust inspired, Faust will arrogantly try to "play God," and face punishment for his actions.

> How all things interweave as one
> and work and live each in the other!
> ...
> How grand a show! But still, alas! mere show.
> Infinite Nature, when can I lay hold of you
> and of your breasts?

Related Characters: Heinrich Faust (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 447-456

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we get a better sense of what, exactly, is lacking in Faust's life. Faust reads a book in which he comes across a passage about the macrocosmic nature of the universe. Faust learns that the universe is all one harmonious whole--every tiny part of the world has its grander purpose and locks in with the other parts.

Faust's newfound knowledge of the universe, however, doesn't bring him much happiness. It's not enough for Faust to learn that the universe has a purpose; Faust wants to *experience* that purpose first-hand, instead of trusting that the purpose exists. In short, Faust doesn't want to be a cog in a machine anymore--he wants to understand and *touch*the machine itself.

Note the physical nature of this passage--Faust talks about "laying hold" of Nature, whom he personifies as a beautiful woman. It's certainly possible to suggest that Faust is simply deprived of love and human companionship: he's trying to find passion and *eros* in science and philosophy, and so of course he comes up short. And yet Faust's observations about Nature could suggest that knowledge itself has an almost erotic quality: the mixture of power, domination, and love that Faust feels as he talks about nature shows us that Faust is trying to fit all of human contact and experience into his crazed experiments.

> Is parchment then the sacred fount,
> and does one drink from it forever to slake our thirst?
> There's nothing you can gain refreshment from
> except what has its source in your own soul.

Related Characters: Heinrich Faust (speaker), Wagner

Related Themes:

Page Number: 566-569

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faust has an argument with his assistant, Wagner, about the value of knowledge and education. The two men's positions have been interpreted to reflect the two dominant intellectual positions of European thought at the time, the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Wagner argues that book-learning is useful because it fills the mind with useful knowledge; one could argue that his point of view is characteristic of the Age of Enlightenment (the era when the encyclopedia, the dictionary, and the modern school system came into being). But Faust disagrees with his assistant: it's not enough, he claims, for books to fill the mind with information--they must nourish the soul as well.

Faust argues that the best books don't really introduce *new* information at all; instead, they merely provide the answers to questions that the mind, or rather, the soul, has already posed in some way.

Faust's observations, complicated though they are, suggest why his pursuits of knowledge so far have failed. Faust has gotten a lot of information from his books, and yet there's a sense, deep down, that he hasn't really satisfied his soul's desires yet. Faust doesn't yet know what he *wants* to know; he's out of touch with what his soul is "thirsty" for.

Part 1: Outside the City Gate Quotes

Alas! it is so hard to find corporeal wings
that match those of the human mind.
Yet in all of us there is an innate urge
to rise aloft and soar along
when, lost in the blue space above us,
the lark pours forth its vibrant song,
when high above fir-covered crags
the eagle floats on outspread wing,
and when above the plains and lakes
the crane seeks out its native place.

Related Characters: Heinrich Faust (speaker), Wagner

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1090-1099

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faust and his assistant, Wagner, go outside Faust's study to survey the city they live in. Outside, Faust notices an entire city of people walking outside, socializing, and having a good time. The scene prompts Faust to note that all human beings feel a desire to "soar" in some way or other. For animals like the eagle, soaring is a literal affair--the eagle flies overhead, savoring the vistas of Earth. For ordinary people, it's implied, "soaring" is a matter of ambition, but also being around other people, enjoying the city and nature, drinking, etc.--such interpersonal interactions bring joy and comfort to the soul.

The passage seems to suggest that Faust can find some happiness and comfort in socializing with his fellow human beings. And yet there's also a suggestion that for Faust, socializing and enjoying the city simply aren't enough. Because of Faust's massive intellect, he feels apart from other human beings, even when he's around them--he wants to "soar" in a way that others don't.

Part 1: Faust's Study 2 Quotes

My spirit prompts me, now I see a solution
and boldly write: "In the beginning was the *Act*."

Related Characters: Heinrich Faust (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1236-1237

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faust rewrites the New Testament, beginning with the Book of John. Faust looks at the famous first verse of the Book, in which we're told, "In the beginning was the word." Faust is dissatisfied with such a view of life: he finds words dry and ultimately empty. Faust has spent his entire life studying various "words," and he's emerged none the happier. Here, Faust crosses out the word "word," and replaces it with a series of other words, culminating in "act."

What does it mean for Faust to replace "word" with "act?" To begin with, it's a sign of Faust's hubris and arrogance that he's daring to rewrite the Bible at all. But furthermore, Faust's rewriting suggests that he's tiring of passivity in all its forms. Faust is no longer content to sit in a study reading books--he wants to use his knowledge to understand and dominate the world. By acting instead of just reading, Faust hopes to bring himself a sense of control and power. Faust, one could argue, is the true Romantic hero: instead of accepting the "word" (i.e., the law, whether of Christianity or of society) he seeks to make a new law for himself by acting on his own.

[I am] a part of that force
which, always willing evil, always produces good.

Related Characters: Mephistopheles (speaker), Heinrich Faust

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1335-1336

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faust finally meets Mephistopheles, generally considered the "villain" of the poem. Mephistopheles is the incarnation of the Devil, who's come

to tempt Faust into wickedness. And yet Mephistopheles introduces himself to Fast by claiming to be a force for good, even when he intends to be a force of evil. Mephistopheles is a servant of the Devil, meaning that ultimately, he's less powerful than almighty God. Mephistopheles tries to do the Devil's will, and yet in the grand scheme of things, every evil deed the Devil does turns out to be a good thing for the human race. Just as Judas's betrayal of Christ seemed like an act of wickedness, but turned out to be a "good" thing (since it led to Christ's redeeming mankind's sins forever), Mephistopheles's manipulations seem wicked, but in the end God will use them to make Faust a better man. Goethe's notion of the relationship between good and evil (evil never wins in the end, and is just another tool for God to bring about greater good) is consonant with centuries of Christian theology, dating all the way back to the Middle Ages.

❝ Take my word for it, anyone who thinks too much
is like an animal that in a barren heath
some evil spirit drives around in circles
while all about lie fine green pastures.

Related Characters: Mephistopheles (speaker), Heinrich Faust

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1830-1833

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faust and Mephistopheles have arranged a contract (setting in motion the events of the rest of the poem). Mephistopheles notes that Faust has agreed to the corrupt bargain (in which Faust will be granted unlimited power, until the moment when he wishes to "linger," at which time he'll lose his life and soul) because Faust is dissatisfied with his own knowledge and enlightenment. Mephistopheles reminds Faust that intelligence is a prison: the ignorant man can more readily embrace the glories of God (the "green pastures," perhaps an allusion to the Bible's famous 23rd Psalm), while Faust is too smart to embrace God whole-heartedly.

The passage is a good reminder of how Mephistopheles is both a figure of good and a figure of evil. Mephistopheles wants to take Faust's life for himself, and yet he also seems to understand Faust deeply: he recognizes, for instance, that Faust's study has brought him knowledge but not spiritual enlightenment. Mephistopheles is both Faust's worst enemy and his best friend in the play.

Part 1: Auerbach's Wine-Cellar in Leipzig Quotes

❝ Simple folk never sense the devil's presence,
not even when his hands are on their throats.

Related Characters: Mephistopheles (speaker), Altmayer, Siebel, Brander, Frosch, Heinrich Faust

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2181-2182

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mephistopheles and Faust go to a wine-cellar, where a party is underway. Mephistopheles proceeds to explore the cellar and manipulate the other guests, using his command of language and his "devilish" twisting of logic and reason. As he prepares to trick the guests into sinning, Mephistopheles makes an observation to Faust: people are always unwilling to believe that they're being manipulated by the devil, even when it's overwhelmingly obvious that they are.

Mephistopheles's behavior is interesting, because he's being so upfront about the fact that he's manipulating other people, even when he speaks to Faust. Faust seems to know that Mephistopheles will try to tempt him into weakness--in other words, he knows perfectly well that the devil is present in his life with his "hand on his throat." In short, the passage shows Mephistopheles seeming to treat Faust as an equal, rather than just another mortal victim. As the poem goes on, Mephistopheles will continue to show Faust the ways of evil, effectively showing his human companion how the devil goes about his business.

Part 1: A Garden Quotes

❝ Don't be afraid! Look in my eyes,
let them and let these hands that now clasp yours
express what tongue can never say:
complete devotion and a sense of bliss
that must endure eternally!
Eternally!—Its end would be despair.
There must not be an end! Not ever!

Related Characters: Heinrich Faust (speaker), Margarete/A Penitent

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3188-3194

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we see Faust falling for a beautiful, humble girl named Gretchen. Gretchen is an unusual match for Faust, since she's rather simple and ordinarily-educated (she doesn't have even a fraction of the knowledge and training that Faust does). And yet Gretchen has something that Faust can never have: she's happy and innocent--one could say that Faust and Gretchen are, respectively, like Adam after the Fall of Man and Eve before the Fall (notice that the scene takes place in a garden!).

In this scene, we see Faust wishing for happiness and eternity: because of his feelings for Gretchen, he wants to be happy with her forever. Such a desire is precisely what Faust promised never to feel when he made his agreement with Mephistopheles. And yet the poem doesn't end here: there's still a sense that Faust, in spite of *saying* that he wants to be with Gretchen forever, doesn't actually believe it completely. Faust is, as always, disjointed--his words don't quite match his feelings. There's still a part of him that's tired of life and eager to move on to the next thing.

Part 1: Gretchen's Room Quotes

My heart is heavy,
all peace is gone,
I'll never find it,
never, again.
My breast is yearning
to be with him;
could I but clasp
and hold him tight,
and kiss him
as my heart desires,
under his kisses
I'd swoon and die!

Related Characters: Margarete/A Penitent (speaker), Heinrich Faust

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3402-3413

Explanation and Analysis

Gretchen is a tragic character, because she seems to love Faust whole-heartedly, and yet her love for Faust will bring her only pain and anguish, not happiness. Already, Gretchen finds herself abandoned by her lover: Faust has left Gretchen, at least for the time being. In Faust's absence, Gretchen is distraught: she cries that she'll be in constant pain unless she can see Faust again. If she could only kiss him, she goes on, she would die of happiness.

Gretchen's unbridled love for Faust signals her innocence and ignorance of the world--she barely knows Faust, after all (though the shortness of her relationship might just be part of the artifice of the play). Gretchen is, for all appearances, a totally innocent character, whose sweetness and kindness will be harshly punished (as we'll see soon enough).

Part 1: At the Well Quotes

How readily I once declaimed
when some poor girl did the wrong thing!
...
I'd cross myself, act high and mighty—
and now I'm prey to sin myself!
And yet, o God, what brought me to it,
was all so good, and oh so sweet!

Related Characters: Margarete/A Penitent (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3577-3586

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we learn that Gretchen's affair with Faust has brought her to a state of sin. Previously, she was a sweet, innocent girl--but now that she's been with Faust, she's "sinned" by having pre-marital sex with him. Her childish state of innocence is gone forever. Gretchen seems to lament her loss of innocence, even as she celebrates its cause (her beloved Faust, and presumably sex itself). She loves Faust, and yet seems to hate him for dragging her away from her own piousness.

The passage foreshadows one of the major events of the end of Part One: Gretchen's pregnancy. The passage is also an important indication of the way Faust's nature brings ruin to everyone he crosses paths with. Gretchen has the best of intentions, but these become twisted by Faust's greed and Mephistopheles' manipulations.

Part 1: Walpurgis Night Quotes

Great folk may like the noisy life,
we'll be quite cozy in this quiet spot.
Besides, it is an ancient practice
to make your own small worlds inside the great one.

Related Characters: Mephistopheles (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4042-4045

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mephistopheles takes Faust to a mysterious mountaintop populated by witches: it is Walpurgisnacht, a traditional German night of evil and demonic ceremony. As one might expect, Mephistopheles is a big fan of Walpurgisnacht; he loves being in a place in which he doesn't have to hide from God--here on the mountaintop he can create a microcosm within the macrocosm of the universe, and there indulge in unbridled evil.

It's possible to read the passage as a "metafictional" observation: i.e., Goethe is making a point about his own poem. Notice that the Walpurgisnacht section of the text is usually interpreted as an abrupt diversion from the plot of the poem: it has nothing to do with the action of the story before or after, and therefore could be seen as a self-contained "world." Furthermore, Mephistopheles' observations suggest a strange kinship between Goethe and Mephistopheles himself--they're both the architects of fictional worlds in which they're free to do as they want, (supposedly) without the judgment of others. In fiction, as in Walpurgisnacht, one can find temporary freedom.

Part 2: Act 1: The Throne Room Quotes

Nature and intellect are not words said to Christians.
Because such language is so dangerous
the atheist is executed at the stake.
Nature is sin, and Intellect the devil;
hermaphroditic Doubt their child
which they foster together.

Related Characters: The Chancellor-Archbishop (speaker), The Emperor, Mephistopheles

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4897-4902

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage from the beginning of Part Two, Mephistopheles has joined the court of the Emperor as a kind of jester. Mephistopheles makes some bold suggestions to the Emperor about how to solve some of the various crises of his kingdom. Mephistopheles' suggestions show off his intelligence and his belief that the natural resources of the kingdom (and the gold buried somewhere beneath the kingdom) are sufficient for fighting off the effects of the economic "panic." The Chancellor-Archbishop of the kingdom, on the other hand, objects to the way glib way Mephistopheles suggests easy solutions to the Emperor's problems--he points out that Mephistopheles is relying too heavily on his own intellect and nature.

It's important to recognize that the Archbishop is using Christian language to criticize Mephistopheles, when in reality he's just frightened that Mephistopheles is weakening the Archbishop's own position in court. Mephistopheles may be an evil character, and yet the Archbishop seems equally corrupt in his willingness to manipulate religion for his own selfish reasons.

That merit and good fortune are connected
is something that these idiots will never see;
the philosopher's stone could be in their possession,
but there'd be no philosopher to use it.

Related Characters: Mephistopheles (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5061-5064

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the scene, Mephistopheles has convinced the foolish, pleasure-loving Emperor to dig for buried treasure throughout his land in the hopes of remedying the crisis in his territory. The Emperor is hopeful that he'll be able to find gold and stave off some of the problems in his kingdom. When Mephistopheles is alone, he rejoices that the Emperor is about to become reliant on gold for his power--Mephistopheles senses that the Emperor will become weaker and more materialistic as a result of this "quick fix." Mephistopheles also makes the point that all punishment from God comes with a reason attached--in other words, the Emperor has been experiencing crises in his kingdom because he's a bad emperor who's appointed fools to run his kingdom. Humans in general, Mephistopheles argues, would be better off if they just understood that punishment *isn't* random; i.e., that the best way to avoid punishment is just to be a better person.

The passage reiterates Mephistopheles' original point: he's an agent of good, even as he does evil. Ironically, Mephistopheles is the most morally-attuned character in the poem; he recognizes that humans will be rewarded for their good behavior. The difference between

Mephistopheles and God, of course is that Mephistopheles is evil, and seeks to harm mankind. And yet he's totally *aware* of God's law, to an extent that no human in the play is (with the possible exception of Faust).

Part 2: Act 1: A Dark Gallery Quotes

❝ You are the father of all mystagogues
who ever cheated docile neophytes,
but you reverse their method—send me to a void
for higher wisdom and for greater powers.
You're making me the cat whose task it is
to pull your chestnuts from the fire.
But do not stop! Let's probe the matter fully,
since in your Nothingness I hope to find my All.

Related Characters: Heinrich Faust (speaker), Mephistopheles

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 6249-6256

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mephistopheles (who's been tasked with summoning Paris and Helen to the Emperor's court) explains to Faust that he's about to enter into a mysterious zone in which there's no space or time. This space, the land of the "Mothers," will be lonely and foreign to Faust--it will be, in essence, Nothingness incarnate. Faust senses that Mephistopheles is manipulating him into the world of Nothingness in order to bring out Helen and Paris for him--Faust compares himself to a cat pulling out hot chestnuts from a fire because the cat's owner is too scared to do so himself. Thus,Faust shoots back that he hopes to find enlightenment in Nothingness: in fact, he hopes to find All there. He's not afraid of doing Mephistopheles' dirty work for him.

The passage is exceptionally confusing because of the way it treats "nothing" like a 'thing." Mephistopheles is the master of nothingness, because in Christian theology, evil is considered the absence of good; i.e., nothingness itself. And yet in the realm of nothingness, from which Faust and Mephistopheles will summon Paris and Helen of Troy, Faust hopes to find glory--a boundless sense of power, creativity, and domination.

Part 2: Act 1: Knight's Hall Quotes

❝ Does some more inward sense than sight perceive
the overflowing fountainhead of beauty?
My dread ordeal is gloriously rewarded.
How circumscribed and empty was my world before!
Now, with this priesthood, it at last becomes
desirable and has a lasting basis.

Related Characters: Heinrich Faust (speaker), Helen of Troy

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 6487-6492

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faust comes face-to-face with the spirit of Helen of Troy, the famously beautiful woman who indirectly caused the Trojan War. Helen of Troy is the embodiment of the Classical ideal: the Greco-Roman model of what is beautiful and desirable. Faust is immediately drawn to Helen of Troy; he finds her enchanting, the very thing his soul has desired all along, and he falls instantly in love.

It's been argued that Faust, the embodiment of European Enlightenment and Romanticism, is naturally attracted to Helen, the embodiment of the Greco-Roman tradition, because the former could not exist without the latter. The passage has also been taken as a symbol for the "marriage" between modern Europe and its classic past: during Goethe's lifetime, there was a tremendous revival of interest in the classical era. Other critics, such as Franco Moretti, have interpreted the scene as a veiled metaphor for the wave of colonization and imperial domination that began during Goethe's lifetime: just as Faust comes to dominate the beautiful, exotic Helen, so did the great European nations of Goethe's lifetime come to dominate the other countries of the world, from which European culture was "descended."

Part 2: Act 2: Laboratory Quotes

❝ [Homunculus's vial is] rising, flashing, piling up—
another moment and it's done!
A grand design may seem insane at first;
but in the future chance will seem absurd,
and such a brain as this, intended for great thoughts,
will in its turn create a thinker too.

Related Characters: Wagner (speaker), Homunculus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 6865-6870

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we're introduced to Homunculus, the tiny man that Wagner, Faust's former pupil and assistant, is developing in his laboratory. Homunculus is a human being, and yet he has no true parents, except for Wagner, who has produced Homunculus using "crystallization," rather than the usual process of procreation.

Homunculus has been interpreted as a symbol for the scientific innovations of Goethe's lifetime, an era during which interest in science exploded. Others have noted that the Homunculus--a bizarre, satanic, motherless human being--might symbolize modern, isolated human beings. Homunculus, in any event, represents the unnatural qualities of Wagner's experiments: Wagner has gone against "God's will" by creating a living, breathing creature on his own (although the devil's presence was seemingly necessary to give him the spark of life). Wagner, one could say, has eclipsed even Faust as a scientist and a thinker--he seems almost as restless and arrogant as Faust in his desire to understand the mysteries of the universe and overreach the bounds of human knowledge and pride.

Part 2: Act 2: The Pharsalian Fields Quotes

❝ You'll never learn unless you make mistakes.
If you want to exist, do so on your own!

Related Characters: Mephistopheles (speaker), Homunculus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 7847-7848

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mephistopheles watches as Homunculus, the creation of Wagner, proceeds to watch the trial of two philosophers, Anaxagoras and Thales, as they debate the material sources of the natural world. Mephistopheles warns Homunculus that he'll never learn anything about the universe unless he makes his own mistakes--as if to suggest that by latching onto Thales and Anaxagoras, he'll always be a pupil, never a real thinker.

In ancient Greece, Thales and Anaxagoras were two of the most notable early philosophers, who believed they'd found the substances that made up the universe (Thales famously claimed that everything is made out of water). And yet Mephistopheles' exchange with Homunculus isn't about the universe's structure, but rather the structure of education and free will. Mephistopheles seems to believe that the best way to learn is to be free; to be one's "own boss." One should take Mephistopheles' advice with a grain of salt. Mephistopheles' observations could be interpreted as heretical (since they imply that humans shouldn't worship God, but merely live "on their own") or Christian (since the notion of free will and making one's own mistakes is central to salvation in Christian theology). The ambiguous nature of Mephistopheles' advice sums up his identity as a character who may be doing evil, but who also has some intriguing things to say and teach us.

Part 2: Act 5: Faust's Palace (Before the Palace) Quotes

❝ The worst of torments we can suffer
is to feel want when we are rich.
The tinkling bell, the lindens' scent,
make me feel buried in a crypt.

Related Characters: Heinrich Faust (speaker), Baucis and Philemon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11,251-11,254

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Faust's domination of the kingdom is almost total. He's won control of the land, using Mephistopheles' help. And yet he remains unhappy. He's won the kingdom for himself, and yet he can't quite savor his victory: he doesn't feel that he truly "owns" or otherwise possesses his own property (which he wants in order to pursue his goal of "pushing back the waters"). Faust imagines that he'd be truly happy if only Philemon and Baucis were evicted from their property.

Faust isn't exactly a tyrant, but he seeks total domination of the material world, so he can't stand that Philemon and Baucis stand in his way. He is ever ambitious and restless, as usual, and so always desires more, even when what he desires belongs to someone else.

Part 2: Act 5: Faust's Palace (The Large Outer Courtyard) Quotes

If only I might see that people's teeming life,
share their autonomy on unencumbered soil;
then, to the moment, I could say:
tarry a while, you are so fair—
the traces of my days on earth
will survive into eternity!—
Envisioning those heights of happiness,
I now enjoy my highest moment.

Related Characters: Heinrich Faust (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 11,579-11,586

Explanation and Analysis

Faust has studied almost every field, but in the end, it's political science and city planning that strike him as presenting an opportunity for true, fundamental happiness.

Faust wants to drain a large marsh, creating a huge, green space in which people will be able to work happily and freely. Faust wishes that he could drain the marsh and free the "unencumbered soil" beneath it--such an achievement would lead him to be totally, completely happy; it would be his defining achievement as a mortal man.

In this scene, Faust approaches death, because he's finally said the fatal words, "tarry a moment, you are so fair," that signal his satisfaction. And yet, as we'll come to see, Faust's soul is saved (even though he dies) because he never actually succeeded in enacting his vision of the ideal city. Faust wants to savor a moment in his utopian kingdom, and yet because that moment never actually comes to be--the utopia remains unbuilt--Faust is ultimately saved from the terms of his bargain. His constant restlessness and ambition, which initially led to his deal with the devil, now act as his salvation. There is something eminently Romantic in the manner of Faust's death: he dies striving for greatness, rather than having achieved it himself.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

DEDICATION

As he resumes work on *Faust* after putting it aside for many years, the writer of the drama, Goethe, addresses the misty figures and ideas that appear to him, those he has not yet managed to incorporate into his drama. He feels eager and invigorated to give them poetic form, because they remind him of delightful days past, legends, first loves, and friendship. But he also grieves to think of those he used to know who have passed away, those who heard the early cantos of *Faust* but died before hearing the later ones. The poet is seized by nostalgia. The present is insubstantial to him, and the past becomes his existence.

Goethe is invigorated by the thought of completing the whole of his drama, but he recognizes also that, for those who have passed away, it will remain forever partial and incomplete. His nostalgia for his personal past also mirrors his nostalgia for the historical past, namely for the period of Greek Classicism. He finds this past culture more admirable than either the rational Age of Enlightenment or the impassioned Romantic period during which he lives.

PRELUDE IN THE THEATER

In a German theater, the Manager, the Dramatic Poet, and the Player of Comic Roles are preparing a production of *Faust*. The Manager uneasily asks the other two how they think the German public will react to the drama. He is nervous because, although he thinks the Germans won't expect anything first-rate, he knows they are nonetheless well-read.

The "Prelude" reminds us that dramatic art does not exist in a vacuum, but must always exist within some kind of larger context. Theaters, actors, and audience members all make up the whole of which the script is only part—so it is a part that must be responsive to the whole.

The Dramatic Poet wants nothing to do with the public, however, which he fears will vulgarize his art. He doesn't want to make a poem that is glittering and ephemeral, but instead something worthy of posterity. The Player, in contrast, can only please his contemporaries, and therefore values amusing people here and now. He asks that the Dramatic Poet not hide his excellence, but stage the full extent of human experience, from Reason to Passion to Folly.

The Poet represents the aesthetic and visionary perspective on art, in contrast to the practical, people-pleasing Manager. The Player, a third contrast, is essentially an entertainer. Goethe suggests that an artist must be all three of these things to create a work of art that is of general cultural value.

The Manager reminds the Dramatic Poet that their audience will be expecting lots of action and variety. Only by including in a drama something for everyone will it be a success, he says. The Dramatic Poet retorts that to follow the Manager's advice would be to produce lowly work unworthy of a genuine artist, and he accuses the Manager of deriving his dramatic principles from incompetent playwrights.

Goethe includes a great deal of action in Faust, *as well as an infamous variety of settings and characters. Nonetheless, he is always a genuine artist, and so synthesizes the perspectives of the Manager and Poet, fusing low culture and high culture.*

The Manager assures the Dramatic Poet that his feelings aren't hurt by such accusations. Somebody who wants to be effective, he says, must work with the proper tools. He further reminds the Dramatic Poet that theatergoers tend to be people who are bored, or full after a heavy meal, or more used to reading magazines than listening to plays. In short, they are either indifferent to a poet's dreams or else they are boors. Pleasing them is no easy task.

While the Poet has his eye on eternity, the Manager has his eye on people paying for tickets. Such people, he sensibly argues, are usually too numbed by bodily pleasures to be pleased by a poet's dreams. The artist must remember, then, that he needs to communicate with people who are limited in their ability to appreciate his work.

The Dramatic Poet becomes indignant. He tells the Manager to hire someone else if he expects him to forfeit his fundamental human right to dream and create for the sake of mere entertainment. He explains that the poet's power lies in his ability to harmonize what his heart sends out into the world with the world that returns to him by way of his senses. It is by this power that he breathes life and rhythm into **nature**, and also coordinates the different parts of the world into one general choir.

As sensible as the Manager is, the Poet himself gives an inspired vision of what he thinks of as the artist's role: to harmonize the internal world of the spirit with the external world of nature. In his drama, Goethe plays this synthesizing role, while also aiming to please and entertain his readers.

The Player of Comic Roles tells the Dramatic Poet to manage his literary business like a poet, then. He compares what would happen in such a case to the way that a love affair is conducted. The poet would meet his admirer by chance, the two would get involved and feel boundless joy, only for misery to ensue: good material for a novel. The Manager even instructs the Dramatic Poet to make his play just like this, out of common life, because life is strange and therefore interesting to most people anyway. If he does this the Dramatic Poet will have a play full of lively scenes, confusion, and just a dash of truth, so that it attracts the common people and the elite alike. Those who are young and young at heart won't fail to appreciate it.

The Player suggests that writing good poetry and having a good literary career don't go hand in hand at all. Note that the metaphor of the Poet wooing his reader like a lover foreshadows Faust's own love affairs with Gretchen and Helen, which likewise end in misery. Faust and the Poet are in fact very alike in their dreams and ambitions. Although Goethe entertains us in Faust, *as the Manager says the Poet should, he does not add a dash of truth just for effect. For Goethe, rather, the complete work of art necessarily creates truth.*

The Dramatic Poet wishes for the days of his youth to return to him so that he, also, can be young at heart, when he was constantly inspired to song and was full of untamed passions, the power to hate and the strength to love. The Player of Comic Roles suggests that the Dramatic Poet would need youth back only when embattled by enemies, tempted by charming girls, in sight of victory, or when partying the night away—the Dramatic Poet, however, will presumably not be in such situations again. The Player goes on to say that it's up to old gentleman like the Dramatic Poet and the Manager to set their own goals and approach them at their own pace, and suggests that we never really outgrow childhood.

Though the Poet wishes, like Goethe in his "Dedication," to go back in time, the Player assures him that the strength of youth is not required to create a lasting work of art. With age comes experience, and this experience will enable the Poet to achieve his creative goals. Besides, the Player says, we are always like children in a way, perhaps in the sense that we're always curious, always learning and growing.

The Manager is growing restless: it's time to get to work. He says that the company needs a good strong drink to serve to the public, that is, a good piece of entertainment, something satisfying and refreshing, and that they should get to brewing it. He observes that German theaters let people work on whatever projects they want to. Since this is the case, there's no reason to stint on scenery or stage effects: suns, moons, fire, water, cliffs, birds, and beasts. He orders the company to act out on their modest stage all of creation, from heaven, through the world, to hell.

The metaphor of a good play as a good beverage emphasizes the idea that a play must satisfy not only the mind but also the body. It must create a visceral experience for its audience. The scenery and stage effects may seem merely spectacular, but in Goethe's hands they become symbols for the human condition and, more broadly, for eternity itself, the worlds of heaven and hell.

PROLOGUE IN HEAVEN

Three archangels, Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael, are beholding and celebrating the mysterious splendor of the Lord's creation, **nature**, which is comforting to the angels but also too great for their comprehension. Raphael sings of the sun, Gabriel of the revolutions of the earth, night, day, and the surging of the sea, and Michael sings of the storms that sweep from land to sea and back again, powerful and devastating. Together the angels sing that none can understand the Lord's Being, though His grand creation is still as splendid as it was upon first being created.

The angels rightly claim that no single mind but God's can understand creation as a whole. Faust attempts to attain exactly this kind of understanding, and it leads to his tragedy. The sun represents the eternal life-giving presence of God, the storms represent the destructive powers inherent in creation, and day and night, ebb and flow, represent the natural cycles human beings live and die in.

Mephistopheles (the devil) enters heaven uninvited, though he has been welcomed here often before. He addresses the Lord, claiming to be sorry that he can't offer Him high-flown praise like the angels can. Any attempt at strong emotion on his part, the devil speculates, would only make God laugh anyway. He says he has no remarks to make about the sun or planets, only how mankind toils and suffers, the unchanging little gods of earth who are as odd today as they were upon first being created. The devil tells God that life would be easier for humans if He did not permit them to glimpse the light of heaven, because they only employ their reason in bestial and cruel ways.

Goethe wildly reimagines the relationship between God and the devil. In the play the devil, while sarcastic and negative, is not strictly God's enemy, but is welcome in heaven. The devil also pities human beings, or at least pretends to, which we might find surprising—in fact, he gives advice to God on how to improve our lives: by taking reason from us, which we misuse in being cruel to one another. God, instead of taking away our reason, would ask that we learn our place in the cosmos.

The Lord speaks. He asks Mephistopheles if he ever has anything to say other than criticisms. Isn't there anything right on the earth? He asks. No, Mephistopheles says, mankind suffers endlessly, so that even he, the devil himself, is reluctant to antagonize them. The Lord asks if Mephistopheles is familiar with Faust, a doctor and the Lord's faithful servant. Mephistopheles knows him to be a man who is discontent with earthly life and eager to attain to the brightest stars and highest joys. The Lord says that though Faust serves Him now blindly and ineptly, soon God will lead the doctor into clarity.

Mephistopheles later calls himself the Spirit that always negates—he never has anything positive or affirming to say or do. Although he claims to pity us, he also pulls many vicious pranks and stirs up truly atrocious violence later in the play. It is ironic that God should call Faust blind and inept, for he is vastly more intelligent and learned than anyone else in the play. God apparently doesn't put much stock in book learning.

Mephistopheles proposes a bet: that the Lord will lose Faust to temptation and sin if He permits the devil to gently guide the man. The Lord says only that He won't prohibit Mephistopheles from doing what he will, and He will even let the devil tempt Faust to damnation if he can. God announces that a good man won't lose himself on the devil's path. Mephistopheles considers the bet agreed upon. The Lord tells the devil to return uninvited if he succeeds in damning Faust, for God has no hatred for creatures of the devil's kind, those who prod human beings into activity both bad and good as the devils do.

The proposed bet between Mephistopheles and God (who, notably, never seals the deal, which would be beneath Him) anticipates the bet successfully struck later between Mephistopheles and Faust. A good man, in Goethe's world, is one who, not willing evil, strives tirelessly to better himself. It is ironic, then, that the devils should spur human beings into activity, when activity is what seems to help them avoid damnation.

When the Lord finishes speaking to Mephistopheles, He invites the angels to delight in beauty's living richness, **nature**, and urges them to turn their vague revelations into solid thoughts. Heaven closes and the devil is left alone. He states that he likes to keep on speaking terms with God, and thinks it very decent of Him to chat and be so polite with even the devil himself.

The Lord has created the universe to please both angels and people, and indeed Faust feels most at home and most spiritually full in nature. With characteristic and perhaps resentful sarcasm, the devil talks about God, the perfect being, as though He were just a nice neighbor.

PART 1: NIGHT (FAUST'S STUDY 1)

The scholar Faust sits restlessly at his desk in his narrow, high-ceilinged Gothic **study**. He regrets having studied Philosophy, Law, Medicine, and worst of all Theology, for he feels that he is no wiser than before. For ten years he has led his students on a chase for knowledge, only to realize that human beings can't ever find certainty in the world. This conclusion makes Faust despair. Indeed, he says nothing gives him joy, as his knowledge can't better mankind or make it godly, and he has no worldly riches or honors. For these reasons, then, he has turned to magic, which promises to solve many mysteries, and to explain the foundation and forces of the universe.

God's creation, infinite and beautiful, is immediately contrasted with the cramped, imprisoning atmosphere of Faust's study. Faust is hemmed in by the books that have so far distracted him from searching for real meaning. He knows everything the scholarly, rational mind is capable of knowing, and yet he remains unsatisfied and powerless. Magic, an irrational and powerful art (although a demonic one) is his last resort in transcending the littleness of his own mind. This sets up the theme of reason and passion in the play, as Faust is dissatisfied with his reason and turns to magic.

As much as Faust wants to roam in the moonlight and rejuvenate himself by doing so, he is still **imprisoned** by his worm-eaten, dusty books. He feels anxious and constricted to find himself surrounded not by the living world of **nature** but instead by so much smoke and mustiness, and he thinks of the books as if they were the bones of the dead. He vows to escape, aided by Nostradamus' book of mysterious and magical symbols which the spirits use to communicate.

Part of Faust's problem is that the scholar's life is physically cramping and prevents one from experiencing nature. It is ironic, then, that, instead of going for a moonlit walk at this point, Faust instead opens another book, suggesting that he is not yet prepared for the transcendence he claims to seek.

Faust opens Nostradamus' book to the sign of the Macrocosm: the whole universe in its harmonious unity. When he sees it, rapture and a youthful happiness flows through him. He feels like a god, with total clarity about the being and workings of creative **nature**, how all things interweave as one and work and live in each other harmoniously. Grand as all this is, Faust concedes that it is nonetheless a mere show, and that he can't yet touch Infinite Nature (which he personifies as a woman) and her breasts.

The Macrocosm reveals how everything in nature forms a harmonious whole. Though Faust contemplates this fact, he also yearns to go beyond mere contemplation, and to act on his wisdom. The personification of nature as a woman anticipates Faust's affairs with Gretchen and Helen, through whom he also seeks transcendence.

Angrily Faust turns the pages of the book until he comes to the sign of **the Earth Spirit**, a spirit which Faust thinks is closer to him than the Macrocosm was. He feels brave and ready to experience life and deal with the hurricane of mortal difficulties.

Unlike the sign of he Macrocosm, the Earth Spirit can act in and on the world. Faust is therefore more enthusiastic about its appearance.

Suddenly the sky outside becomes overcast, the moon hides, and the lamp's flame vanishes. Mists arise and beams of red flash about. Faust feels a dreadful chill, and senses that the Spirit he was praying to has come. Faust demands that it reveal itself. He orders it to obey, even if the price for the Spirit revealing itself should be Faust's own life. In a flash of reddish flame, **the Earth Spirit** appears.

Faust has underestimated the Earth Spirit's power. Far from being in any way akin to the scholar, the spirit is powerful and even menacing. The forces operative in nature can, after all, be hostile to the human will. With the Earth Spirit's appearance the theme of parts and wholes becomes more apparent, as Faust will soon be forced to face his own limitations in the face of all creation as a harmonious whole.

Faust turns away in fear. **The Earth Spirit** wonders whether the frightful worm now in his presence could possibly be the demigod whose ringing voice summoned him. Faust rallies and announces himself as the Spirit's peer. The Spirit then sings out that like a storm he oversees the constant change of the physical world, working at the loom of time to fashion the living garment of God. Faust says that he feels close to the industrious Earth Spirit, but the Spirit disowns him, disappearing, which distresses Faust.

The Earth Spirit symbolizes the active forces of nature as well as the natural cycles. While easy to contemplate from afar, in person these forces are terrifying, which Faust learns firsthand. He should be careful what he wishes for. Faust at first cowers before the Spirit, then arrogantly claims to be its peer. It won't be till the end of the play, however, that Faust really masters nature.

There is a knocking at **the study** door. Faust curses at being interrupted during his happiest moment of most plentiful visions. Faust opens the door, and it is the gowned and night-capped Wagner, Faust's assistant in scholarship, who heard his master thundering out what he supposes was a Greek tragedy. Wagner says he wishes he were a better reciter and rhetorician, but how can he be, he asks, when he only observes people from afar? Faust says that affecting people with rhetoric requires passion, innate force, and heart. Wagner responds that delivery alone can make a speech a hit, and acknowledges that he has much to learn.

It is ironic that Faust's "happiest moment" is as terrifying and ultimately unsatisfying as his encounter with the Earth Spirit. The reference to Greek tragedy foreshadows Faust's later love for the Greek beauty Helen, and the scene of Classical Walpurgis Night, which is set in Greece. Faust, unlike his bookish and rationalistic fellow-scholars, understands the importance of passion in affecting others. But passion, Goethe suggests, must always serve truth.

Faust disparages the pretty speeches that Wagner admires, and the two begin debating the values of learning and knowledge. Faust says that the only thing of value one can learn comes from one's own soul, while Wagner defends book learning as enabling people to enter into the spirit of ages past. Faust in turn dismisses history as a trash bin, full of excellent maxims suitable only for puppets to speak. He doesn't think that what the world calls knowledge is really knowledge at all.

Faust's claim that only our own souls produce things of value is a Romantic attitude, and one that the play as a whole challenges. Historical Greece, for example, provides not just excellent maxims for puppets to repeat, but also a valuable model for how human beings can live in the world. At the same time, mere book learning can deprive one of passion and experience.

It is getting late, and Faust proposes that the two stop their debate for now. Wagner would have liked to stay up longer discussing learned matters. He asks Faust if tomorrow, Easter Sunday, Wagner can ask Faust more questions, for he would like to know everything. With that, Wagner takes his leave.

Wagner is energetic and bright, an endless learner—much as Faust must have been as a younger man. Easter is the day of Jesus's resurrection from the grave, a day of rebirth and renewal for both soul and nature in the Christian worldview.

Alone, Faust thinks about how greedy for superficialities Wagner is, and resents him for knocking when he, Faust, was surrounded by inspiration. He is also grateful to Wagner in a way, however, because he feared that **the Earth Spirit** would destroy his mind, as it was so great and it made Faust feel so small. He regrets having been so arrogant as to claim himself the Spirit's peer, and wonders who will teach him now. Once Faust's Imagination soared, but now his joys are distracted by mundane cares. These cares take many forms for mankind: house and home, wife and child, fire, water, dagger, and poison.

The play does not represent Wagner as being especially superficial, so Faust's condemnation of him is more a condemnation of intellectualism in general. In a rare moment of humility and vulnerability, Faust confesses that the Earth Spirit made him feel small, weak, and insignificant, which suggests why he does not summon the Spirit again. None of the cares that Faust lists really have any bearing on his case. His chief care at this point is more his own ego than anything else.

Faust despairs of ever being godlike, cramped as he is by countless useless things. He addresses a skull among his possessions, whose brain he suspects went wretchedly astray. Faust feels that the secrets of **Nature** can never be understood, not even with the implements of learning he inherited from his father. Faust goes on to say that what is inherited but does not serve a purpose becomes burdensome. When the moment for action comes, we can only use what the moment itself provides.

Faust implicitly contrasts his ambition to be a perfect god with the inevitable human fate of death, represented by the skull, which is proof of our imperfection. Faust's observations about inheritance are, in part, a reference to Medieval academic culture, which relied excessively on old or ancient intellectual authority. Faust finds such authority a burden.

Suddenly, Faust's eye is caught by a vial in his possession that contains a poisonous extract. The sight of it makes Faust feel as though he's been transported to the open sea, as though fiery chariots are approaching him. Faust intends to kill himself by drinking the contents of this vial. He thinks this will prove his bravery in the face of heaven and hell.

This vial of poison anticipates the poison that kills Gretchen's mother, as well as the vial in which Homunculus is created. While Homunculus seeks to escape from his vial to achieve existence, Faust considers drinking from the vial here to escape existence.

Right as Faust prepares to drink, however, he hears church bells and a choir of angels, women, and disciples singing of Christ's resurrection, and with Him all mankind. So Easter day is announced. Faust takes the vial of poison from his lips. Even though he lacks faith, he is nonetheless reminded of joyous tears and spring freedom, and is so moved that he resolves to keep living. The scene closes with the choir of disciples bemoaning that they are still on earth while their master Christ is in heaven, and a choir of angels comforting the living by singing of Christ's nearness.

As Jesus was resurrected on this day, so too does Faust choose life over death upon hearing the church bells and choir heralding Easter. Whereas the Earth Spirit distances itself from Faust, Christ, the angels assure us, is very near, and at the end of the play Faust does indeed follow Jesus's path by ascending to heaven.

PART 1: OUTSIDE THE CITY GATE

Outside the city gates, a variety of people are coming from the city, all of them on their way to various taverns. The men are looking forward to drinking good beer, chatting up women, and quarreling. A citizen complains that the new burgomaster (similar to a mayor) is high-handed and demanding, and that things cost more than ever. A beggar, cranking a hurdy-gurdy (a stringed instrument), sings of his misery and the goodness of giving. Still other citizens look forward to discussing war and military matters. A prettily dressed girl dreams about the soldier whom a witch showed her in a crystal ball, whom she hopes will be her love. Soon after a group of soldiers sweep through, singing of war.

This scene presents all of human society in a nutshell: people anticipating physical pleasures like drinking and lovemaking, complaining about the deficiencies of their earthly government, and working to try and make a living. The image of the witch's crystal ball anticipates Faust's own yearning for Gretchen and, in turn, her yearning for him. These people have desires, but seem generally content with how they live, unlike the restless Faust.

Faust and Wagner enter the scene. Faust observes that the rivers and brooks are thawing as old Winter withdraws into the mountains and the Sun seeks to enliven the world of **nature**. From a height, he looks down at the mass of people outside the city gate celebrating Easter. He says they celebrate because they themselves are "risen" like Christ, risen from their dreary rooms, jobs, streets, and churches into the gardens and fields. This is the common man's true heaven, he says, and he feels both human and that he can be himself here.

After leaving his study, Faust seems like a different man. He takes a deep pleasure in the natural world, in its changes (the withdrawal of winter) and in its constancy (the enlivening sun). Although he is not a "common" man, he too seems as though he's risen like Christ from his dead study into living nature. Common people can find paradise in this physical world, however, while Faust cannot.

Wagner tells his master that to walk with him is both an honor for him and an educational experience, though he wouldn't come here on his own, because Wagner hates anything "vulgar." He detests the sounds of fiddling, shouts, and clattering bowls, and says the people carry on as though possessed by the devil. Some villagers are dancing beneath a linden tree, singing about a shepherd who bumps into a girl while dancing and ends up seducing her.

Wagner reveals himself to be a self-limiting elitist here. Instead of learning from real life and taking pleasure in being around nature and other people, he wishes he were back in his study with his books. Ironically, his master is soon to partner up with the devil, whose influence decidedly does not make one want to sing and dance.

An old peasant comes upon Faust and Wagner. He tells Faust that it is good of him to be out and about with the ordinary folk. He offers Faust a drink from his tankard, which Faust accepts with thanks. Meanwhile, more villagers come and form a circle around the two scholars. The old peasant recalls how Faust's father cured the village of the plague, and how Faust as a boy accompanied him, coming out of every stricken house unharmed, protected by God above. The villagers wish Faust good health, and he tells them to instead thank God, who teaches us to help one another.

Unlike Wagner, Faust enjoys the company of ordinary people, and so he is much better rounded than his assistant is. Moreover, his manic desire for transcendence seems to recede in this scene as he enjoys the company of other people and the bodily pleasure of drink. Faust tells us earlier that he does not believe in God, but he seems so moved to happiness by nature that he feels comfortable invoking God here.

Faust and Wagner resume their walk. Wagner is impressed by how much the villagers respect Faust. The two make their way to a large stone, where Faust says he has agonized in the past, praying and fasting. He tells Wagner that he hears in the people's praise only derision, for neither he nor his father deserve such respect. His father, he explains, was an alchemist, who during the plague brewed a medicine that actually killed the patients who drank it. He suspects that with that poison in hand he and his father did more harm than the plague itself.

An alchemist was a pseudoscientist who sought to create the philosopher's stone, a substance said to turn base metals to gold and also to grant human beings immortality. Either for profit or to experiment with live patients, Faust's father immorally gave those in his care a poison—just as his son will seek to profit materially and spiritually from his deal with the devil.

Wagner wonders how Faust can be disturbed at all by his father's actions, seeing as how he was only laboring in his profession honestly and adding to human knowledge. Faust says that what we know does nothing for us, and what we need is precisely what we don't know. He doesn't want to let such thoughts spoil the day's beauty, however. As night falls he surveys **nature**, the greenery, the cottages, the sun, the peaks and valleys, and the brooks and rivers. He says that in all human beings there is a desire to soar like the birds. Wagner says he has never felt that way, and he prefers the pages of his books.

Wagner believes in the rational pursuit of knowledge no matter the cost, a belief shared by some supporters of the rationalistic and scientific Age of Enlightenment. But, as Mephistopheles tells God, reason can lead us into acts of bestial cruelty. Faust's love for nature is deeply associated with his sense that all people desire meaning. One implication of this is that people should not be treated as mere science experiments.

Faust retorts that Wagner only knows one desire, whereas he himself has two souls at once: a sensual one that grips the earth, and another that wants to struggle from the dust to the heights. He wishes for a magic cloak that could take him anywhere. Wagner warns him not to invoke the devil and spirits who are eager to do harm—even though such spirits might murmur like angels to disguise their lies. It's getting dark, and Wagner says that it is time to go home.

Faust's two souls—the sensual soul that loves the earth, and the other soul that desires transcendence—are in conflict with one another. The play, from one perspective, presents how this conflict resolves itself, with the desire for transcendence later being put into the service of Faust's governance of his kingdom.

Faust sees something that holds his interest: a black dog. Wagner says he saw the dog a while ago but thought it unimportant. He identifies it as a poodle. Faust notices that the dog is spiraling closer and closer toward them, and Faust seems to see fire swirling behind it. Wagner just sees a mere black poodle. Faust says that the dog seems to be setting a magical trap for future bondage. Wagner insists it's just an ordinary dog, timid, snarling, lying on its belly, and wagging its tail. Faust calls to the dog and it comes. At last, he agrees with Wagner that the dog is not conscious like humans, just well trained. The two exit through the city gate along with the poodle.

The black dog is Mephistopheles in disguise. Fittingly he takes on a bestial form, and also assumes the form of an animal that serves human beings, just as Mephistopheles will come to serve Faust. Wagner sees only an ordinary dog, either because Mephistopheles is revealing the dog's spiritual nature only to Faust, or because Wagner has no capacity for spiritual perception. As Faust says, the dog is indeed setting a trap, one that threatens Faust's very soul.

PART 1: FAUST'S STUDY 2

Faust enters **his study** with the poodle, feeling that his better soul has been awakened by the night, and he feels a greater sense of love for man and God. The poodle is running about, and Faust offers it a cushion to lie down on by the stove. He then sings of self-knowledge, hope, and life-giving waters, only for the poodle to growl and interrupt what Faust calls the sacred harmonies. All of a sudden, he feels his contentment fading away.

Nature and human companionship have seemingly rejuvenated Faust. Last night he was considering suicide, but now he feels a new sense of love for man, God, and himself. Just as all seems well, however, Mephistopheles in the form of the poodle growls and disturbs Faust's sense of harmony and contentment.

Faust resolves to translate the New Testament, specifically the Gospel of John, out of its original Greek into German. He stops on the first sentence, "In the beginning was the Word." Unwilling to concede that words have such high power, he considers substituting for "the Word" "the Mind," "the Power," and finally "the Act."

"In the beginning was the Word" refers to how God created the world. Faust does not accept that words have creative power—only action does, to his mind. Through action, thought and will can realize themselves in nature.

The poodle begins barking and Faust invites it out of **the study**, only for the animal to transform into a large and horrible Spirit, hippopotamus-like with red eyes. Faust vows to master this creature with the Key of Solomon, a textbook of magic. In the passage outside, Spirits whisper that one of their sly fellows has been caught in the scholar's study, and they discuss freeing it. Faust calls upon the four elements, fire, water, air, and earth, but these fail to cause the creature pain. Faust then casts another spell and gestures toward a pentagram on the doorsill of his study, which drives the creature to swell and retreat behind the stove. It begins to melt away like mist.

Throughout this scene, Mephistopheles barks to distract Faust from ideas of harmony and creation, the better to snare his soul in negativity. Mephistopheles, being the Spirit of negation, is not vulnerable to material elements like fire and water. He is subject only to deeper laws, like the one saying that when he is trapped, as he is by the pentagram, he must submit to his entrapment.

As the mist clears, Mephistopheles enters from behind the stove dressed like a goliard, a special kind of religious cleric. He had been hiding in the poodle all along. Mephistopheles congratulates Faust on his learnedness, for the scholar had made the devil sweat indeed. Faust asks the Spirit for its name, but Mephistopheles says merely that he is a part of that force which, though always trying to do evil, always produces good. He is the Spirit of Eternal Negation, whose essence is sin and destruction, in a word, Evil. Faust asks Mephistopheles why he calls himself a part of something, when the Spirit stands before him whole. The devil retorts that mortals are insignificant fools, who like to think of themselves as complete when really they are just parts of a whole, too.

The devil's religious clothing is doubly ironic: first, in that the devil is the enemy to God's creation, whereas the religious cleric worships God, and second in that the devil, as he himself says, does indeed do good despite himself, as God wills it. In this way, Mephistopheles is in fact like a religious cleric, although a begrudging one. Faust thinks that individuals are whole in themselves, but this is an error—individuals are just parts of the whole. The devil knows this from experience, for his individual negations always promote creation in the bigger scheme of things.

Faust says he understands: since the devil can't destroy everything at once, he must settle for destroying creation piece by piece. Mephistopheles concedes that his business of destruction is not really thriving, and that if he didn't have fire to himself he'd have nothing to call his own. Faust suggests the devil look into a different line of work. Mephistopheles says this is an interesting idea that the two should discuss at a later meeting.

Mephistopheles' comparison of destruction to a business is both a dark understatement and dripping with sarcasm. Businesses ideally create value, whereas Mephistopheles seeks to destroy all value. Faust seems remarkably unthreatened by the devil, who is more dangerous, even if also weaker, than the Earth Spirit.

Mephistopheles assumes he is excused to go, but points out a little problem: the pentagram on **the study** doorsill. He was able to come in because the magical Sign was badly drawn, and didn't notice it as a poodle, but he is now imprisoned by it. Faust is pleased by this surprising triumph. When asked why he can't just leave by another exit, the devil explains that he, like all demons and specters, is bound by this rule: where they enter is where they must exit. Faust likes that even Hell is bound by laws, and supposes it is possible for humans to safely make contracts with such gentleman as Mephistopheles. Mephistopheles says it takes time to work out such arrangements, and requests the freedom to leave.

Although Faust has sought and seeks omnipotence, it is humorously enough through ignorance and error that he happens to ensnare Mephistopheles. A lack of control over his magical knowledge gives Faust control, however short-lived, over the ultimate magical being. Faust seems to think that demonic magic works instantaneously, but things take time, Mephistopheles reminds him. Devils, like human beings, are limited in their capacities for action, and bound by laws.

Faust thinks a devil in hand, however, is well worth keeping, and Mephistopheles trapped himself, after all. The devil consents to stay, but only if he can use his black arts to entertain Faust properly. Faust has no objections, and so Mephistopheles summons spirits who provide intense sensuous pleasure to the ear with song, to the eye with pictures, and to the smell, taste, and touch. The spirits sing of clear blue skies, beautiful heavenly bodies, bowers and vineyards, birds and dancers.

Mephistopheles escapes Faust's snares here, just as Faust's soul will escape Mephistopheles later. The illusions the devil summons parody the natural world Faust so rejoices in. Whereas nature is beautiful and wakes one up, however, the devil's illusions are merely pleasurable and just put one to sleep. The devil often uses what seem like good things to deceive.

At last Mephistopheles dismisses the choir of spirits he has summoned, for Faust has fallen to sleep. This scholar is not yet the man, the devil says, to hold a demon captive. He orders his minions to surround Faust with beautiful visions, to plunge him into a sea of mad illusions. Meanwhile, Mephistopheles summons a rat to gnaw away the pentagram on the doorsill that holds him prisoner. This done, he bids Faust dream on, then exits. Faust wakes, surprised to have been duped. Did he dream the devil, he wonders, and did the poodle simply run away?

Faust often underestimates the devil's ingenuity and cruelty. Contrast the rat that liberates Mephistopheles here—ugly, gnawing, pestilential—with the beautiful angels who save Faust from damnation at the end of the drama. The devil's illusions give Faust a taste for the beauty he can enjoy with the aid of demonic magic—but always such beauty dissolves as in a dream, leaving only confusion and pain.

PART 1: FAUST'S STUDY 3

Faust is in his **study** when he hears a knock at the door: it is Mephistopheles dressed as a young nobleman. Faust lets him in. The devil suggests that Faust get clothes like his so that he, too, can know what life and freedom really are, but Faust despairs at this suggestion. He says he is too old to live for pleasure only, but still too young to live without desire, and each day fails to satisfy a single one of his wishes. He longs for Death to embrace him.

The devil dresses as a cleric to calm Faust, then as a nobleman here to stir up Faust's earthly ambition. Faust does not object to contracting himself to the devil on principle, but only in practice. He is in middle age, a difficult transition period in life, and his wishes are so grand they can't be satisfied.

Mephistopheles asks Faust why he didn't drink the poison on that Easter night then. Faust explains the effect the bells and song had on him. He curses the arrogance of the human mind, the delusion of appearances, empty promises of fame, possessions, greed, sweetness, love, hope, faith, and, most of all, patience. Mephistopheles' Spirit minions lament the brokenness of the world and tell Faust to start a new life. Fun and action is their counsel, the devil says.

That Mephistopheles knows Faust tried to poison himself suggests that the devil has been watching the scholar for a while, waiting to strike at the opportune time. Faust seems to forget that after his Easter walk he was full of love and hope, feelings dispelled only when the negative devil and the devil's illusions entered his study.

Mephistopheles starts talking business: he offers to become Faust's companion and guide through life, his servant and his slave, at the man's beck and call night and day. Faust knows that the devil is an egoist, however, and wonders what he has to give in exchange for these services. The devil says that he will serve Faust here and now on the condition that in the Beyond, or the afterlife, Faust must serve the devil. Faust confesses that the earth is the source of all his joys and that it doesn't much matter what happens to him after death. The devil urges him, then, to take the risk and accept his offer.

Faust's deal with the devil is the central plot point of the drama, yet Faust seems awfully casual in discussing its terms. He says that he cares only for life on earth, but of course he does, for he knows no other life. He has no conception of the heavenly paradise he'd be giving up, nor of the hell he'd be damned to for eternity. He is, in short, grossly shortsighted, confined and blinded by his microcosm.

Faust suspects that Mephistopheles intends to deceive him, however, to give him food that cannot satisfy, gold that will turn to liquid, girls who cheat, or honor that vanishes. The devil says he can indeed offer such marvels, but also things to savor peacefully and quietly. Faust wants nothing to do with idleness and sloth, though. Faust says that if the devil can ever lull him with self-complacency or dupe him with pleasures—if Faust ever says the words, "Tarry, remain!—you are so fair!" about a moment he's experienced, asking the moment to last forever—he'll give up his life then and there. That's his wager. The devil offers his hand, and the two shake on it. If I stagnate, says Faust, I am a slave.

For Faust, spiritual inactivity is self-destruction: stagnation involves living in an imperfect world of time and change as though it were perfect. More fundamentally, this is to accept an illusion as the truth. Illusion is to be shattered, from Faust's perspective, not enjoyed. Right before his death, though, Faust does give us a vision of what would lead him to ask a moment to remain forever: the creation of a Utopian society on earth. However, he does not live to see this come to pass.

For insurance, Mephistopheles also requires that the agreement be sealed in writing. Faust scoffs at this pedantic formality, and thinks his word of honor should suffice, but at last he agrees. A drop of blood on a scrap of paper will do, the devil says. Faust signs away his soul.

Mephistopheles is legalistic. In this way, he is like the Biblical Satan, an accuser, a persecutor who creates laws to punish their having been broken. God creates laws not to punish but to liberate.

Faust looks forward to giving up his search for knowledge and welcoming instead pain and suffering into his life. Mephistopheles advises that Faust enlist the aid of a poet in dreaming up what he wants. Faust fears that he may not ever reach the Infinite, but the devil consoles him that at least he will always be himself. Mephistopheles also says that all things we have free use of belong to us fully: a man who owns six strong horses also possesses their power. How do we start? Faust asks. We simply leave, the devil says.

Faust's search for knowledge has numbed him to feeling. He looks forward to waking up to pain and suffering as a proof that he is alive. Note that he envisions contact with the Infinite as resulting from a quest, whereas Mephistopheles envisions it in the metaphor of mastery and power, as over the six horses. Faust's vision is spiritual, the devil's physical.

Faust hears one of his students in the hallway, but he feels that he cannot face him. Mephistopheles dons a cap and gown to speak to the student instead, and Faust exits **the study**. The devil boasts to himself that Faust will soon be his, for Faust scorns the highest gift of reason. The devil says that even without a demonic contract, the restless man would ruin himself.

Earlier the devil tells God that people only misuse reason in acting bestially, but here he recognizes reason as our highest gift. The devil knows that when used alone, passion and reason can both hurt human beings. Only when they are harmoniously synthesized do they produce the ideal good.

The student enters **the study**. Mephistopheles, pretending to be Faust himself, welcomes him. The student says he is committed to learning, but doesn't like being cramped in these walls and halls all day; he misses the trees. The devil assures him he'll get used to conditions here, as a child gets used to being weaned off of mother's milk. Mephistopheles also advises the student to take courses in logic so that he can both analyze things and see the spirit that unites a thing's parts. The student says he doesn't understand, but Mephistopheles assures him that all will be easier soon, once he's studied logic and deductive reasoning.

This student is warm, but not as intelligent as Faust or Wagner. He longs to be in nature merely to distract himself from disciplined study, not to expand the range of his feeling. The devil promotes reason here only to later encourage the student to pursue superficial and uncritical intellectual habits. Mephistopheles is giving himself the air of sensible authority early on, the better to lead the student astray later.

Mephistopheles goes on to advise the student to study metaphysics, a branch of philosophy, which the devil says isn't meant for the human brain but does make high-sounding words available to us. Be methodical, he says, make sure you don't say anything that isn't from the book, and write everything down. The devil doesn't blame the student for not wanting to study law, because the law shifts from place to place, generation to generation.

The devil promotes bad intellectual habits: valuing big words over meaning, lazily accepting authority, and merely repeating information. All these lead to intellectual complacency, as the devil well knows. Not to study the law is to live ignorant of one's society, which isolates the scholar and limits his social usefulness.

Mephistopheles then tells the student that theology is as much poison as it is medicine. He advises him to study only with one teacher and to swear allegiance to words, the better to enter a state of complete certainty and faith. The student supposes there must be ideas behind the words, but the devil says not to fret too much about ideas: you can place perfect faith in words, he says.

Theology is the study of God and religion, which the devil opposes because it threatens to gives students a yearning for higher things. Instead, the devil preaches a faith in words, which leads, ultimately, to a faith in nonsense and meaninglessness.

The student inquires about Mephistopheles' perspective on medicine. In an aside, the devil says he's grown bored of playing at a sober tone, and that it's time to be the real devil again. He tells the student not to worry about being scientific about medicine, but to let things take the course God wills. He tells the student to project self-confidence so as to make others confident, and to handle women well so as to stimulate passion in them. The student likes this practical advice. Theories are gray, says the devil, but the golden tree of life is green.

Science can be used for good or ill, and is neither in itself. The devil advises the student not to take responsibility for his scientific inquiries, and to have false confidence in them. This is a recipe for disaster, as the earlier story of Faust's medically irresponsible and overly confident father suggests. The devil also promotes acting without knowledge, which is to think only microcosmically.

Finally, the student asks Mephistopheles to write a favorable message in his album (a book in which contributions like signatures are inscribed for the owner), which the devil does. *Eritis sicut Deus, scientes bonum et malum*, the inscription reads, or "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil," a quotation from the Book of Genesis in the Bible. The student withdraws with a bow. The devil says that if the student follows this ancient advice, his likeness to God will some day perplex him indeed.

The quotation that Mephistopheles writes in the student's album is what the demonic serpent told Eve in the Garden of Eden, part of the temptation that led her to eat from the Tree of Knowledge and, ultimately, caused the Fall of Man into hostile nature and a world of death. Following this advice can only lead to destruction, which is just what the devil desires.

Faust enters and asks where he and Mephistopheles will go first. Wherever you please, the devil says. He suggests the two experience the ordinary life first, and then the grander world. This course promises to be both practical and entertaining. Faust worries that he won't be able to adapt to people because he always feels insignificant around them, but the devil assures him that he will soon gain confidence. Mephistopheles then lays his cloak out flat. It will carry the pair through the air, so long as they don't have too much luggage. The scene closes with the devil congratulating Faust on his new career.

Part I of the drama treats what Mephistopheles calls the "ordinary life" of human pleasure and love, while Part II treats the grander world of politics, ideal beauty, and wisdom. Faust says he always feels insignificant around other people, but recall how at home he felt among the villagers only scenes ago, outside the village gate. The devil is having a bad influence on him already, it would seem.

PART 1: AUERBACH'S WINE-CELLAR IN LEIPZIG

At Auerbach's wine-cellar, a lively drinking-party is underway. One of the revelers, Frosch, urges his companions to drink and be merry, but his fellow Brander says it's Frosch's fault everyone is boring like wet straw, because he hasn't contributed anything silly or bawdy to the conversation. Frosch empties a glass of wine onto Brander's head. Brander insults him and a third reveler, Siebel, says that anyone who quarrels should be kicked out. Siebel breaks out into song, and a fourth and final reveler, Altmayer, complains that the singing is splitting his ears.

The scene in the wine-cellar presents ordinary people indulging in bodily pleasures. The revelers, it is implied, repeat the same conversations and jokes every time they get together to drink, which suggests their self-destructive complacency. When they are bored, as now, they antagonize one another like animals. These are people in the devil's clutches already.

Frosch begins to sing a political song about the Roman Empire, which Brander dismisses as nasty; he is grateful not to be an emperor or chancellor. Frosch then begins singing a love song, apparently addressed to a woman Siebel loved once, for Siebel demands that Frosch stop singing. He says that the woman in question made a fool of him and will do likewise with Frosch. He concludes that for being such a slut she deserves a goblin, not a man of flesh and blood. Brander then leads a chorus in singing a song about a gluttonous rat whom a cook poisoned. The poison made the rat run about, feeling as though it had fallen in love, and then die.

These revelers turn to idle leisure in order to distract themselves from responsibility. It is no wonder that Brander, for one, shrinks away from political life, which might require discipline and inner resources. His song about the rat can be read as a metaphor for the revelers themselves—they are the rats, poisoning themselves with drink, lustful but incapable of real human love, living undesirable and brutishly short lives.

Faust and Mephistopheles enter the wine-cellar. The devil intends to first introduce his master to partying and merriment. Frosch suspects the newcomers to be aristocrats because they look haughty and dissatisfied, and he decides to try and trick the two. Mephistopheles tells Faust that simple folk never sense the devil's presence, not even when his hand is on their throats. Siebel welcomes the newcomers, but notices to himself that Mephistopheles limps on one foot. Frosch attempts to fluster Mephistopheles by randomly asking if he had supper with one Mr. Jack, but Mephistopheles slyly plays along, thereby getting the better of him.

An aristocrat, because of his privilege, could acquire an education and cultivate skills that distinguished him or her as an individual. Frosch, who is not an individual but merely a part of a group—basically indistinguishable from his fellows—seems to resent the aristocrat's privilege and so tries to make the aristocratic Faust and devil feel like outsiders. He plays at being sarcastic and negative, but Mephistopheles, the spirit of negation, is too much for him.

Mephistopheles, claiming to have just come from Spain, the land of wine and song, begins singing upon Altmayer's request. His song is about a king who has a flea that he loves like a son, dressing it in a fine suit of clothes and making him a minister in the court. The flea bites the ladies and knights of the court, but these people dare not scratch their itches, much less kill the flea. However, the chorus of the song concludes, we who are not in the king's court are free to kill fleas whenever we feel a twitch. The revelers all cheer.

The devil's song plays to the revelers' populist prejudices. It is about the freedom common people experience as a result of not living in the sphere of political power. Of course, the revelers themselves don't seem all that free, in reality, as they are stuck in a rut of drinking and telling the same old jokes, day in, day out. Only someone who transcends the structure of earthly power can truly be free, Goethe suggests.

Mephistopheles then says he'd drink with the revelers if only their wine were better. The revelers take offense at this notion, that is, until the devil offers to bring up some bottles from his and Faust's private cellar, a plan all heartily approve of. Mephistopheles requests an auger, a drill-like tool, which is duly provided, and he says each man can have whatever he pleases. Frosch asks for a good Rhine wine, and Mephistopheles bores a hole in the table with the auger. He also asks for wax to serve as stoppers. It's only a magician's trick, Altmayer says.

After playing to their anti-aristocratic prejudices, Mephistopheles slaps the revelers in the face, so to speak, by criticizing their wine as inferior. He is asserting his more refined taste over theirs. While they take offense at first, the prospect of drinking fine wine excites the men. The devil's implicit point seems to be that our prejudices come about out of resentment: we hate what we can't have.

Mephistopheles continues taking wine orders—champagne for Brander, and something good and sweet for Siebel—but Altmayer fears that the stranger is just making fools of the revelers and he won't make a specific request. At last, Mephistopheles stops boring holes in the table and stopping them with the wax. He chants a spell makes fantastical gestures. He orders the men to draw the wax stoppers out of the holes and drink their fill. And indeed, when the men draw the stoppers, various wines flow out of the bored holes into their cups. The men are ecstatic and drink cup after cup. The devil warns them, however, not to spill a single drop.

This passage is a demonic parody of the Biblical episode in which Moses strikes life-giving water out of a rock for the parched Israelites in the desert. The revelers here, in contrast, have probably had too much to drink already, and the devil is only inviting them to further excess. Moreover, the wine does not give life, but rather lulls the revelers into illusion and stupor. This is a false miracle, and the men behave like animals in response to it.

Faust tells Mephistopheles that he wishes to go, but the devil says they must wait to see a demonstration of marvelous animal spirits. Soon enough, Siebel spills a drop of wine, which turns to flame as it hits the floor. Siebel cries out that it is hellfire. Mephistopheles conjures the flame to be peaceful, and says that it was only a spark from purgatory. The revelers are now angry with the stranger's trick, and his impudence. It's time for him to make himself scarce, they say.

Faust is not at all impressed by the devil's sadistic trick, nor is he pleased by the bestial folly of the revelers. Rather nobly, he wants to leave, for there is nothing to learn here. The devil, however, is pettily cruel and upholds the law that no one spill wine very strictly. Rather than recognize the moral danger they're in, though, the revelers stupidly threaten the devil.

In response, Mephistopheles calls Siebel a "wine-tun" (a barrel). The devil seems to be just asking for a beating. When Altmayer pulls a stopper from the table, fire shoots out at him, setting him on fire. Siebel identifies this as a work of black magic. He and the other men draw their knives and rush at Mephistopheles. With a seriously-intoned charm, however, the devil bewitches the men into thinking that they are transported to a new, pretty country, complete with a vineyard. The men grab at what they think are grapes, but which are really one another's noses. Mephistopheles chants a counter-charm, removing the spell, then immediately disappears with Faust.

The wine's transformation into fire foreshadows the revelers' damnation to fiery hell if they persist in their pleasure-seeking and idle ways. Far from recognizing this, the men become violent, even though their magical enemy is clearly too strong for them. The devil, in turn, transports the men to a false paradise, where their bodies make up the vegetation. This transformation reveals just how plant-like the men are in life: merely absorbing nutrients, they are inactive and uncreative, not wholly human.

The revelers are confused by Mephistopheles' joke, especially when they realize they're all holding one another's noses. They wonder where Mephistopheles went, and Siebel swears that if he finds him he'll kill him. Altmayer claims to have seen the stranger ride out of the tavern on a keg. The men wonder if any wine is left in the table, but Siebel says that it was all a deception and an illusion. Altmayer closes the scene. Some people, he exclaims, claim there are no miracles.

The fact that the revelers wonder if any wine remains suggests that they have learned nothing from their encounter with the devil. Rather than being spurred to change their lives, they persist in their self-destructive idleness, contrasting strongly with Faust on this point. Altmayer's identification of the trick as a miracle is sadly misguided. The devil's cruel deception is the opposite of a miracle.

PART 1: WITCH'S KITCHEN

Faust and Mephistopheles enter a vaporous, grotesque witch's kitchen where a female ape tends to a boiling cauldron on the fire. Gathered around her are a male ape and several young apes. On the walls are utensils of sorcery. The devil has brought his master here to provide him with a potion that will make him thirty years younger, but Faust does not like the lunacy and foulness of the place. The devil tells Faust that if he wants to stay young without such magic, he should just live a simple farmer's life. Faust is unused to physical labor and too restless for it anyway, so he concedes that the witch will have to help him if he is to stay young.

In the wine-cellar, Faust meets men who behave like animals. In the witch's kitchen, in contrast, he meets animals that eerily behave like humans. This inversion speaks to how magic corrupts the natural order. The violation of nature presented by the humanoid apes deeply disturbs Faust. Although Faust rejects the farmer's life now, he later cultivates, not unlike a farmer, a kingdom and society. Often our quests bring us back to where we started, but with new knowledge.

Mephistopheles asks the apes where the witch is. They say that she is dining out and she will be for a while. Charmed by the apes' conversation, the devil then asks what they are tending in the caldron. A watery soup for the needy, they say. The male ape asks to play dice with Mephistopheles, so long as he himself, the ape, be permitted to win. This ape would think it a privilege to play the lottery, Mephistopheles says, upon which the male ape sings a song about the tumult and fragility of the world.

The devil enjoys the language of the apes because it verges on gibberish, pure sound disconnected from any meaning. That the ape wants to play dice is a rather bitter joke on Goethe's part. It seems that what separates humans from other animals is that we enjoy needlessly exposing ourselves to risk, and would like to profit without having to work.

While Mephistopheles inquires about various utensils on the walls, Faust is gazing into a magic mirror in which he sees the beautiful form of a woman. The devil, now seated in an armchair like a king, promises to find for him a woman just like that. The apes bring the devil a crown, but clumsily break it in two. They dance about with it, singing that they can listen and write, and, if they're lucky enough to make a bit of sense, write profoundly at that. Meanwhile, Faust feels as though he's going mad with desire for the woman in the mirror, and he asks to leave.

The woman in the mirror awakens in Faust the appetite which will lead him to seduce and corrupt Gretchen, and later to pursue Helen of Troy. In the witch's kitchen, the devil is indeed king, but he rules over confusion and impotence, symbolized by the breaking of the crown. Based on Faust's empty books, we may well believe the apes when they say that to write with a little sense is to write profoundly.

Just then, the caldron the female ape is tending boils over and the witch appears in a great flame, screaming horribly. She berates the ape for forgetting the kettle and scorching her mistress. Then the witch sees Faust and Mephistopheles and threatens to torment their bones with fire. In response, Mephistopheles joyfully shatters the witch's glassware and pottery before revealing himself as the devil, the lord and master of witches. The witch apologizes and claims not to have recognized him because he is lacking his usual two ravens. She refers to the devil as Squire Satan, but he prefers to be called Baron, like a cavalier and noble gentleman.

The witch and Mephistopheles both are quick to assert their power and mastery over others. Throughout Faust, *the master-servant relationship is associated with the demonic world, whereas Goethe's ideal ruler is more a servant of his people.*

Mephistopheles then asks the witch for a glass of her well-known elixir, the oldest batch she has, for every year doubles its potency. She happily obliges, but warns that Faust must prepare himself before drinking it, or else he will die within the hour. With the devil's blessing, the witch draws a magic circle, places curious objects within it, gathers the apes together to serve as her reading-desk, and beckons to Faust, who is skeptical of all this hocus-pocus.

That Faust is skeptical of the witch's ritual suggests that he has not yet forfeited his reason altogether. He knows magic has power, but he also knows that much of what passes for magic is merely theatrics and self-aggrandizement.

Mephistopheles shoves Faust into the circle, and the witch bombastically reads several numerological paradoxes from her book—saying that ten equals zero, for example. The devil explains that such self-contradictions, especially that one is three and that three is one, mystify the foolish and the wise alike and propagate confusion, because people hear such silly words and assume there's some thought behind them. The witch continues reading, and Faust feels like his head is going to split. It's like he's listening to a hundred thousand fools in chorus.

The devil appreciates paradoxical nonsense because it can't be rationally analyzed, and therefore it leads us into complacency. The paradoxical identity of the three and the one is an allusion to the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity, which Goethe seems to be criticizing here. Faust is too reasonable for all this, of course, and consequently his head hurts to hear it.

Mephistopheles tells the witch that that's enough, and to fill the goblet. She does so and gives it to Faust, who begins to drink until a slight flame rises from the cup. The devil urges Faust to down the goblet nonetheless, and Faust obeys. The devil then tells Faust to keep moving, explaining that he must sweat if the elixir is to rejuvenate him both inside and out. Mephistopheles also thanks the witch, and tells her to approach him on Walpurgis Night (a saint's holiday, but also one honoring Satan) if she has a favor to ask. Faust begs to see the woman in the magic mirror once more, but Mephistopheles promises that he will see the very best of women in the flesh soon enough. The two exit.

This scene parodies the Catholic ritual of Communion, where the faithful drink wine, which is a metaphor for (or an incarnation of) the blood of Christ and salvation. Faust is gaining only thirty earthly years, however, not eternal life. Ironically he achieves this through demonic means that would like to see him damned for eternity. Now that he is younger, Faust is also able to act vigorously on his bodily passion, as he will soon do with Margarete.

PART 1: STREET

Later, in a street, Faust walks past a lovely young woman, Margarete. He takes her by the arm and offers to escort her home, but she frees herself, saying she doesn't need an escort, and leaves. Faust exclaims that she is a real beauty, all modesty and virtue.

Margarete is an embodiment of ideal innocence for Goethe. This is suggested in her very first appearance in the play, where she rebukes Faust's romantic advances.

Mephistopheles enters, and Faust demands that the devil get him that girl. The devil says that she is returning home from confession. She is an innocent with nothing to confess, so the devil has no power over her. Just because you try doesn't mean you can pluck the flower, Mephistopheles says. Faust calls him "Professor Dogmatist," and tells him that if the girl isn't lying in his arms by midnight, he'll part with the devil forever.

The devil can only act on those who have already admitted sin into their souls, as the innocent Margarete has not. Faust, then, who is not bound by such laws, must seduce the woman himself. But the feeling of love is very strong, and is associated throughout the drama with transcendence, so Faust insists the devil aid him.

Mephistopheles tells Faust to be practical: it'll take at least two weeks to coordinate the affair. Faust responds that if the devil could just get him alone with the girl for seven hours he would not need the devil's help in seducing her. Mephistopheles suggests in turn that Faust shouldn't rush pleasure, but Faust says he doesn't need to whet his appetite. The devil has had enough, and declares that the girl can't be taken by storm, only by strategy.

Goethe emphasizes the weakness of the devil and magic in general, which cannot instantly satisfy the will, but which can only work slowly by rational cunning, craft, and deception. Compare the slowness of Margarete's seduction with the speed of Faust's salvation at the end of the play.

Faust narrows his ambitions, and asks for a mere souvenir of the girl, a handkerchief from her breast or garter to excite his passion. Mephistopheles proposes that he take Faust to the girl's room instead, when she is at a neighbor's house, so that he can anticipate the taste of future joy. Very well: Faust orders that the devil get a present for him to take to her. The devil knows some excellent locations with lots of ancient buried treasure and goes off to do a little looking.

The rational scholar in Faust has been transformed by youth and love into a raging inferno of passion, a truly Romantic lover in his explosive haste. The devil is associated throughout the play with gold, which glitters but has no intrinsic value, just like the devil's own illusions.

PART 1: EVENING

In her small, neatly kept room, Margarete is braiding and tying up her hair. She wishes to know the identity of the debonair, noble gentleman she met earlier in the day, who was none other than Faust. When she exits her room, Mephistopheles and Faust enter, the former snooping about. Faust, enraptured, welcomes the twilight glow that permeates the room, and asks the sweet pain of love to possess his heart. He sits in a leather armchair and announces that Margaret's hand is godlike enough to make this cottage into paradise. He lifts one of the bed-curtains and becomes ecstatic. He came here for immediate enjoyment, but instead he's fallen in love.

Faust does not merely lust after Gretchen, but truly is in love with her. Love gives him a sense of eternity and creative power, the ability to transform the ordinary world into a paradise. In the witch's kitchen, Mephistopheles sits down in an armchair like a king, but Faust rules here, indicated by his *sitting down in an armchair. Gretchen, by metaphorical extension, is his queen and equal in power.*

Mephistopheles warns that Margarete is returning, so he and Faust must leave. He presents his love-struck master with a little casket of treasures and tells him to put it in Margaret's drawers, the better to win her love. Faust wonders whether he should do this after all, so the devil does it for him. Mephistopheles observes that Faust looks glum and gray. The two exit in a hurry.

The image of a casket of treasures darkly suggests the idea of a burial casket, and indeed Gretchen's death is set into motion by the treasures Mephistopheles leaves for the girl. Love transforms Faust, so that he no longer wants to prey on Gretchen like an animal, but wants to encounter her soul honestly.

Margarete enters, carrying a lamp. She is warm, so she opens a window and finds it cooler outside. A feeling she can't describe comes over her. She starts trembling, feeling silly and timid, and she wishes her mother would come home. Margarete sings a song about a faithful king in Thule whose dying mistress gave him a cup of gold, which he cherished until his death.

Margarete's indescribable feeling is an erotic one—she is developing sexual desire, but she is so innocent that she does not yet understand this. Perhaps seeing Faust in the street has brought this feeling about. Margarete's song is about an ideal lifelong love—something she won't have the fortune to enjoy.

Margarete then opens her chest to put away her clothes, and at once she sees the casket Mephistopheles planted there. She opens it and finds beautiful jewels inside, which she tries on. She laments the fact that women are valued only for the wealth they have. And if we're poor, that's just too bad, she says.

Margarete is absolutely innocent, and so she cannot even imagine the jewels in her drawer as being sinister or ominous. She does understand the social fact, however, that financial interests often get in the way of love.

PART 1: PROMENADE

Faust walks back and forth, preoccupied, while Mephistopheles swears vehemently. Faust asks what's ailing the devil, who explains that Margarete's pious mother gave the girl's new jewels to a local priest as a donation to the Church, fearful that they were treasures of wickedness. The priest, of course, accepted.

Margarete's mother is very controlling of her daughter, which no doubt contributes to the girl's naïveté. Though the Church preaches against earthly wealth, it can hypocritically be a greedy institution, as the priest's seizure of the jewels suggests.

Faust inquires about Margarete, here referred to as Gretchen. Mephistopheles says she is grieving about the loss of her jewels and thinking about who may have brought them to her. Faust orders that another set of jewels be brought to the girl at once, and also orders the devil to groom Margarete's neighbor, presumably so that she can be of use to him. The devil obliges. Lovesick fools would do anything to entertain their ladies, he says.

Faust referring to Margarete as "Gretchen" is like using a pet name, and it indicates his affection for the girl. Faust intends to use Margarete's neighbor's house as a private place where he and his beloved can meet. While love is a positive feeling, it can also lead us into temptation, which the devil delights in.

PART 1: THE NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE

Margarete's neighbor, Dame Martha Schwerdtlein, is alone in her house, thinking about her husband. He has left her though she did him no wrong, she says. She always loved him and fears he may be dead. She wishes she had a death certificate to know for sure.

In contrast to Gretchen, who loves ideally, Martha had what seems to be an unloving and combative marriage, founded not on love but on pragmatism.

Margarete enters and tells Martha that she has found yet another casket of treasures more splendid than the first. Martha advises Margarete not to tell her mother about this and suggests that, since the girl can't wear the jewels in public, she come over to her, Martha's, house to dress up in them privately. Margarete again wonders who on earth could have brought these two caskets. Something, she says, is not quite right.

Martha, a morally imperfect woman, promotes secrecy and deception in inviting Margate to dress up in her jewels privately. In this way, she is the perfect tool for the devil to use in helping Faust seduce Gretchen. But Gretchen is now realizing that something bad lies behind her treasures.

There is a knock at the door and a gentleman enters. It is Mephistopheles, claiming to have a message for Dame Martha Schwerdtlein. He excuses himself for interrupting, and addresses Margarete as though she were a lady of high social standing (even though she is just a poor girl), induced to do so not only by the girl's jewels, he says, but also by her noble demeanor and piercing eyes. He then gives his news: Martha's husband is dead. Martha despairs. Mephistopheles says that the man's corpse has been buried in Padua, and he instructs her to have three hundred masses sung for him.

The devil flatters Margarete's self-esteem by addressing her as a lady of high social standing. He is trying to stir her ambitions to transcend the littleness of provincial life and to make her feel above common morality. This will make her more susceptible to Faust's charms. He also lies to Martha in order to gain admission into her home and win her trust so that Faust can later seduce Gretchen under the privacy of Martha's roof.

Martha is troubled: her husband left her no money? No jewelry? Mephistopheles offers his sympathies, and Margarete promises to pray requiems (masses sung for the dead) for the departed. The devil turns to Margarete and says she deserves a husband right away, or at least a lover. She responds that taking a lover is not the custom in these parts. It's still a practice, however, the devil replies.

Martha is less interested in her husband's death than in the fact that she isn't profiting from it. This is indicative of her moral corruption, particularly when compared to Margarete's innocence. The devil continues to prime Margarete to take Faust as her lover.

Martha requests that Mephistopheles tell her more of her husband's death. The devil says he was beside him on his straw deathbed. Her husband, he says, died a Christian, requesting his wife's forgiveness for going into debt and forsaking her. Martha says that she has long since forgiven her husband. But the devil continues: he claims that the husband blamed his wife more than himself, and he insinuates that the husband acquired a huge treasure only to spend it on his mistress. Martha curses her dead husband as a thief and villain. When the devil advises her to mourn, however, she praises her husband as most lovable, even though he had vicious habits.

Sadistically, Mephistopheles tortures Martha by lying to her about her husband's last words. He says that the husband was cruel and neglected his wife in favor of his mistress. This is all just a vicious prank, designed to relieve the devil's boredom. Martha, for her part, sincerely curses her husband, only to hypocritically conform to the social convention that she should at least appear to be aggrieved by his death.

Mephistopheles gets in a final dig, by saying that things would have been all right if Martha's husband had been as tolerant of his wife as she claims to have been of him. He then resolves to leave. Martha requests proof of her husband's death and burial. Mephistopheles says he'll bring a friend to her house as a second witness to establish the truth of what he's said. He then asks Margarete if she'll be here too, and praises his friend (the one coming to verify the death) as worldly and polite. Margarete says that she will only be able to blush in front of him, but the devil replies that there's no need to blush before a king. Martha says she'll expect Mephistopheles and his friend to return this evening.

Martha satisfies the devil's plan perfectly by asking for a death certificate, which gives Faust an occasion to come to her house and meet Margarete again. The devil's digs about Martha's husband, however, have nothing to do with this plan and are just wanton acts of nastiness. Having flattered Margarete and stirred her social ambitions by calling her a lady, the devil then sets Faust up as a king, that is, one able to satisfy any social ambitions she might have. So he lays his snares for the poor innocent girl.

PART 1: A STREET

Faust wants to know how things stand with Margarete. Mephistopheles applauds his passion and tells him that he will see his beloved tonight at Martha's house. They must simply make a deposition declaring that Martha's husband is buried in Padua. Faust doesn't want to perjure himself (lie under oath), but the devil suggests that as a scholar Faust perjured himself often and boldly in claiming to know about God and the world when really he didn't. Faust calls Mephistopheles a liar. The devil says he's not alone, as Faust is about to lie to Margarete about being eternally devoted to her. Faust says he is sincere in his love, but concludes that he has no choice but to lie to Martha about her husband's remains. The two exit.

Faust's love affair begins with a lie about a dead husband and ends with the very real death of Faust's own lover. This suggests that, in a world governed by time, love generally decays. The devil compares scholarship to perjury, which is a bad joke and little more, as lying and being mistaken in one's claims are not the same thing. Mistakes, after all, can be the gateways to discovery. Even so this is another dig from Goethe mocking learning without experience. As noble as Faust's love for Gretchen is, he has put himself in a situation where he can only pursue it by ignoble means.

PART 1: A GARDEN

It is the same evening, and Faust and Mephistopheles are in Martha's **garden**. Martha and Mephistopheles walk together, and Margarete is on Faust's arm. She is self-deprecating in conversation with him, but Faust praises her and kisses her hand, which makes the girl both anxious and pleased. She says Faust must know so many sensible people, but Faust responds that what passes for good sense is often vain stupidity.

The garden represents a kind of earthly paradise, so it is an appropriate setting in which to fall in love. Although Gretchen and Faust come from two very different backgrounds, their love transcends all boundaries. Love becomes a deep wisdom here, to Faust's mind.

As they enjoy one another's company, Margarete tells Faust about her and her fussy mother's modest household. Because they don't have a maid, Margarete has to cook and sweep and knit and sew herself. Her brother is a soldier, and her beloved little sister—whom Margarete cared for after their father died and their mother became paralyzed with misery—is dead. Faust says that Margarete has enjoyed the purest form of happiness through this, but she remembers hard hours too, of waking in the night to feed and comfort the child, and of waking early to clean the child and shop and cook.

Margarete has had a difficult life, in contrast to Faust's life of relative privilege (recall that he has never had to manually labor). Nonetheless, Faust sees in Margarete's love for her little sister the purest form of happiness. This is something of a naïve idealization, of course, and Margarete reminds Faust that with that happiness also came hardship. Margarete understands, as Faust does not, that pure happiness is just a dream, not a reality.

Meanwhile, Martha and Mephistopheles walk together. Martha says that it's difficult to reform long-time bachelors into husbands. Mephistopheles says that all it would take is a woman like Martha to teach him better. Martha asks her companion to speak plainly: is he not at all romantically involved? Mephistopheles evades the question by quoting a proverb, that a home and a virtuous woman are as precious as gold and pearls. This frustrates Martha. The two walk on.

We later learn that Margarete is disgusted by Mephistopheles. The less upstanding Martha, however, attempts to seduce the devil here, and he evades her with riddles and proverbs. He is toying with her rather insensitively, out of boredom and a sadistic sense of fun.

Faust and Margarete are deep in conversation. Faust asks if she really recognized him when he entered the **garden**. She says she did. The two discuss their first meeting, which Margarete says dismayed but also pleased her. She picks a daisy and plucks its petals—he loves me, she murmurs, he loves me not… She plucks the last petal, elated that doing so coincides with "He loves me!" Faust says he does indeed love her. He clasps her hand and vows complete devotion. He feels a sense of bliss that he is sure must endure eternally, for its end would be his despair. Margarete runs off. Faust stands pensively a moment, and then follows her.

Faust asks Margarete if she recognized him to see whether he left an impression on her before being introduced by Mephistopheles as a man of power and wealth. That she did subtly indicates to Faust that Margarete loves him for who he is, not for his social status. Love brings Faust to a state of bliss. This bliss leads him not into stagnation, but only deeper into Margarete's soul. Faust following Margarete here anticipates when his soul follows hers into heaven.

Mephistopheles and Martha reenter. Martha says that she'd ask her companion to remain longer if the evil-minded town wouldn't gossip about it. Then she asks where the young couple is. Down the **garden** path like wanton butterflies, Mephistopheles answers. Martha says that Faust is infatuated with the girl. So the world runs its course, the devil says. They both exit.

Goethe introduces the judgmental town here to remind us that even love cannot exist in a vacuum, but is a part of a social whole, as Gretchen tragically learns later. Mephistopheles' image of the butterflies suggests that love has transformed Faust and Gretchen.

PART 1: A SUMMERHOUSE

Faust and Margarete run from Martha's **garden** to a summerhouse. Here, the girl warns her lover that Mephistopheles is coming. Faust calls her a teasing minx, kisses her, and again tells her that he loves her. Mephistopheles knocks at the summerhouse door, announcing himself as a friend. Faust calls him a beast. It's almost time to leave, says Mephistopheles. Martha confirms that it's late. Margarete bids Faust farewell until the two shall meet again, and Faust responds in kind. After Faust and Mephistopheles exit, Margarete says how astonished she is by the many ideas Faust has. She can't imagine what he sees in a silly, poor young thing like her.

Although Faust and Gretchen truly are in love, they are also lustfully aroused, wanting to consummate their relationship with sexual intercourse. This consummation, however, will prove to be the beginning of the tragic end of their love. Love makes lovers feel like they're dwelling in eternity, but sex brings them back into the world of time, birth, and death. Faust sees in Gretchen what, as a sinful man, he yearns for: innocence.

PART 1: FOREST AND CAVE

Faust enters the wilderness alone and addresses a sublime Spirit, presumably **the Earth Spirit**, the one that showed its face in fire to Faust. Apparently that first visit was not in vain, for everything Faust had prayed for has been granted. Faust praises Nature for teaching him to know his fellow human beings and himself. Although he recognizes that human beings can never posses what is perfect, he also feels that in Margarete he at last has found a companion he cannot live without, who makes him swing back and forth between desire and enjoyment.

Faust's love spiritually renews him and makes him feel as though he's deeply a part of nature. He praises the Earth Spirit for this, presumably because the Earth Spirit endows human beings with the erotic urges that lead to love. Faust also has a much firmer sense of his place in the universe now. He must accept the imperfect, which means he can't be a god. This is not a loss, however—he is blissful.

Mephistopheles enters. He urges Faust to enjoy this life of wild solitude but then to move onto something else afterward. Faust wishes the devil would leave him alone. He says Mephistopheles is behaving like an annoying servant who wants gratitude in spite of everything. The devil asks Faust why he is wasting his time alone in **nature**, and says it's very "professorial" of him. Faust says that his solitude gives him vitality. Mephistopheles responds, with a masturbatory gesture, that Faust's lofty desire to merge with the "All" will end in an unmentionable way. For shame, Faust exclaims.

Mephistopheles shrewdly seems to know that human love rarely ends in spiritual idleness, and idleness is what he desires for Faust. Love leads, rather, to cycles of sex, birth, labor, and the like. The devil urges Faust to move on to something likelier to stagnate the great man's development, the more quickly to lead him to damnation. Mephistopheles' crude gesture reduces spiritual love to mere lust and mechanical sex.

Mephistopheles denounces Faust as a hypocrite for being so modest. He goes on to tell Faust that Margarete is in town, sitting in gloom with her overpowering love for him, and he advises him to go to her and repay her for her devotion. Faust calls Mephistopheles a serpent for bringing up the image of the sweetness of Margarete's body, when Faust's sense are already half-crazed with desire.

The devil seems to think that there's no faster way of putting an end to love than through its sexual consummation. This is why he mixes into Faust's spiritual ecstasy the image of Margarete's physical body—he's trying to move Faust to have sex with his lover and get it over with.

Mephistopheles warns Faust that Margarete thinks he has run away, and adds that for all intents and purposes this is the case. Faust replies that he will always be with her, even far away, but that being in her arms would only make him restless and brutal. Mephistopheles cheers Faust for his ardor and again tells him to go to Margarete, to be courageous in the face of self-conflict. In other ways, he says, Faust is fairly well along in devilry. There's nothing so boring, Mephistopheles says, as a devil in despair.

Faust has the sense that his love is pristinely spiritual and that lovemaking can only defile it, and so he seeks solitude in nature. He is conflicted, though, because he wants to maintain the spirituality of his love, but also wants to have sex with Margarete. This self-conflict leads to despair and inactivity, which the devil is attempting to spur Faust out of.

PART 1: GRETCHEN'S ROOM

Gretchen, a.k.a. Margarete, is alone in her room, sitting at her spinning-wheel. She sings about her heavy heart, how peace has fled from her never to be found, and how upset she is. All her thoughts fall to Faust: his poise, nobility, and fascinating words. Were he to kiss her now, she says, she'd swoon and die.

Margarete is distraught that her lover has abandoned her. Being with Faust again would make her so happy that she could die in peace. But, as we will see, being with Faust again leads not to joy but tragedy.

PART 1: MARTHA'S GARDEN

Margarete and Faust enter Martha's **garden** together. Margarete wants to know her lover's religion, but he hushes her. He tells her that he'd die for those dear to him, and implies that he does not believe in faith or church. This upsets her. Faust says that he feels the immensity and blessedness of the universe, and knows this feeling to be everything. He says that names for it, like God, are just sound and smoke. Margarete finds this acceptable, because her priest says something similar but in slightly different words. Faust says that all hearts everywhere say this in their own language.

Faust's spiritual sense comes from his recognition of the universe's immensity, which is grand to consider and stirs intense feelings within him. It is this feeling, moreover, which Faust boldly declares to be the what words like "God" and "love" are actually referring to. This is a very Romantic conception—that what we call God is actually something inside of us. It's also an idea that evolves in the drama as Faust experiences more.

There's a hitch, however, for Margarete. Faust doesn't hold to Christianity, and she's distressed by the company he keeps. She finds Mephistopheles repellent and dreadful, with his expression half of mockery, half of anger. He seems to have no interests and to be incapable of love. Faust praises Margarete for her angelic intuitions. She goes on: when Mephistopheles is around, she thinks she no longer loves Faust.

Margarete is being rather tolerant in overlooking Faust's neglect of society's religious customs and conventions. Unlike Martha, who flirts with the devil, Margarete perceptively senses that Mephistopheles is dangerous. She is the only character spiritually sensitive enough in the play to be repulsed the devil at first sight.

Margarete announces that she must go. Faust asks when he will be able to stay and rest upon her heart and join souls with her. Margarete is worried, however, that her mother might catch the two in the act of lovemaking. Faust offers her a vial of potion. He tells her that three drops in anything her mother drinks will harmlessly put her into a deep sleep. Margarete says that whenever she looks upon her lover something makes her do whatever he desires. She exits.

We later learn that this vial of potion contains a poison, which ends up killing Margarete's mother. It is unclear whether Faust knows this now, or whether he too is being deceived by Mephistopheles into thinking the potion is safe, but the latter is more likely to be true. Margarete trusts Faust unconditionally, and she is too innocent to even be suspicious of the potion.

Mephistopheles enters. He has been watching the conversation and heard Faust lecturing about God and religion, and he hopes this will do Faust some good. Faust calls the devil a monster, incapable of understanding how such a loyal loving soul as Margarete suffers in regarding her lover (Faust) as a lost soul. Mephistopheles calls Faust a sensualist, and relishes Margarete's sense that he is in fact the very devil. He is very excited for what will happen in the coming night.

Faust says that words are empty, which is perhaps why the devil mocks him for saying so many words about subjects of which the scholar is, by his own admission, ignorant. Margarete quite rightly worries about the fate of Faust's soul. Stirred by lust, he goes out to seduce her after this scene, even knowing that the satisfaction of his lust means Gretchen's doom.

PART 1: AT THE WELL

Gretchen and a girl named Lieschen are at the well with their pitchers. Lieschen gossips about a stuck-up girl named Barbara who was scandalously impregnated out of wedlock by a man who ran off. Gretchen pities Barbara, but Lieschen thinks the girl got what she deserved for not keeping busy and for violating social convention. She'll learn to conform and do penance in her sinner's smock, Lieschen says, and if she follows after the boy and marries him the village boys and girls will taunt and harass her.

Between this scene and the last, Gretchen and Faust have sex—suggested by the image of filling jugs with water. Gretchen's fate then parallels Barbara's. Lieschen represents the petty cruelty of society, the ordinary people who are so spiritually deficient that they can't understand or experience true love like Gretchen's for Faust. They think that love is merely lust, and punish lovers accordingly.

After Lieschen exits, Gretchen walks home. She says that once she would have criticized a girl for doing wrong like Barbara. She would have worked herself up about the sins of others and declaimed them with sharp words. But now she's prey to sin herself—and yet what brought her to sin was so good and so sweet!

Love has opened Gretchen's mind—she is less judgmental of other lovers—but sex has taken her innocence, at least in society's opinion. This scene (what is so "good and sweet") is the first hint we get that Gretchen is pregnant with Faust's child.

PART 1: BY THE RAMPARTS

In a niche in the wall there is a shrine with the image of the Mater Dolorosa, the Blessed Virgin Mary in her sorrows, surrounded by jars of flowers. Gretchen enters and places fresh flowers in the jars, then prays to Mary to have mercy on her in her distress. Racked by pain, Mary is raising her eyes to her son Jesus's death. Only she can understand Gretchen's pain, the sorrow that causes her to weep constantly. Gretchen says that the flowers she placed in the jars she watered with her own tears. She asks Mary to save her from shame and death.

Gretchen feels guilty and seeks forgiveness for her sins. Mary is a figure of purity and innocence, and therefore represents what Gretchen was before she had sex, and what she hopes to be restored to through her penitence. As Marys' son (Jesus) died, so too does Margarete's. But Margarete kills her son, and so her story becomes a tragic parody of the Bible.

PART 1: NIGHT

This scene is set in the street outside Gretchen's house. Her brother Valentine, a soldier, enters. He recalls how his comrades used to get drunk and toast to pretty girls, while as he sat relaxed, unconcerned by their bragging talk, until he would ask if there was any girl who could compare with his own sister. The men would all agree that Gretchen was the flower of her sex. Now, however, Valentine fears that his sister's honor has been compromised, and it maddens him to think how she'll be talked about.

By this point in the play, news of Margarete's sex out of wedlock has spread around town, bringing shame on her and her family. It's also quite likely that Margarete's mother is dead by this point, poisoned by the sleeping potion Margarete gave her. Valentine is deeply invested in social and religious conventions.

Faust and Mephistopheles enter, and Valentine swears that if his sister's lover is one of these two, then that man won't escape alive. Faust is tranquilly ecstatic, while the devil is energetic, for Walpurgis Night is approaching. Faust wishes he had a gift for Margarete, but Mephistopheles tells him not to worry about it. The devil then sings a song (accompanying himself on a guitar he happens to have) about a woman named Kate, who loses her virginity to a rogue.

The cerebral Faust is ecstatic to see Margarete again, and oblivious to how he's played a part in bringing her to disgrace. The devil already knows about Margarete's fall, and is surely relishing her suffering. Mephistopheles' song about Kate parallels Margarete's story, and the devil sings it with the sadistic purpose of enraging Valentine.

Valentine advances on Faust and Mephistopheles, cursing the devil's song and breaking his guitar. He says it's time to break some heads. The devil urges Faust to duel Valentine. Faust does so, drawing a sword he carries on his person; he is magically aided in parrying the soldier's thrusts. Valentine feels his hand becoming numb, presumably as a result of magic, and the devil orders Faust to strike Valentine. Faust stabs him and Valentine falls in pain, mortally wounded. Cries of blood and murder are heard, and Faust and Mephistopheles escape into the night.

Mephistopheles is like the playwright and theater director here, coordinating a duel and then scripting the fates of the duelists with malicious glee. Faust has no good reason to fight Valentine. He doesn't even know who he is, it seems, and so we can only assume that Faust fights him because of the devil's bad influence. He came to see Margarete, but instead he's now killed her brother.

Martha, Gretchen, and some townspeople pour into the street, bringing light, and they discover that a brawl has taken place: the murderers have fled, and Valentine lies dying. Gretchen mourns for her brother, but he tells her in front of all the townspeople that since she is a whore now she should make that her occupation. Gretchen is appalled. Valentine says that he knows of her secret lover, claims that soon she will have many more, and foresees the time when all the townspeople will avoid her for being a slut as they would avoid an infection-breeding corpse. She'll be damned as long as she's on earth, he says.

With misogyny and cruelty, Valentine condemns his sister's behavior in the most unforgiving terms. Her life, he predicts, will become a living hell. He shortsightedly sees the world only through the lens of human society and convention, without recognizing the divine scheme of things—the whole of which humanity is just a part. Gretchen must be deeply shaken by her brother's cruelty, which in part motivates her to kill her infant.

Martha tells Valentine to commend his soul to God in his dying hour, not to slander his sister. Valentine says that if only he could lay hands on the scrawny vile body of his sister and kill her, he'd hope to get abundant pardon for his sins. He demands that Gretchen not shed tears. He tells her that she gave his heart the fatal blow. Valentine dies.

Martha is right to remind Valentine that human society isn't everything, especially when one is about to leave it for the afterlife. But Valentine draws all of his life's meaning from what happens on earth, hence his disturbed and disturbing last words.

PART 1: CATHEDRAL

At the cathedral, a mass with organ and choir is in progress. Surrounded by people, and with her Evil Spirit behind her, stands the fallen Gretchen. Her Evil Spirit torments her with memories of innocence. It reminds her of Valentine's death, his blood shed because of her sins, as well as of her mother's death (which is stated here for the first time), caused by the potion which she, Gretchen, gave to her at Faust's urging. The Evil Spirit also implies that Gretchen is pregnant.

Gretchen is in a cathedral seeking forgiveness for her sins. Her Evil Spirit is a figure representing her conscience, pulling her thoughts away from God and the possibility of change, down toward a paralyzing, repetitive guilt. It is in this sense that the Spirit is evil. The Spirit is also concealing to Gretchen the infinitude of divine love and mercy.

Gretchen wants to escape the thoughts the Evil Spirit inspires in her. The choir sings the "Dies irae," a Latin hymn about God's wrath on Judgment Day. The Evil Spirit insinuates that on Judgment Day, Gretchen will be damned to burn in torment. Gretchen tells the Spirit to go away and says that the organ is taking her breath away, that the singing is undoing her heart. As the choir sings on, Gretchen says that the pillars and walls are **confining** her—she needs air. The Evil Spirit tells Gretchen that all blessed souls avert their faces from her in horror now. Gretchen asks the person next to her for their smelling salts (a chemical compound used as a restorative in cases of faintness or headache), and then Gretchen faints.

The imagery of Catholicism focuses a great deal on guilt and the fiery wrath of God. Goethe seems to suggest here that these ideas imprison the soul, when what the soul really needs is liberation into the wholeness of the divine, represented by the natural fresh air that Gretchen so desperately calls for. Her fainting represents her giving into the Evil Spirit. In performance, this scene is very claustrophobic, with the heavy choral hymn underlying the dialogue between Gretchen and the Spirit.

PART 1: WALPURGIS NIGHT

About a year has passed since Valentine's death. It is April 30th, Walpurgis Night—a dark celebration in the devil's honor, held on Brocken's summit in the Harz Mountains of central Germany. Faust and Mephistopheles are hiking in a labyrinth of valleys among welling and plunging waters, elements of **nature** that make Faust feel energetic and alive. He feels spring in his limbs, but the devil feels like it's winter inside of him, and the red moon seems dreary. Mephistopheles summons a will-o'-the-wisp, a fairy-like flame, which guides the two to Brocken.

At this point, Faust does not know what has befallen Gretchen—she has killed her infant and been imprisoned for it—and he is still in love with her. The devil's boredom suggests that the year since Valentine's death has been uneventful for him, perhaps because Faust has been too racked with guilt to take advantage of the devil's services.

As they hike, Faust and Mephistopheles see many wonders, like the glowing, mist-surrounded palace of Mammon, a devil of wealth. A storm begins to rage and Mephistopheles instructs Faust to grab a nearby rock so he isn't hurled to the bottom of the gorge. Witches riding on both broomsticks and pigs approach, all singing in a chorus, followed by warlocks. Mephistopheles, however, is master here, and he tells the mob to make way so that he and Faust can join a small club of naked witches who are accompanied by their veiled elders. It's an ancient practice, he says, to make small worlds inside the great one.

Wicked beings associated with bodily pleasure and blind appetite take to the mountains on Walpurgis Night. Among these are Mammon, the lewd, naked witches, and their pigs. The devil enjoys asserting his power over them, dominated by he is with ideas of mastery, slavery, and indebtedness. He has power here, in this demonic microcosm, but only here—in the macrocosm of the universe he is impotent to do anything but ultimately serve the divine will.

With his cloven foot, proof of his identity as the devil, Mephistopheles serves as spokesman for the tongue-tied Faust. First the two approach a group of old gentlemen who complain about how one can trust neither the Government nor the People, how nothing's stable, and how impudent the young have become. Looking suddenly very old, the devil anticipates that the Judgment Day is near, when the physical world will be destroyed and the kingdom of heaven revealed. A witch tries to sell to the devil a variety of objects that have done great harm to people and society, but he tells her that she is behind the times and should sell not objects of the past, but novelties instead.

The old gentlemen are bitter and cynical, which is perhaps a justifiable attitude based on the world they live in, but they, like the devil, are content to just talk negatively, never acting creatively to actually make the world a better place. Buying and selling, which draws the human mind away from higher pursuits, is associated with devilry throughout the play.

Faust hopes his mind remains intact, because he's never seen such a lively carnival as this. Lilith, the first man Adam's first wife—now a temptress and demon—is there along with dancing witches. Faust and Mephistopheles join in with them, with Faust singing about apples in a tree (a reference both to breasts and the fruit which Adam and Eve ate in Eden, leading to the Fall of Man from paradise), and the devil singing about a gaping hole in his tree, which suits him just fine. A mortal who doesn't believe in ghosts approaches, and says it's impossible that these supernatural beings should be dancing together—and yet here they are.

Walpurgis Night is a highly sexualized nightmare, a fitting context for us to learn about the tragic aftermath of Faust's love affair with Gretchen. Lilith, a demon who kills children, anticipates the revelation that Gretchen killed her infant. Lilith is contrasted with the Virgin Mary, whose son Jesus died to redeem humanity. Faust sings about the Tree of Knowledge, while the devil's Tree is one of negation. Knowledge for him is just a pit, an absence.

Faust leaves his dance, disturbed when a red mouse leaps from his partner's mouth. He also confides in Mephistopheles that he saw a deathly-pale lovely girl who looks like his own dear Gretchen (whose fate he has no knowledge of at this point). Leave that alone, the devil advises. He says it's mere sorcery, a woman who appears to every man as the woman he loves. This sorceress, he points out, can also transport her head between her arms. The devil observes that Faust has not yet lost his craving for illusions, and urges him on to a theater he sees, where a play is scheduled to begin.

That the deathly-pale girl can hold her head between her arms anticipates the fact that Gretchen is set to be executed by beheading the following morning. The devil intentionally withholds this news from Faust, however, perhaps because he worries that seeing Gretchen again alive might move Faust to change his life for the better. The devil instead tries to distract Faust with more illusions.

PART 1: WALPURGIS NIGHT'S DREAM

Faust and Mephistopheles watch the amateurish play, staged in the mountains, which presents the wedding of the king and queen of fairies, Oberon and Titania. During the wedding, insects and frogs play in an orchestra and a pageant of characters enters, each one commenting on the devilish event.

This scene, the title of which alludes to Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, *is in large part a satire of Goethe's contemporaries. It serves as a transition from Walpurgis Night back into the action of the drama.*

A young witch, for example, flaunts her healthy nudity. A weathervane praises the delightfulness of the gathering but says it will go on down to hell itself if the ground opens to swallow the wedding guests. Satiric verses announce Satan to be their father. One character, a dogmatist, concludes that the Devil must exist, since he is seeing devils. Another, a supernaturalist, infers from the existence of all these devils the existence of good spirits too. A skeptic says that Doubt is the Devil's companion and so he, the skeptic, is right where he belongs. The orchestra winds down, clouds and mist grow brighter, and the pageant vanishes.

The play is a sensual pageant, full of lustful devil-worshipping and high-flown nonsense. The dogmatist and the supernaturalist, for example, both make unsound arguments in proving the existence of the devil and good spirits, respectively. This is part of Goethe's broader critique on reason: people often try to turn their feelings and prejudices into subtle arguments, when it would be more intellectually honest to have faith in the feeling itself.

PART 1: AN EXPANSE OF OPEN COUNTRY

Faust and Mephistopheles enter an expanse of open country under an overcast sky. Faust has learned that Gretchen is miserable and despairing in **prison**—for killing her newborn child, Faust's own. Speaking in prose for the first time in the drama, Faust curses the devil for concealing this from him and for attempting to distract him with worthless entertainment. He demands that the devil save Gretchen, but the devil says he has no power over a society avenging bloodshed. Faust demands, then, to be taken to the prison himself, where with his own human hands he will free Gretchen. This agreed, the two exit.

It is implied that since the last scene, Faust has searched for Gretchen and has discovered the doom his seduction condemned her to. Although he recognizes the evil effect of associating with Mephistopheles, Faust nonetheless insists on employing his services, as though the devil were a necessary evil at this point. The prose gives this scene a raw, visceral passion and explosive realism.

PART 1: NIGHT: OPEN FIELDS

Dashing along on a black horse, Faust and Mephistopheles see a group of figures by a stone block. Neither knows what these figures are doing, exactly (at least the devil claims not to know): brewing or making something, soaring, bending and bowing, scattering things and consecrating them. Mephistopheles identifies the figures as witches and says that the two must hurry on.

The stone block is the scaffold to be used the next day for Gretchen's execution. Mephistopheles is evasive when answering Faust's questions about the figures on the scaffolding, so some critics think they might not be witches at all, but instead good spirits preparing to save Gretchen's soul.

PART 1: PRISON

Faust, lamp in hand, stands in **the prison** before a small iron door, having stolen a jailer's **keys**. A long-forgotten sense of horror makes him tremble, for behind the iron door is Margarete. Inside she sings in the persona of her dead child, singing about the whorish mother who killed the infant and the father who ate it, and about having transformed into a bird.

Faust intends to liberate Gretchen from her physical prison, but her actions suggest that her prison is not just a physical one, but mental as well. She sings a folk song and reads her own horrific tragedy into its lyrics.

Faust enters the cell and Margarete cowers, afraid that her execution is about to take place, even though it is scheduled for the following morning. She does not recognize Faust, even as he unshackles her. He throws himself down and identifies himself as one who loves her. Margarete throws herself down too, to pray to the saints.

Faust is, in one sense, Gretchen's executioner, for he is the one who introduced so much suffering into her life. She turns away from the thought of her imminent death and prays for divine love and forgiveness.

When Faust calls her name, Margarete recognizes his voice. She feels free and embraces the man she loves. Happy memories of their courtship overwhelm her, so much so that even as Faust urges her to escape with him she lingers and caresses him. His lips are cold, and Margarete asks if he really knows whom he's freeing: a mother-killer and child-murderer. Let what is past be past, commands Faust, but Margarete says she only wants death and eternal rest, and will not leave with him.

Being called by her name restores Margarete to temporary lucidity. Margarete knows, as the calloused Faust does not, that the past cannot stay in the past, but exists in the present, too, and in the whole of time that is eternity. She would escape from this prison only to be in the prison of the world again. Instead she desires rest and eternal salvation.

Margarete tells Faust to leave without her, to save his poor child, and she imagines her mother sitting on a rock shaking her head—the mother who died so that her daughter and her daughter's lover could have their happiness together. Faust says that if Margarete won't respond to reason, he'll carry her away, but Margarete cries for him to take his wicked hands off of her. The sun is rising, and Margarete is committed to dying today.

This scene of liberation becomes a dark retelling of Faust's seduction of Margarete. Faust, gentle and loving at first, becomes brutal, just as he was brutal in acting on his lust. This time, however, Margarete pulls away from Faust and denounces him as wicked. She will not swoon and die from his kisses, but instead on the scaffold.

Mephistopheles enters and tells Faust and Margarete to come away, or else both of them will be lost. Margarete begs Faust to send Mephistopheles out, and the devil threatens to abandon both of them. Margarete calls on divine justice and the heavenly Father to save her and keep her safe. She is judged, cries Mephistopheles but then a voice from the heavens cries, "She is saved." Mephistopheles tells Faust to flee, and the two disappear. Margarete's voice is heard from within, calling Faust's name: Heinrich! Heinrich! This is the end of Part I of Goethe's *Faust*.

Faust thinks the devil is a necessary evil, but Margarete recognizes that he isn't needed so long as one is not concerned with earthly life, but rather with divine justice. The devil's idea of judgment is coarsely human: Margarete has been sentenced by her society to die. But the voice from heaven reminds us that earthly justice is nothing compared to divine justice, and Margarete is granted her eternal salvation.

PART 2: ACT 1: A PLEASANT LANDSCAPE

Several years have passed since the action of Part I. Faust is couched on the grass, amidst **nature**, trying to sleep as twilight fades to night. Small graceful Spirits hover about, singing to calm him, to ease his intense guilt, and to purge him of his sense of horror. The Spirits sing about the sacred ranks of stars, the glorious moon which seals the bliss of sleep, the obliteration of pain and joy in sleep, and the hopefulness of the dawn that begins to break.

Faust has been paralyzed with guilt ever since he failed to rescue Gretchen. He is stagnating, but with sorrow rather than joy. The Spirits of nature, like the wilderness and cave where Faust celebrates his love earlier, remind Faust of how nature nourishes man and in its cycles forgives what is past. This is how hope emerges.

The sun rises, and the Spirits hide from the loud heralds who accompany it. Faust wakes up and feels freshly alive, joyous, and resolved. He looks at the mountains and feels blinded to his own sorrow. He compares this feeling to having your highest goal overwhelm you, so that you turn to the earth for concealment. Indeed, Faust turns to a nearby waterfall with a rainbow rising from it. This, he says, is a perfect symbol for human striving. What we call life is just a colorful reflection.

This moment is a turning point for Faust. It is spring, the season of rebirth, and here Faust is indeed reborn. He lets go of his remorse and wakes up to life again. Nature restores to him his sense of hope and purpose, and he decides to pursue earthly goals, not seek transcendence. The waterfall represents the constant change of earthly life that also (in its rainbow) reflects the constancy of the divine—the sun.

PART 2: ACT 1: AN IMPERIAL PALACE: THE THRONE ROOM

In a palace throne room, the irresponsible, pleasure-loving Emperor meets with his state council, courtiers, and servants, along with Mephistopheles, who took the place of the Emperor's fool after the fool mysteriously collapsed, dead or drunk. He stands to one side of the Emperor. On the other side stands the astrologer, who divines the future from the positions of the planets, a man of great importance if we are to judge by his high position in the court.

To create a meaningful earthly life, Faust turns to politics, supposedly the highest sphere of human activity. The devil is in the Emperor's court to prepare the Emperor to accept Faust's council. The Emperor has a fool on one side, and a quack fortuneteller on the other, both counseling him. It's no wonder his state is in disorder.

Though it is the season of the rowdy, joyful Lenten carnival (a festival which immediately precedes the solemn Christian observance of Lent in spring), the empire is in dire straits. The Chancellor announces that evils haunt the realm: fever, theft, injustice, civil turmoil, flattery, and corruption. A high-ranking military officer says that soldiers are murdering and being murdered, and ignoring all orders. Mercenaries are demanding payment, and imperial realms are falling into chaos. A treasurer informs the Emperor of paralyzing economic difficulties. Even the Emperor's steward says that the palace is running low on food, wine, and money.

All aspects of the empire are falling apart. The people live in crime and misery, the military is insubordinate and ineffective, and money is running short. This is the perfect place for Faust to work his magic and so acquire earthly power very quickly. The Emperor's councilors are very good at listing problems, but are very ineffective at solving them. The conditions here mirror the complaints of political corruption we heard in Auerbach's wine-cellar.

The Emperor asks his new fool Mephistopheles if he doesn't know of some further cause of woe. The devil says he doesn't. He flatters the Emperor's power, and advises that to make up for an inevitable lack of resources he should simply dig for treasure and gold buried by desperate people in times past, like those fleeing Rome during its collapse. The Chancellor (also the Archbishop of Mainz, a city in the Holy Roman Empire) accuses Mephistopheles of not speaking like a Christian, and of overvaluing nature and human intellect. The devil replies that the chancellor is small-minded and blind to possibility. The Emperor tells Mephistopheles to go and get the gold, then, which all his councilors (except the Chancellor) come to agree is not necessarily a bad plan.

The devil, whose qualifications to speak on the matter no one seems to have questioned, falsely assures the Emperor that all is in fact well, and he flatters him. He then makes the bad proposal that the Emperor solve his problems by digging up gold. This is a short-term solution to the empire's problems, a mere distraction that will waste time and resources. The Chancellor opposes Mephistopheles not out of high Christian principles, but because Mephistopheles' naturalistic perspective threatens to sever Church from State and thereby reduce the Chancellor's political power.

Mephistopheles evades the Emperor's request. Instead, to prove that he's not deceiving anyone, he invites the Emperor to consult the astrologer, who assures the Emperor that gold is indeed obtainable. People in the Court doubt him, however, and buzz with a lack of confidence in the devil's plan. The devil assures them that he speaks the truth, and to prove it he says that the treasure may be divined by a twitching of the limbs. All in the court begin to twitch and have uncanny feelings, and they begin to think the devil is right: there must be gold hidden nearby causing them to feel so strangely.

Mephistopheles introduces the gold so that he can later produce Faust as just the man who can help to dig it up. He uses magic to persuade the court that the gold is near, which is all that is needed to fully awake the court members' greed and covetousness. The devil is never more at home than among politicians, whom he can manipulate and tempt to sin with shocking ease.

At last, tempted by Mephistopheles, the Emperor decides to begin looking for the hidden vaults where gold might be found. The astrologer counsels him to wait, however, until the season of the Lenten carnival passes. The Emperor agrees that it would be better to pass the time merrily and then to seek the gold with absolute focus.

The Emperor is shameless about enjoying bodily pleasure, and he is easily distracted from his political duties by the idea of drinking and partying. He is also good at rationalizing his dissolute lifestyle as a way of ultimately focusing himself on leading responsibly.

Everyone exits except for Mephistopheles, who delights in the fact that idiotic mortals will never see that merit and good fortune are connected. The philosopher's stone (a legendary substance which changes base metals to gold and is an elixir of life) could be in their possession, he says, but there would be no philosopher to use it.

People on earth, as the devil observes, think that good fortune often comes about by luck, when in the divine scheme it only comes about when we deserve good fortune. This mistaken worldview results in human folly, which of course delights the devil.

PART 2: ACT 1: AN IMPERIAL PALACE: THE GREAT HALL

In a great hall, a Masquerade begins as part of the Lenten festival. A herald (royal messenger) says that, unlike traditional German festivals—which are full of morbidity, dancing fools, and demons—the Emperor's will be a more cheerful entertainment, in the Italian fashion. He concludes that Mankind always has been and always will be the great embodiment of Folly.

The Masquerade is a sensual celebration not unlike Walpurgis Night. It is also Mephistopheles's opportunity to introduce Faust to the court. The herald, whose job it is to keep order, recognizes the party to be a foolish distraction keeping the Emperor from political duties.

Flower girls enter, singing, and present baskets full of fruits to the masqueraders. The olive branches, grains, flowers, and rosebuds in the baskets discuss their own virtues before the flower girls arrange them in the hall. A mother enters and advises her single daughter that fools are on the loose today and that, if she spreads her lap, surely she can catch one.

The flower girls represent sensual womanhood, the springtime rebirth of humankind through sexual activity. They are one of the many archetypes on display during the Masquerade, which is something like a microcosm for human culture.

Fisherman, birdcatchers, and boorish woodcutters enter and mingle with the girls. Flatterers praise the powerful at the Masquerade, and a drunkard, insulted by the girls, drinks to produce his own high spirits. Indeed, everyone drinks and toasts. Poets enter, some of them satirizing the proceedings and others becoming involved in a poetic discussion with a Vampire, who is visibly fresh from his grave.

The fisherman, birdcatchers, and woodcutters represent the ordinary men of the kingdom, laborers who are interested in sensual pleasure, especially sex. The drunk and the poets are those on the fringes of society, who live in illusion. The Vampire represents a kind of false rebirth, not from death to life but to a living death. This is the kind of rebirth Faust brings about in the kingdom with his paper money.

Characters from Greek mythology also enter, like the Graces (three beautiful sister goddesses, givers of beauty and charm) and the Fates (three goddesses who determine the course of human life), who sing amusingly, as do Fear, Hope, and Prudence. Mephistopheles enters disguised as a two-headed dwarf, but the herald strikes him with his staff. The devil turns into a horrible shapeless substance, which then transforms into an egg, from which hatch an adder and a bat. The adder and bat hurry into the night to reunite.

The characters from Greek mythology are debased here. They are treated like mere amusements and stripped of their deeper cultural value that Goethe so admired. Mephistopheles enters to create confusion so that Faust can enter afterward without a problem. The herald tries to keep order by striking Mephistopheles, but the negative, conflict-creating devil succeeds in his purpose.

The herald sees in the sky a charioteer (here, the personification of Poetry) carried by winged horses, who lands in the great hall and introduces the splendid figure seated on his chariot's throne. It is Plutus, the god of wealth, but actually it is Faust disguised as Plutus. He orders that a great chest of treasure be unloaded from the chariot, after which the charioteer flies away. With the herald's staff, Plutus smites the lock from the chest to open it. Magically, gold and jewelry surge up from its mouth and overflow. The crowd goes wild, attempting to make off with as much treasure as possible. Again, however, Plutus takes the herald's staff, sets it on fire, and he uses it both to drive back the crowd and also to draw an invisible magic circle.

Plutus, the god of wealth, is just who is needed to set things right in the bankrupt empire, so it's no wonder Faust disguises himself as such. But Faust is not providing wealth to all and creating a Utopia— instead he is providing only the illusion of wealth, and this to the Emperor alone, so that Faust becomes indispensable to the operations of the imperial court. The charioteer who accompanies Faust foreshadows the appearance of Euphorion, who is Poetry incarnate, later in the play.

There suddenly arrives a herd of satyrs—part human, part animal woodland gods—and their leader Pan, a horned and goat-legged Greek god of flocks and herds—but this actually the Emperor in disguise as Pan. Dance-loving fauns and materialistic, earth-mining gnomes enter also, along with hearty giants and nymphs who worship Pan as representing the cosmic All.

The satyrs and gnomes represent the Emperor's court. The satyrs are drunken pleasure-lovers, while the gnomes are exploiters of the earth, greedy for gold, just as the court is full of people seeking pleasure and personal gain. Only narrow-minded humans could think the political court encompasses all the world.

Plutus's magic circle opens, revealing a fountain of fire that surges up from an abyss. The gnomes conduct Pan toward it. He stands fearlessly before the fire and enjoys the spectacle—that is, until it burns his beard off and he himself catches fire. Joy turns to agony, and people panic. The herald sees that it is really the Emperor burning. We learn later that it is here that the Emperor signs the note of paper money that Faust gives to him, probably while he's surrounded by fire, copies of which are later circulated throughout the empire, thereby eliminating, for now, the financial crisis.

This scene represents the Emperor giving into the temptation of Faust's easy gold. Here it leads him into the illusion of fire, but later it will bring about the very real fires of war and, presumably, damnation. Just as Faust seduced Gretchen by giving her gold, so too does he insinuate himself into the imperial court by printing the paper money which alleviates the financial crisis. The Emperor does not really burn here—it is only an illusion.

Plutus thinks that there has been sufficient panic. With the herald's staff he summons fragrant coolness into the great hall, and water to put out the fires. When demonic forces threaten, he says, we must bring magic to our aid.

As Plutus starts and then puts out his own fire, so Faust solves the problems he himself causes in the empire, like the rebellion later caused by the printing of the paper money.

PART 2: ACT 1: AN IMPERIAL PALACE: A GARDEN

It is the morning after the Masquerade. Soberly dressed and kneeling before the Emperor and his courtiers are Faust and Mephistopheles, the former begging forgiveness for disguising himself as Plutus and creating the fiery illusion of the night before. The Emperor says he was awed by it, and welcomes many more such entertainments. The devil tells the Emperor that he now has proof that fire is his servant, and he promises him mastery over the seas and air as well. The Emperor is grateful to have such entertainers at his command who can help him escape from this routine world.

The Emperor is so eager for pleasure that he ignores the fact that Faust's fiery spectacle threw his own subjects into panic. This anticipates the point at which the Emperor becomes so pleasure-seeking that he ignores his duties, which leads to bloody rebellion in his realm. The devil reinforces his and Faust's control over the Emperor with flattery and the false promise of mastery. A good ruler, Goethe implies, needs to be content with the routine world.

The steward enters and tells the Emperor joyous news: all the empire's debts are settled. The high-ranking military official follows and announces that the army is disciplined once more. The treasurer says that Faust and Mephistopheles are to thank for these happy turns of events.

Faust has solved the empire's problems by inventing and circulating paper money, the foundation of our own economy. But in the play this invention causes more problems than it solves.

The Chancellor explains: Faust and Mephistopheles came up with the idea of having paper money printed on notes. The Emperor fears fraud, and wonders who forged his signature on the original of these notes. The Chancellor explains that the Emperor signed it himself the night before, and that conjurors made copies of the notes in the thousands, to the unprecedented pleasure of the imperial subjects. The Emperor finds the idea of paper money strange, but accepts it.

It is ironic that the Emperor does not even remember signing the original banknote. He makes crucial decisions for his realm while drunk, a clear sign of his inability to rule his people well. Characteristically, the Emperor accepts a short-term solution to a problem so long as it leads to pleasure now.

Faust and Mephistopheles go on to explain that everyone accepts these new banknotes, and that they're substantiated by the unimaginable wealth buried in the soils of the empire. The Emperor is persuaded. He thanks the magician and the devil for their service, and appoints them masters of the treasury. The Emperor then grants gifts to his officials and courtiers. His fool enters, apparently resurrected, and is at first distressed but soon charmed by the idea of paper money. He says he will dream of his estates that night. Everyone exits except the devil, who says that now none can doubt that the fool has wit.

Mephistopheles needed to introduce the idea of hidden gold earlier so that he and Faust can pretend here that the paper money has real-world value (gold to back it up), which it doesn't. Without even knowing whom Faust and the devil are, the Emperor gives them a high-ranking position in his court. This kind of impulsive, decision-making is typical of how the Emperor governs. Instead of being prudent with their newfound wealth, the Emperor and fool can't spend it fast enough.

PART 2: ACT 1: AN IMPERIAL PALACE: A DARK GALLERY

Faust and Mephistopheles enter a dark gallery in the palace. The magician tells the devil that the Emperor is demanding that he summon Helen of Troy and Paris (Helen's lover in Greek mythology) without delay. Get to work, Faust tells his servant. The devil says it will be costly, for pagans like Helen and Paris live in their own special hell where he doesn't have power. He explains that Faust must enter the timeless, spaceless sphere of strange and majestic goddesses known as the Mothers by enduring dreary solitude. He says Faust must enter Nothingness, and Faust responds that it's there he hopes to find his All.

Impressed by Faust's fiery spectacle during the Masquerade, the Emperor orders the magician to summon Helen, the ideal beauty of Classical Greece, and Paris, the Trojan man who kidnapped her from her Greek husband Menelaus's palace. This started a war—just so that Paris could sexually enjoy Helen. These two figures thus represent perfect beauty and sensual enjoyment at the expense of political duty, respectively.

Mephistopheles gives Faust a tiny **key** that begins to grow in his hand. It has special properties, the devil says. Faust must follow its lead down to the Mothers; the word "Mothers" makes Faust shudder. Descend or ascend, the devil says—it makes no difference. Faust becomes enthusiastic, eager to get underway. Mephistopheles says that he will know he has reached the Mothers when he comes to a glowing tripod. In its light the Mothers will be sitting, standing, or walking. All is form in transformation, he says. Faust stamps his foot and sinks out of sight. Mephistopheles is curious to see if he'll return.

The devil has control over illusion but not over myth, which is the world of Helen and Paris. To access that world, Faust must go into eternal nothingness, where the immortal mythical images dwell guarded by the Mothers. The descent into the realm of the Mothers is portrayed like sexual penetration: Faust uses his phallic key to unlock new life from nothing's womb. In Helen's case, this new life is superior to the life that exists in Faust's current society.

PART 2: ACT 1: AN IMPERIAL PALACE: BRIGHTLY LIT ROOMS

The Emperor is surrounded by princes and courtiers hustling and bustling through brightly lit rooms of the palace. An official tells Mephistopheles that the Court is impatient to see Helen and Paris act out a phantom scene together. The devil responds that Faust is hard at work making this happen.

The Emperor's court wants only pleasure, and they don't have any sense of how much dangerous labor is required to produce real pleasure—like the dangerous quest Faust is now on.

Several women then approach Mephistopheles and ask for remedies to their problems: blemishes, swellings of the foot, and unrequited love. The devil recommends nasty, painful solutions: rub frogspawn and toad tongues on your skin; let me kick you; mark your lover with charcoal and swallow it. People begin to crowd about the devil asking for favors.

People are so vain and so eager for quick solutions to their problems that they are willing to take devilishly bad advice without question, just as the Emperor did in solving the financial crisis. The devil's proposed solutions are worse than the problems themselves.

To get rid of the crowd, Mephistopheles orders the Mothers to release Faust from their spell. Candles dim, and the Court starts to move and assemble in the old Knights' Hall. This hall is richly hung with tapestries and filled with armor, and the devil thinks that in itself it will be enough of an invitation for the ghosts of Helen and Paris.

The devil is quickly bored with tempting people who are easily tempted, like the members of the Emperor's court. Only Faust's soul is a big enough catch to hold Mephistopheles' attention and energy in the drama.

PART 2: ACT 1: AN IMPERIAL PALACE: KNIGHT'S HALL

The Emperor and his Court have already entered the dimly lit Knight's Hall. They are arranged as if to watch a theatrical production. Mephistopheles enters, followed by Faust with a tripod containing a bowl of incense, announced by the astrologer. Grandiosely from the proscenium (that part of a stage in front of the curtain), Faust invokes the Mothers, touches his **key** to the bowl, and summons Paris.

In contrast with the Walpurgis Night's Dream, which was an empty satirical illusion, the summoning of Helen and Paris is imbued with an almost religious dignity. This is indicative of Goethe's admiration for Classical Greek culture. The incense alludes to the Catholic Mass.

Paris appears, and the women in the audience praise him for his youthful vigor and his delicious lips, but the men criticize his coarseness, stiffness, his lowborn air, his femininity, and his boorishness. Then Helen enters. She's pretty but not his style, Mephistopheles says. Faust, however, is enraptured with the beauty he's summoned. He says it makes his world desirable and firmly grounded. He declares his devotion to, love for, and idolization of Helen, along with his madness. Men in the audience lavishly praise Helen, but the women criticize her, for bad proportions, ungainly feet, and for looking ugly next to Paris.

The courtiers don't really understand the beauties of Helen and Paris. Goethe is suggesting that reason and passion have become so disconnected in the modern world that people are no longer capable of admiring Classical ideals of beauty, where reason and passion are intermixed. Faust has never encountered ideal beauty before, only innocence in Gretchen, and he at once falls in love with Helen. The devil appreciates only the ugly.

The astrologer observes that Paris is boldly seizing Helen, perhaps even abducting her. Faust orders the ghost to stop but he does not. Faust vows to rescue Helen and possess her himself. Faust leaps up and attempts to seize Helen. He touches his **key** to Paris. An explosion results that leaves Faust lying on the floor. The phantom figures have dissolved.

Faust, whose desire for transcendence is reawakened by Helen, suddenly feels that he can't find meaning in life without her. He can't just contemplate her beauty, but must possess it. As she is right now, however, Helen is a mere image from the past. Faust will have to bring her into his world if he is to love her.

Mephistopheles hoists Faust onto his shoulders. That's life, he says, and adds that to be encumbered with a fool can't even help the devil. Darkness and noisy confusion ensue as the curtain falls. This is the end of Act I of Part II.

Just as the Emperor leaves his duties to chase pleasure, so does Faust impulsively resolve to leave his position at court to chase beauty. He is still quite spiritually blind and egotistically self-serving.

PART 2: ACT 2: A HIGH-VAULTED, NARROW GOTHIC ROOM (FAUST'S STUDY 4)

Faust is in his former **study**, unchanged since his days as a professor. Mephistopheles enters from behind a curtain and finds his master lying on an old-fashioned bed, pining for Helen in his dreams. The devil observes that nothing has changed—there's the pen Faust signed his soul away with, and there's the gown Mephistopheles disguised himself in when he told the student all that nonsense. The devil takes down the gown and shakes it out. Insects fly out of its fur, greeting him in song, and he puts it on.

Faust is lovesick after discovering and losing Helen, but he cannot pursue beauty until he has more knowledge, hence the return to the study and Goethe's satire of intellectualism. Nothing has changed here—Wagner maintains the place like a shrine to his former master.

Mephistopheles wants someone to play professor with, so he pulls a bell chord, summoning from a dark corridor the famulus (an attendant), later called Nicodemus, who is Wagner's assistant in scholarship. The famulus is frightened of the giant wearing Faust's old woolen gown, but the devil beckons him and he comes. Mephistopheles says he knows of Wagner's fame, eclipsing now that of even Faust. The famulus says that Wagner is very modest and has not reconciled himself to Faust's disappearance. He still prays for Faust's return.

Wagner has taken Faust's place as the leading intellectual authority at the university, and he now has his own servile assistant. The world rages beyond the university walls like a storm, but the university is strangely unchanged and disconnected from reality. The cycle of professor and student never ends, and ultimately it leads nowhere.

Mephistopheles orders the famulus to lead him to Wagner, but the famulus explains that Wagner is deeply involved with a great project and has set a prohibition on visitors. The devil says that Wagner will not refuse to see him, for he himself hastened the success of Faust's former assistant. The famulus exits.

The devil is cunning to say that he hastened Wagner's success. The master-pupil hierarchy and careerism at the university are permitted to interrupt the course of serious study as almost nothing else is. This is one of the university's greatest flaws.

Mephistopheles sits in a dignified pose when the student, now called the baccalaureate (whom the devil told nonsense to many years ago) comes storming down the hall. The baccalaureate complains that his education has been nothing but lies told by the old to the young, with the old not even believing the lies they told. He tells the devil this, and, after a pause, the devil agrees: what's been called knowledge up to now doesn't deserve the name. The baccalaureate goes on to condemn old age as frosty impotence and to celebrate youth as power and freedom. He exits.

Years ago the student unquestioningly accepted all of the devil's advice. Now that he is older, he is disillusioned by his education, which he thinks is so much nonsense (echoing Faust in this sentiment, of course). Ironically, it is the conviction that one knows better than one's elders that keeps the university alive. This dissatisfaction breeds new research and theories which themselves become dissatisfactory in their turn. So the university goes in circles.

Farewell, Mephistopheles says to the baccalaureate, that pompous ass! He imagines that the young man would be much offended to hear that there are no wise and stupid thoughts that have not already been thought. The devil then addresses the younger members of the audience, saying that they may be left cold by what he says now, but when they grow old they'll understand him.

The jaded Mephistopheles knows, like the writer of the Biblical book Ecclesiastes, that there are no new thoughts left in the world. The search for knowledge is just a recycling and representation of old ideas. We're all pompous asses, in the devil's eyes, if we think that we have original ideas.

PART 2: ACT 2: LABORATORY

Wagner is in his alchemist's chamber, **a laboratory** that is filled with a cumbersome apparatus designed for fantastic purposes. He is at the hearth, excited. In the inmost **vial** of his apparatus something glows like a living ember. Mephistopheles enters and Wagner explains that he's making a human being, not by means of procreation but a process he calls crystallization. The vial vibrates, clouds up, and then clears. Success seems certain.

Wagner is a representative of Enlightenment science, which holds that the world is knowable only by reason and experiment. But he, too, is disconnected from the world, and troublingly thinks life is reducible to mere matter. Note that his experiment succeeds only when the devil enters, suggesting that evil magic is required to bring life out of inorganic materials.

Inside **the vial** is Homunculus, a very small human or humanoid creature, making dainty gestures. It speaks, addressing Wagner as its daddy and stating that it would like to begin working right now. Mephistopheles tells it to demonstrate its talents by interacting with Faust, who is still asleep in the other room. Homunculus hovers over to the magician and magically eavesdrops on his dreams: Helen is there, along with woodland springs and swans. It would kill the dreamer to wake into this moldy, ugly room from such beauty, says Homunculus. He says they should get Faust out of here.

Wagner, with the devil's quiet aid, succeeds in breaking nature's laws and bringing Homunculus into the world, just as Faust has broken nature's laws with his rampant criminality. Homunculus is the great Enlightenment achievement, the reduction of the miracle of life into mere mechanical processes. Faust's dream is both sensual and spiritual, as his love for Gretchen was.

Homunculus suggests that Faust be taken to Classical Walpurgis Night, which Mephistopheles has never heard of. Homunculus explains that Satan prefers Romantic specters, the North, and the gloominess of sin, but that Classical Walpurgis Night is like the southwest in Greece, full of the creatures of classical myth and sensual pleasures. The devil is skeptical, but intrigued when Homunculus says that Thessalian witches will be there, as Mephistopheles has a lecherous interest in them. So it's decided: Wagner will stay and attend to his studies while his creature escorts the devil and the still-sleeping Faust to Classical Walpurgis Night. They all exit.

As Homunculus intuits, to properly possess Helen, Faust must not remove her from her historical context, but must instead learn to understand Classical Greece and its culture intimately. The only way for him to achieve such an understanding is by going to Classical Walpurgis Night. The devil has no knowledge of, or power over, Greek cultural resources—he knows only the ugly, and Greece promotes the beautiful. Ironically, Wagner's invention is more human than its inventor in desiring to experience the world.

PART 2: ACT 2: THE PHARSALIAN FIELDS

It is August 9th, and darkness lies over the Pharsalian Fields, where on this day in 48 BC Julius Caesar won a decisive victory over Pompey the Great during the Great Roman Civil War. The Thessalian witch Erichtho presides, anticipating the night's celebration. She says that human beings, who are incompetent to rule over themselves, arrogantly seek to impose their wills on others, and power always meets a greater power, as was the case when Caesar defeated Pompey. Fires glow and redden in the Fields. Erichtho sees a shining light fly through the night and she withdraws.

The mention of the Great Civil War foreshadows the rebellion soon to break out in the Emperor's realm. Erichtho understands that human beings are only a small part of the universe, but they still falsely think themselves capable of mastery—and this causes their arrogant, futile wars. This point will be elaborated on later in this scene, in the war between the Pygmies and the cranes.

From the sky, accompanied by light, enter Homunculus, still in **his vial**, Mephistopheles, and Faust, who wakes upon landing, refreshed just to be in Greece. The three decide to seek their own adventures and split up. Mephistopheles, desiring erotic fun, meets griffins, who argue that the sounds of words reflect the origins from which their sense derives. He also meets riddling Sphinxes who sense that the devil is ill at ease here in pagan Greece. Soon after, he meets sirens too—part-bird, part-woman creatures that seduce men to their deaths with beautiful song—but their singing is wasted on the devil.

The culture of Classical Greece is one where (in Goethe's mind) reason, passion, and nature all existed in harmony. The Northern Germanic culture that produced Mephistopheles, in contrast, separates these elements, leading to unnaturalness of feeling and ugliness. The devil is indeed out of place here. Note that the griffins' theory of language contradicts the devil's—the griffins say that ideas are inherently attached to the words describing them, whereas the devil thinks of words as merely sound.

Faust enters, newly vigorous because of the strength and grandeur of Greece and its inhabitants, even the ugly ones. He asks the Sphinxes if any have seen Helen, and one suggests he speak to Chiron. The sirens attempt to tempt Faust, but he withdraws to look for Chiron. Mephistopheles insults and threatens the sirens, and begins ogling the Lamiae, who are coquettish creatures, part-snake and part-woman, said to devour children. He exits to speak with them.

This is the first time in the drama that Faust has been taken to a world not of the devil's choosing. It is no surprise, then, that he feels so refreshed. While Mephistopheles pursues sensual pleasure, the only part of Greek culture he understands, Faust and Homunculus seek to transcend themselves.

Meanwhile, Faust approaches a River God who is surrounded by streams and nymphs. The nymphs invite Faust to rest, and he experiences a beauty very similar to the dream he had while sleeping in his former **study** earlier, complete with woodland springs and swans.

In Greece, dreams of sensuous, ideal beauty become a reality for Faust. The magician also hopes to rediscover Helen here, not as a mere vision but as a reality.

The centaur Chiron enters, and he invites Faust to mount and ride him. Faust acknowledges Chiron to be a great educator and skilled in medicine, and modest as well. The two discuss Greek heroes like Hercules, before Chiron adds that once Helen rode on his back just as Faust is doing now. Faust is beside himself. Chiron says that Faust may act heroically for a mortal, but in the spirit world his behavior looks like madness. The centaur offers to take him to Manto, a healer. Faust says he doesn't want to be healed, but it is too late, and they've already arrived at the temple where Manto is living, at the foot of Mount Olympus.

Chiron has the upper body of a man and the lower body of a horse, and as such portrays the integration of intelligence and sensation—reason and passion. Horseback riding is often associated in Western culture with sexual activity, which is perhaps why Faust is so excited to learn that Helen once rode on Chiron's back as well. Faust's behavior looks like madness in the spirit world because Faust has no concept of his microcosmic limitations.

Chiron introduces Manto to the crazed Faust. Manto says she loves this man who wants what cannot be. Chiron gallops into the distance, and Manto invites Faust to enter with her into Hades, the Greek underworld, so that joy can be his. The two exit, descending.

Manto appreciates Faust's desire for transcendence and so agrees to help him restore Helen to life.

Elsewhere, earthquake-tremors rattle and rumble, making the Sphinxes uncomfortable, and a mountain rises up to the earth's surface. (It is implied that this is caused by Faust rescuing Helen from Hades, which brings about upheaval in nature). Out of nowhere emerges a society of Pygmies, diminutive people, who begin to settle the mountain, building a forge, furnishing their troops with armor and weapons. A Pygmy general orders the destruction of a nearby flock of herons for their feathers, which will be used to plume Pygmy helmets. Just then, from the sky, an army of cranes enters. The cranes are disgusted by the murderous greed of the Pygmies and vow vengeance.

The Pygmies, often portrayed as pudgy, exaggeratedly comical dwarfs, have no sense of self-restraint. They act impulsively and self-importantly, not unlike their counterparts in the Emperor's court. They attempt to violently master the newly arisen mountain, living as though what is in their reach is the whole universe. They also violate nature in their conquest, killing the herons needlessly. The smallness of the scene provides a clear lesson for how humans look in the divine scheme of things.

Mephistopheles enters the plain beside the mountain. He complains of being uncomfortable with the witches here in Greece, but is nonetheless lured on by the Lamiae. The devil gives chase, only to stop and complain that their tight-laced waists and pained faces tell us how absolutely worthless these coquettish creatures really are, offering only what's unhealthy.

Mephistopheles feels like a stranger in a strange land. He is sexually aroused by the Lamiae, but they are unlike the lustful witches he's used to, which makes him uncomfortable. He enjoys unhealthy pleasures, but the Lamiae seem resistant to him.

The Lamiae invite Mephistopheles to take his pick and choose the prettiest among them, but those he picks are revealed to be less than what they seem: a desiccated broomstick, a lizard, and a pine-cone headed wand. The Lamiae then summon bats to confuse and horrify this so-called uninvited witch's son.

Beauty and ugliness in Greece are idealized and ephemeral, and Mephistopheles is only used to taking pleasure in coarse flesh. Rather than sensually enjoying the Lamiae, they turn the tables on him by making him a victim of illusion, which must be rather embarrassing for the devil.

Mephistopheles shakes himself off, none the wiser, he says, for again pursuing mere sensual illusion. He walks off into some rubble, where he loses his way. A mountain nymph greets him and directs him to Homunculus, who is trying to destroy **his vial** and achieve a proper existence.

Mephistopheles's pursuit of the Lamiae is echoed later when he attempts to sexually engage angels while they rescue Faust's soul. The devil is consistently, and humorously, a victim of his lustful disposition.

Homunculus tells Mephistopheles that he's on the trail of two pre-Socratic philosophers, Anaxagoras and Thales, from whom he hopes to learn about Nature, real existence, and the wisest course for him to follow. The devil tells Homunculus that he'll never learn if he doesn't make his own mistakes, and the two separate.

Homunculus's search for transcendence leads him to fall in with two philosophers. In the play, philosophers are different from scholars in that Anaxagoras and Thales cultivate debate and draw their ideas from nature and experience instead of just reading. Homunculus does learn from these two, despite the devil's warning.

Anaxagoras and Thales enter, arguing about the creation of the mountain on which the Pygmies have settled. Anaxagoras says it was created by fierce fire and an outburst of gas, while Thales holds that it was created without violence, by water. Homunculus introduces himself as one eager to evolve. Anaxagoras says that, for living modestly and like a hermit, Homunculus could be king of the creatures on the mountain, but Thales advises against it, saying that a little world produces petty deeds.

Anaxagoras believes that land forms violently, while Thales believes that it forms peacefully. This debate becomes metaphorically important later, when Faust attempts to create new land by driving back the sea. Anaxagoras suggests that Homunculus should become politically involved. Thales, a more open-minded thinker, argues that in the microcosm, only little deeds can ever be performed.

Suddenly Thales observes that a black cloud of cranes is menacing the Pygmies on their mountain, avenging the herons. Anaxagoras, who has always praised the subterranean powers, now begs the moon to relieve the distress that the Pygmies and the other earth-bound creatures suffer. The moon comes near and explodes and flares, raining down rocks on crane and Pygmy alike. Thales urges the bewildered Anaxagoras and Homunculus not to get worked up, and proposes that the three pleasantly celebrate at the sea.

Anaxagoras only thinks about the earth, whereas Thales thinks about the whole macrocosm of existence. As a result of his limitations, Anaxagoras takes sides in the political squabble between Pygmies and cranes, earth and sky. His intervention in this conflict ironically only results in future strife, as all self-important political action does.

Mephistopheles enters, climbing the mountain where Pygmies recently ruled. In a dim cave he sees an astoundingly ugly and monstrous triple shape, the Phorcides, three witch-sisters who share but one eye and one tooth between them, born in darkness and related to all that is nocturnal. The devil approaches and asks for their blessing, flattering them. He asks the sisters to combine their triple essence in two persons so that he can take on the likeness of the third. This is granted, and Mephistopheles stands transformed into the hermaphroditic Phorkyas, a bit embarrassed to be a hermaphrodite. He exits.

Mephistopheles is drawn to the Phorcides because they alone in Greek culture embody something he can understand: ugliness. He seeks to transform into one of them so that he can play a part in the events to come, which will center on Helen (a devil, after all, has no role in Classical mythology). He is embarrassed to be a hermaphrodite, perhaps because he sees in his new body a sign of his own self-conflicted nature.

PART 2: ACT 2: ROCKY INLETS OF THE AEGEAN SEA

The moon is at its highest point in the sky. Sirens sit on rocks by the sea, fluting and singing. Thales and Homunculus arrive at the shore, the philosopher urging the creature to speak with the prophetic sea-god Nereus. Homunculus decides to take a chance, and he knocks at the door of Nereus' cave. Nereus is enraged to hear human voices, for people seek to be gods but never heed his godly advice. He moves away toward the sea to be with his daughters, the nymphs, advising Homunculus to speak with the powerful shape-shifter Proteus instead about changing his form and achieving a real existence.

Homunculus is seeking at the Aegean Sea nothing less than life. He wants to be transformed from his unnatural state into a natural one. The sea is an appropriate place to do this, of course, because it is the origin of life itself. Nereus recommends Homunculus speak to Proteus because Proteus is a master of shifting his shape, and this is exactly what Homunculus is looking to do. Proteus represents the power and diversity of life.

Homunculus and Thales withdraw to speak with Proteus. They lure him over to them by shining the lamp of Homunculus's **vial**. The tricky shape-shifter comes in the form of a giant turtle and then, at Thales' request, transforms into a stately human figure. Proteus advises Homunculus to achieve his real existence by going out into the open sea, where life began.

Like Chiron, Proteus integrates the animal and the human, the intellectual and the sensual. The devil earlier told Homunculus that he can only learn from his own mistakes, but because he is an unnatural creature, Homunculus must rely on nature outside of himself for his education in existence.

Proteus transforms into a dolphin, on whose back Homunculus rides to the open waters. There his lamp illuminates the grace and beauty in the waters. From afar Thales sees Homunculus' flame burn brighter with passion, till at last Homunculus shatters **his vial** and his fiery being embraces the waves. Everyone praises the elements.

Homunculus goes out into the sea, where he learns the laws of nature to which he must accommodate himself if he is to really live. He lovingly surrenders his unnatural body to the natural waters, becoming one with the whole of nature. This scene foreshadows Faust's ascension into heaven at the end of the play.

PART 2: ACT 3: BEFORE MENELAUS' PALACE AT SPARTA

In the Underworld, Faust and Manto were granted their request that Helen be released from her ghostly afterlife to live again in a timeless moment, though Goethe only implies this. Act III opens in this timeless moment, just after the Trojan War. Helen and captive Trojan women have just returned to the palace of Helen's husband, Menelaus. Helen does not know why he has summoned her: is it to reign as queen alongside him, or to atone for her having been kidnapped by his enemy Paris? She is the prize of war, but is she also a captive? She ascends to the palace. The Trojan women mourn their captivity.

By becoming intimately familiar with the culture of Classical Greece, Faust makes it possible to bring the ideal beauty of Helen back into his world—as no longer a vision but a reality. To live, however, Helen must live in her own historical period, so Faust goes back in time to join her. Act III of Faust *opens on a scene set where Homer's* Iliad*—Goethe's source for Helen, Paris, and Menelaus—leaves off. The Greeks have just defeated the Trojans and recovered Helen.*

Inside the palace, Helen encounters empty passageways at first, and then a monstrously strange form: it is Phorkyas-Mephistopheles, the incarnation of the Ugly. The chorus of captive Trojan women sings about being held in terror's grip at the sight of this hideousness. After maliciously reminding Helen of all the lovers she's had in her life, Phorkyas-Mephistopheles insinuates that Menelaus intends to evilly murder his wife with an axe and hang all of the captive Trojan women from a palace rafter. All are terrified by this possibility.

Faust, as a modern man, doesn't realize that that he cannot possess the ideally beautiful Helen until she has been corrupted by evil—for Helen would never submit to Faust otherwise. It is to this end that Mephistopheles disguises himself as Phorkyas. Disguised thus, the devil speaks of good and evil, the language of Christianity. This confuses and frightens Helen, as such distinctions are culturally foreign to her.

Phorkyas-Mephistopheles sees only one way for Helen and her fellow captives to save themselves: in the hills north of Sparta a great, powerful, and magnanimous lord (Faust) has led a horde of Germanic barbarians in building an invincible fortress. The monster promises to instantly transport the women there if Helen gives the word to do so.

Having made Helen spiritually insecure, Phorkyas-Mephistopheles convinces her to flee her murderous husband and escape to Faust's medieval fortress. The devil might be lying about Menelaus's murderous intentions, of course.

Although Helen senses that Phorkyas-Mephistopheles is a hostile spirit who will change good to bad, she gives the word, and the monster transports all of the women to Faust's fortress. After mists spread and obscure their vision, Helen and the Trojan women find themselves suddenly in a **prison-like pit or courtyard**. They fear they're as much captive now as they were before.

Like Gretchen, Helen recognizes Mephistopheles's hostility, and the devil does change good to bad by poisoning Greek culture with ideas of good and evil. Nonetheless, Helen chooses survival, even knowing that this choice will limit her power and freedom.

PART 2: ACT 3: INNER COURTYARD OF A CASTLE

Helen and the captive Trojan women find themselves in a courtyard faced with ornate, fantastic medieval buildings. Phorkyas-Mephistopheles has vanished. Preceded by pages and squires, Faust appears dressed as a medieval lord, with a man shackled at his side: a watchman who failed to see Helen coming. Faust would have the man executed, but instead requests that Helen decide the watchman's fate. After learning that her beauty overwhelmed the watchman, causing him to fail at his duties, she asks that he be freed, and her request is granted. But she also doubts that her effect on the people around her is altogether positive.

In Faust's castle, Greek culture—as represented by Helen and her companions—is now held prisoner. The devil delivers Helen to Faust to break through the magician's dissatisfaction with life, hoping that he will become blissfully satisfied and so lose his soul. Helen chooses mercy for the watchman, an act that Faust does not learn from, for later as a ruler he will be very severe with his subjects. Helen is not the free woman Chiron described earlier, but now doubtful of herself after speaking with the devil, and spiritually shaken.

Faust announces that he also is overwhelmed by Helen's beauty, so much so that he acknowledges Helen as his Lady, whose coming has won her both state and throne at once. She is showered with chests of riches, and offered all that Faust's castle hides in its depths. Helen asks Faust to come to her side. She tells him that she has seen and heard so many marvelous things, and that she is amazed. She begins completing Faust's sentences, and, deeply in love now, grants him her hand. The two are overwhelmed by joy.

Faust's courtship of Helen is very much like his courtship of Gretchen. He showers both women with treasures, and in both cases is an impostor pretending to be someone he's not. Helen is an opportunist—if she must be a prisoner, she will understand her new world and its language, and she will have power even here.

Phorkyas-Mephistopheles enters and announces that Menelaus with his legions is approaching Faust's castle to attack. Faust hurls abuses at the devil and declares the danger to be just an empty threat. Martial music sounds from within, and Faust's troops, urged by their commander, march out to drive Menelaus back to the sea. Faust's Princes form a circle about their lord, who gives them special commands and instructions, rewarding them generously with land for their loyal service. He then takes his seat by Helen, promising her an earthly paradise and freedom.

After stealing Helen from the culture of Classical Greece, Faust is suddenly besieged, just as Troy was. His spiritual experience leads to political strife. The devil is attempting to interrupt the harmony of Faust and Helen's marriage, but Faust easily succeeds in managing Menelaus's threat. He grandly gives away lands that are not actually his to give away. The devil is excluded from Faust's love for Helen, a love that will live or die on its own merits.

PART 2: ACT 3: A SHADED GROVE

Faust and Helen stand in a shaded grove surrounded by cliffs, obscured from view. Phorkyas-Mephistopheles tells the chorus members gathered around that Faust and Helen have together just conceived and brought into the world a brilliant boy (later identified as Euphorion), a true genius who not only can already walk and talk, but who can bounce from mountaintop to mountaintop, his head bathed in light. The chorus says that this story and the ancient gods in general have no meaning for them. Nothing can affect their hearts that does not have its source in feeling.

The marriage of Faust and Helen, of the Romantic desire for transcendence and ideal beauty, gives rise to Euphorion, the incarnation of Poetry. Euphorion is also modeled after Lord Byron, a Romantic English poet Goethe admired, who died fighting in the Greek War for Independence. Mephistopheles is misunderstood by the Classical chorus because he speaks abstractly, whereas they only speak out of deep feeling.

Faust, Helen, and Euphorion enter. Euphorion says that to see him dance makes his parents' hearts dance, and his parents praise the perfection of their union and their love. The chorus is profoundly touched. Euphorion announces that he aspires to go high up in the sky, but his parents warn against it and so instead the brilliant boy dances with the chorus. Then Euphorion pretends to be a hunter, while the members of the chorus delightedly pretend to be the does he is to conquer.

Like his father, Euphorion is ambitious. He aspires to reach the sky and to transcend his earthly nature. He is not a fully healthy child in this, presumably because Mephistopheles made Helen spiritually troubled before she gave birth to the brilliant boy. Euphorion now hunts on earth, but soon he will want to pursue his ideal into the clouds.

Euphorion singles out the wildest girl in the chorus and catches her, only for her to burst into flames and rise out of sight into the sky. Euphorion leaps up the cliffs to her, even as his parents and the chorus fear that he will fall. He is not content to dream but wants an ever-broader view of the world. He wants to wage war and win. Death, he cries, is an imperative—though he has faith that wings will sustain him.

As Faust pursues ideal innocence and beauty in the figures of Gretchen and Helen, so Euphorion pursues the radiant girl in the chorus. His knowledge that he will die no matter what makes the boy reckless, as does his false faith in his wings.

Euphorion flings himself into the air, radiant, sustained a moment by his garments, but then he falls, like the mythical Icarus whose wax wings melted in the sun. His body falls at the feet of Helen and Faust and disappears. All that remains of him onstage are his garments. The boy's bereaved parents grieve that their brief joy has ended in merciless pain. From below, Euphorion calls for his mother not to leave him in darkness alone.

The imperfect marriage of Faust and Helen ends in tragedy. Unlike Homunculus, who successfully transcends his vial by observing nature's limits, Euphorion attempts to escapes nature's limits and dies in the attempt. Faust's Romantic culture has failed to harmoniously unite with that of Classical Greece.

The chorus laments the beautiful youth's death. Helen tells her beloved Faust that beauty and happiness can form no lasting union. She embraces him one more time before delivering herself to the Underworld, so that she might be with her fallen son once more. After she vanishes, Faust is left standing with nothing but Helen's robes and veil in his arms. Phorkyas-Mephistopheles instructs Faust to cling tightly to these garments so that he can soar aloft on them. Indeed, the garments then dissolve into clouds, envelop Faust, and lift him up, carrying him away.

Faust earlier abandoned the innocent Gretchen, and now he is abandoned by the beautiful Helen. He is now doomed, it would seem, to unhappiness. Helen returns to the Underworld, once again a ghostly image in Faust's culture, to dwell among the failed dreams of Romantic poetry. Helen's garments are still imbued with the Classical spirit of harmony, though, and so the artificial textiles can turn into a natural cloud.

One of Helen's servants resolves to join her Queen in the Underworld, and accuses those who do not join her of having no high purpose, belonging merely to the physical world. This servant exits, and the chorus women who remain celebrate nature, accompanied by satyrs. Wine is consumed, and passions grow wild.

After the high ideals of Classical Greek culture depart from the world, what's left is the merely sensual: drunkenness and base sexual passion. These are the empty remnants of a great heritage.

The curtain falls on the scene. In the proscenium, Phorkyas rises to a gigantic height, pushes back his mask and veil, and stands revealed to the audience as Mephistopheles, as though prepared to deliver an epilogue.

The devil has succeeded in preventing Faust from achieving union with a high ideal Faust had longed for. Perhaps now the magician will satisfy himself with idle pleasure and so lose his soul to the devil per their contract.

PART 2: ACT 4: HIGH MOUNTAINS

Faust, riding his cloud, floats onto a rugged, serrated peak. The cloud separates from him and shapes a figure in the sky resembling Helen. Just then two huge boots plump down on the peak. Mephistopheles steps down from them, and then the boots stride away without him. The devil says that mountains were formed by the sulfuric fumes coughed up by devils in hell, suggesting the topsy-turvy values of the world, and also explaining how devils came to be the princes of the air. He cites the Bible in presenting his account. Faust, for his part, claims that Nature made the globe complete and perfect.

Faust's transcendent quest to grasp an ideal of beauty has failed once and for all. His final vision of Helen is ephemeral and blows away. He must now turn his mind away from transcendence for good, and learn to make his life meaningful based on earthly endeavors. The devil anticipates this, attempting to persuade Faust that the world is not valuable enough to spend one's time worrying about it. Faust disagrees.

Mephistopheles turns to the question of whether Faust has seen anything he's desired in the world. The devil suspects not, but Faust contradicts him. Faust wants to create new land, narrowing the limits of the ocean's expanse and forcing the waters back into themselves (this project alludes to the Biblical account of the third day of creation, when God separated water from land). Easy, the devil says.

Faust doesn't want to give up the rest of his life to mindless pleasures. He wants to create a real kingdom for himself, unlike his bogus kingdom in Greece. He has learned an important lesson: that human endeavors must unfold within nature's limits. We cannot be gods, only earthly rulers.

Just then they hear the sound of distant drums and warlike music. Mephistopheles explains that the Emperor is at war. The false riches Faust created for him by printing paper money led the Emperor to attempt governing and leading a life of pleasure at the same time, which led to anarchy and feuds and rebellion. The devil proposes that he and Faust restore peace by assisting the Emperor put down the rebels.

Faust is now focusing on earthly goals, but his record as a politician is rather bleak—his policy of printing paper money led the Emperor into a life of pleasure-seeking, which is incompatible with virtuous governance. To rule, one must often sacrifice one's own pleasures to duty.

Faust and Mephistopheles cross to the next lower range of mountains and view the armies in the valley below. The devil says that with his and Faust's aid the Emperor's victory is certain, for the empty make-believe of magic provides the stratagems that win all battles. He suggests, moreover, that by aiding the Emperor Faust will get the boundless shore he seeks for his project of driving back the ocean.

Mephistopheles suggests that all war is deception and illusion, an empty exercise in the grand scheme of things. As such, war is a human practice the devil is an expert in.

Faust orders Mephistopheles to win the battle for the Emperor, but the devil says the magician must be the general in charge today. Though Faust knows nothing of warfare, the devil assures him that he has created a war-council: the Three Mighty Men, like those who assisted the Biblical hero David defeat the Philistines. These three—one young and eager for bloodshed, one mature and eager for treasure, one old and conservative—enter, and together with Faust and Mephistopheles descend to a lower level of the mountains.

Mephistopheles is entangling Faust into a scheme that he hopes will lead the man into idle pleasures and sloth. As the Emperor devotes his life to bodily pleasure, so too (the devil hopes) will Faust. The Three Mighty men are vicious and brutal, not the ideal instruments for a man like Faust, who wants to create a just kingdom.

PART 2: ACT 4: ON A FOOTHILL

The Emperor meets with his military officers in the imperial tent on a foothill. They discuss the strength of their army. Two scouts, however, enter with bad news: many loyal to the Emperor are too afraid to act on his behalf, and an Anti-Emperor has organized the many rebels under his banner. The Emperor resolves to reassert his identity as a noble leader by challenging the Anti-Emperor to single combat.

The Anti-Emperor is probably no better than the Emperor, or so we might assume based on Goethe's harsh treatment of politicians in general. Human government passes from one fool's hands to another's. The Emperor, though, with rare nobility, offers to fight the Anti-Emperor one-on-one.

Just then, an armored Faust enters with his Three Mighty Men. He offers the Emperor the help and strength of magic in his war, but, as grateful as the Emperor is, he asserts that he must rely on his own hand to put down the Anti-Emperor. However, when messengers return informing the Emperor that his challenge has been received by the rebels with scorn and ridicule, he orders his army to advance and permits the Three Mighty Men to march among his troops.

Perhaps the Emperor offers to fight the Anti-Emperor because he knows that he himself is personally responsible for throwing his realm into chaos. It would be unjust to make others die on his behalf. This is a noble perception on the Emperor's part, but it comes much too late, and might even be seen as mere posturing, an attempt to save his reputation.

Assisted by the Three Mighty Men and empty suits of armor that Mephistopheles animated, the Emperor's army fights the rebels. However, after two ravens conference with the devil, he informs the Emperor that his army is losing—and so the Emperor reluctantly grants Mephistopheles command in his stead. Mephistopheles orders water spirits to create the illusion of a flood, which causes the enemy to flee, and he also blinds enemy soldiers with alternating dense shrouds of blackness and blinding flashes of light. The suits of armor regain their vigor and fight as though living once more. Soon the Emperor's army achieves victory.

The devil deceives the Emperor about the state of the war, which was always securely in the Emperor's favor, so that he himself can wield absolute power in determining the course of battle. Mephistopheles has not enjoyed such pure destructive power yet in the play, and he savors it. The ensuing carnage is hideous to behold, a vision of what the world would be like if the devil were in charge. Of course, the play suggests that the devil often does come to be in charge of politicians.

PART 2: ACT 4: THE ANTI-EMPEROR'S TENT

Two of Faust's Three Mighty Men enter the Anti-Emperor's tent, which is piled up with wealth. They try to take little chests full of gold, but even these are all absurdly heavy. Several of the Emperor's bodyguards enter and denounce the two Mighty Men as thieves, who in turn take what they can and clear out. The guards wonder why they didn't attack the two Mighty Men, and wonder also why these two were somewhat ghost-like.

The abundance of gold in the Anti-Emperor's tent both suggests how abysmal the Emperor himself is at creating prosperity for his people (all his money is wasted on wine, we might think) and also how leaders selfishly hoard wealth for themselves. The Emperor's guards seem unaware that the war was won through magic.

The Emperor enters with four princes. He is overjoyed that his army has won, regardless of the means. He gives high titles to the princes—Arch-Marshal, Arch-Cupbearer, and the like—and he grants them, along with the Chancellor-Archbishop (who enters during these proceedings), fine estates and authority subordinate only to his own. The four secular princes exit.

The Emperor misguidedly promotes all the advisers who celebrated when the paper money was fatally circulated. These men have bad judgment, and yet they only continue to rise in power. No real recovery for the Emperor's realm seems likely.

The Chancellor-Archbishop remains. He is gravely concerned that the Emperor conspired with Satan to achieve his magical victory, and worries that the Pope will consequently destroy the Emperor's sinful realm. The Emperor says he will do anything to repent, and the Archbishop tells him to build a great cathedral and also to give gold to the Church, as well as donating building materials and laborers. The Emperor consents, and in his capacity as Chancellor his subordinate tells him that he'll settle the details.

The Chancellor-Archbishop speaks as though he were a pious critic of the Emperor's Satanic alliance, but he is actually interested in consolidating his power and that of the Church as much as possible, going so far as to take advantage of a bloody crisis to do so. This is unchristian conduct in the extreme.

Finally, the Chancellor-Archbishop reminds the Emperor that he granted Faust the Empire's coasts to rule as a feudal lord. The Archbishop demands for the Church the tithes, rents, dues, and taxes from this land as well. The Emperor responds with annoyance that this land doesn't even exist yet, since it's only high sea still. The Chancellor-Archbishop nonetheless insists, then exits. Alone, the Emperor sighs that, at this rate, he'll soon have signed his entire realm away.

It is ironic that to secure power over his kingdom, the Emperor gives most of it away and subjects what remains to exorbitant taxation. He sighs that he has signed his realm away, overlooking the much more important fact that he has totally failed the people he governs.

PART 2: ACT 5: A BROAD LANDSCAPE

At this point, apparently, Faust has given half a lifetime to his project of driving back the ocean. A traveler enters **a broad natural landscape**, intent on visiting old acquaintances who live in a nearby cottage. He gives a shout and a little, very old woman called Baucis enters, along with her husband Philemon. Philemon tells the traveler that the godless Faust has succeeded in creating paradise-like new lands on the Empire's coast, as well as a palace built not without human sacrifice and torment. The three sit for a meal in the couple's **garden**, where Baucis goes on to say that Faust covets their cottage. He's even offered an estate in new land, adds Philemon. But the pious couple refuses to trade.

After securing his fiefdom (the lands he rules as a feudal lord under the Emperor), Faust has now succeeded in creating new lands. More than that, he has learned how to rule so that his kingdom thrives—in stark contrast to the Emperor. But Faust is also a harsh ruler, for in building his palace he caused much human suffering. In keeping their estate, Baucis and Philemon are setting a limit to the expanse of Faust's kingdom. Faust never accepts limits gracefully, however, and that will be the case here, too. Baucis and Philemon are characters from Greek mythology, a pious couple rewarded for being hospitable to a god in disguise.

PART 2: ACT 5: FAUST'S PALACE (BEFORE THE PALACE)

Faust, now a very old man, a hundred years old, paces in a large formal **garden** outside of his palace. He is obsessed by the fact that he has not acquired Baucis and Philemon's cottage, or the nearby linden grove and chapel. He cannot bear the thought of shade that's not his own. He wishes he were far away.

He was unable to transcend the world, and Faust is likewise frustrated in attempting to control the world. The thought that he possesses only a part and not the whole agonizes him.

A splendid, richly laden vessel appears in a nearby canal, bearing Mephistopheles and the Three Mighty Men. They disembark, and the vessel's cargo is unloaded. The devil praises the trinity of war, trade, and piracy by which such treasures are acquired, and says that might makes right.

Faust's kingdom is prosperous in large part due to its ruler's bad alliance with the devil, who does not create value but violently steals what's of value from others. As long as Faust relies on the devil, his efforts will be tainted.

Despite this success, Faust looks grave and somber. He desires what is not his—the cottage, the grove, and the chapel—so that he can build a panoramic platform from which he can survey in one inclusive look the masterpiece he has created. So it is that, tired of being just, he orders Mephistopheles and the Three Mighty Men to evict Baucis and Philemon from their cottage. The devil says that Faust's will shall be done—they'll just carry off the couple, set them down, and give them a nice new place—and he adds to the audience that this is an old story, ever the same.

Faust's idea of earthly success here has to do with absolute control. Faust is not a brutal tyrant, however, as he wants to be just. It's just that the autonomy of Baucis and Philemon is too much for him. He orders that the couple be evicted and their land seized—but peacefully, and with due compensation. He should know better, though, than to send the devil out on a peaceful errand.

PART 2: ACT 5: FAUST'S PALACE (FAUST ON THE BALCONY)

The keeper of the palace watchtower is looking out over Faust's realm while night falls, singing all the while. Suddenly he sees, through a grove of lindens, sparks explode and a fire swirl in rage. He worries that Baucis and Philemon will be victims of the smoke. The fire destroys the grove and the nearby chapel. What was once a joy to see, says the keeper, now belongs to the past.

The devil and the Mighty Men barbarously set fire to Baucis and Philemon's property, against Faust's specific orders. Like Helen and Euphorion, the quiet domestic joy of this couple consequently vanishes from the earth. The devil ruins all he touches.

Faust appears upon the balcony, having heard the watchman's sad song. His inmost being is offended to see the linden grove burn. Mephistopheles and the Three Mighty Men enter. The devil excuses the bit of trouble they've all caused, but says Baucis and Philemon were unresponsive to requests and threats. They didn't suffer much, he says: they simply died of fright. A traveler was with them, and the devil and Mighty Men knocked him flat, leaving him to die in the fire.

The devil is flippant about having just murdered three people, for to him it's just a prank to relieve the boredom of existence. However, this needless act of violence only plants in Faust's heart the desire to build a more just and prosperous society—and it is this desire that saves him from damnation. The devil ruins himself here.

Faust is outraged and curses this senseless act of savagery. Mephistopheles and the Three Mighty Men simply respond that people should gracefully obey the commands of Force. All four exit. Alone, Faust watches the fire die down, and notices strange shadows drifting toward him.

Faust's outrage with the devil's violence is also outrage with himself, for relying on the devil's services. He does not want to rule by force but with justice. The four shadows are the figures of Want, Debt, Distress, and Care.

PART 2: ACT 5: FAUST'S PALACE (WITHIN THE PALACE)

At the last stroke of midnight, four gray women appear in the courtyard of Faust's palace: Want, Debt, Distress, and Care. The first three cannot get in, for the palace's owner is wealthy, but Care succeeds in entering though the keyhole. Outside, her sisters see the clouds gather and the stars disappear. Far away their brother is coming—Death.

These four gray women personify the afflictions for which they're named. Faust is afflicted only by Care, and so only this sister gains entrance to Faust's palace. Death is approaching in the distance, coming to claim the old dissatisfied Faust at last.

Within the palace, Faust murmurs to himself that he saw four gray women come but only three depart, and he heard them speak the name of Death. He states that he is not free, and wishes he could rid his path of magic. Care enters. Faust urges himself not to use an incantation to drive her away. He tells her that there is no seeing into the Beyond, and that only fools imagine themselves to be godlike. Men, he says, should satisfy themselves with the earth, life's pains and joys.

Faust wishes to free himself from his reliance on magic. He takes the first step in realizing this wish when he refuses to cast out Care with a spell. He has avoided Care his whole life, but her presence now leads him to introspection. He no longer desires to be a god, only to be wholly human, a part of the world that knows and honors its place in the whole.

Care responds that once she possesses a man all is darkness in his heart, and he ceases to rejoice in his treasures. Faust orders her to leave and asserts that he shall never acknowledge her power. Care breathes on Faust, blinding him, and then vanishes. Though darkness presses in about him, Faust senses in his inner being a radiant light. He resolves to fulfill his plans. He orders his workmen to rise and make his designs a reality.

Faust refuses to surrender to Care, who would lead him into mere frustration and worry. He is victorious over her, signaled by her vanishing, but now that he is unprotected by magic, Faust is vulnerable to the effects of old age like blindness. Nonetheless, his sense of purpose is strong, and he resolves to realize his Utopian dream.

PART 2: ACT 5: FAUST'S PALACE (THE LARGE OUTER COURTYARD)

The courtyard of Faust's palace is now lit by torches. Mephistopheles enters, leading a group of Lemures, spirits of the restless or malignant dead in Roman mythology. The devil sets them to digging a grave for Faust, for his death is near, though Faust himself thinks that the Lemures are working on a canal in accordance with his plans.

Faust confuses the sounds of his grave's construction with his canal being built, but this confusion expresses a deep reality—that Faust will achieve transcendence and meaning only after his death, when his body is in the grave and his soul is in heaven.

Faust dreams of draining a contaminating marsh as his crowning last achievement, so that millions of people can live, not safe but free to work nonetheless in green and fertile fields. He wishes that he could see the people's teeming life, and their autonomy on unencumbered soil. If this ever came to pass, he'd say of the moment: "Tarry a while, you are so fair" (the words in his contract with Mephistopheles, which, when spoken of a moment experienced, forfeit Faust's soul to the devil). Thus envisioning the heights of happiness, he enjoys now his highest moment.

Faust's final vision is of the Utopia he hopes to build on earth. It is a vision not of domination but of justice, prosperity, and love. Although Faust is never satisfied, and dies before he can realize his vision, he nonetheless learns at last to find happiness in desire and progress, not just accomplishment. He never gives into bodily pleasure and idleness either, but is always striving, and this striving saves his soul.

Faust falls back dead and is caught by the Lemures, who lay him on the ground. Mephistopheles says that nothing satisfies Faust, and so he just keeps chasing shapes that always change. But time triumphs, and now Faust is dead. The devil says that the past and nothingness are the same thing, and that he'd prefer Eternal Emptiness to creation.

The devil's comment that nothing satisfies Faust seems to be a concession that he, the devil, has not won Faust's soul by the terms of their contract. Being the devil, he attempts to take Faust's soul nonetheless.

The Lemures begin to bury the body of Faust. Mephistopheles says that if the dead man's soul tries to rise, he'll show his blood-signed contract to it, even though, he sighs, there are so many ways to cheat the devil of his souls these days. Mephistopheles conjures devils to assist him in arresting Faust's soul, and he orders them to bring with them the hideous mouth of hell, which opens its jaws to the Flaming City.

The devil has not fairly won Faust's soul, and so he must resort to force in securing it for himself. The Flaming City of hell is a sharp contrast to Faust's Utopian vision, one that emphasizes the devil's commitment to negativity.

The glorious host of heaven enters from above, singing of forgiveness. Mephistopheles hates their nasty, androgynous songs, for they have cost him many souls. Angels begin to scatter roses about, making the devils flinch. In agitation Mephistopheles orders his minions to shut their mouths and noses, but it is too late, and their strength and valor is giving out. He curses them while they stand on their heads, cartwheel about, and plunge back into hell.

Mephistopheles can win human battles, but illusions cannot help him now against the angels, even though armed only with roses. His minions' panic and flight suggests that the devil is about as competent a ruler as the Emperor is, despite his love of domination. The roses represent mercy and are contrasted with hellfire.

Mephistopheles fights off the roses that drift about him. His head is on fire and his body burns. He is surprised, however, to find the angels not an offensive sight, as he used to, but instead to be lovely, even attractive. He wants to kiss them like a lover, and suggests that they could wear less clothing, instead of these long prudish robes. He lecherously admires the angels' buttocks. These rascals really whet his appetite, he says.

The roses would stimulate true love in anyone but the devil himself. The closest thing he can feel to love is lust, and so he begins, outrageously, to sexually pine for the angels. In his sensual madness, however, the devil ignores the fact that Faust's soul is escaping him. He ignores the whole situation and is distracted by only a part.

The angels rise, bearing off the immortal part of Faust from his gravesite. Mephistopheles begins to regain his composure. Even though he finds himself afflicted with boils now, he is pleased to find the love-illusion dissipated and himself still every inch a devil. The angels have succeeded, however, in robbing him of a great treasure: Faust's noble soul. Mephistopheles calls himself a bungler who's wasted a great investment all over some erotic silliness. The very height of folly defeated the devil himself.

Faust's grave is not a prison, but a doorway to salvation. Thanks to divine love, the great man finally leaves the world that so limited and frustrated him. The devil, in a way, has ultimately succeeded only in spurring Faust on, teaching him to learn his limits and how best to work within them. Willing Faust's damnation, Mephistopheles has instead contributed to Faust's salvation.

PART 2: ACT 5: MOUNTAIN GORGES

Amid **gorges, forests, and rocks**, where religious recluses live, Fathers of the Church (including Pater Ecstaticus, Pater Profundus, and Pater Seraphicus) sing about love purified of trivialities, and how Love gives all things their form and sustains them such that nature is expressive of the Divine. A cloud of innocent children who died at birth floats through the forest, happy with existence—but Pater Seraphicus instructs them to fly to a higher sphere.

Fittingly, Faust's last glimpse of earth is of nature at its most sublime. Indeed, the Fathers of the Church suggest that nature itself is really the language through which God expresses his infinite love. The cloud of children recalls Faust's two dead children, by Gretchen and Helen, and suggests that at least his child by Gretchen is in a better place.

Angels hover in the upper sky, bearing with them the immortal part of Faust. They sing of how this worthy member of the spirit world was rescued from the devil. Younger angels exult in how their falling roses drove away hell's legions. More perfect angels find it distasteful to bear Faust's soul in its current state, for it is too intermixed with the base elements of earth. Only Eternal Love can disunite two natures conjoined in a single entity like this, they say.

Faust's restlessness saved him. He was never satisfied with mere idle pleasures, but always wanted to improve himself and, in the end, to improve his world. He was a far from perfect man, suggested by his contamination here with base elements, but he did strive to harmonize with the whole of the world.

In the highest and neatest cell in the mountainside, Doctor Marianus, a saint, sees heaven's High Queen, the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is surrounded by other women ascending upward, penitents anxious for mercy. Three sinful women who have achieved redemption—Magna Peccatrix (the Biblical Mary Magdalene), Mulier Samaritana (the Biblical Woman of Samaria), and Maria Aegyptica (a saint)— all ask the High Queen that another penitent (Gretchen) also be granted her forgiveness.

Mary completes the trinity of women important in Faust's spiritual journey, along with Gretchen and Helen. She is a figure of mercy and divine forgiveness. Earlier, Gretchen prays to Mary after being corrupted by Faust. Now, other penitent women are praying on behalf of Gretchen's soul, which also achieves salvation.

The penitent (Gretchen) clings to the Blessed Virgin Mary, asking her to look down on Faust, the love of her, Gretchen's, youth, who has now returned to grace. The penitent watches as Faust's soul frees itself from all earthly bonds with youthful vigor. Mary instructs the penitent to rise to higher spheres, where Faust, sensing her presence, will follow.

Faust has achieved transcendence, not through his own actions but through divine love. He still needs guidance, however. Mary instructs Gretchen's soul to lead Faust's to eternity, an image that contrasts with the tragic image of Euphorion chasing the chorus girl into the sky and falling to his death.

A mystical chorus concludes the drama. They sing that all that is transitory is only a symbol. What is impossible on earth is done in heaven, and what can't be described below here is a fact. They conclude that Eternal Woman shows us how to rise on high. Thus ends Goethe's *Faust*.

The chorus declares that by acting within our natural limits we harmonize with the divine, completing the theme of parts, wholes, and limits. Women have always aroused in Faust love and a desire for the ideal, and through the chorus Goethe suggests that this is universally the case (for men at least). Despite all his dealings with the devil, Faust is ultimately saved by his constant striving and intellectual restlessness.

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