

DOCTOR FAUSTUS READING HANDOUT

Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus was first performed in 1592, but it was not printed until 1604. It was printed again in 1616, in a substantially different version. Although it is now believed that the 1616 B Text is derived from the 1604 A Text and another manuscript, which is now lost, it is uncertain which version is closer to what was performed in 1592.

The \$2 Dover Thrift Edition of Doctor Faustus is based on a 1911 textbook of Renaissance drama, which in turn is based on the 1604 A Text. This edition corrects some printers' mistakes and modernizes some spellings, but it is problematic in other ways.

Most glaringly, it repeats an error that goes back to the first printed edition in 1604, in which certain scenes were printed out of order. So before you even start reading, you should make the following changes:

- As far as I can tell, Robin is the Clown—sometimes the script calls him by his character's name, and other times by his character's generic role. You can correct this in Scene IV (p. 15-17).
- At the bottom of p. 24 or the top of p. 25, note that you should read Scene VIII between Scenes V and VI.
- On p. 34, just above where Chorus enters, mark that you should jump to p. 37 and continue your reading there.
- Also on p. 34, mark that speech by Chorus belongs on p. 38, after Dr. Faustus has made his journey to visit the Pope.
- On p. 35, mark that Scene VIII should be read between our scenes V and VI.
- On p. 37, remind yourself that this is where you pick up from p. 34, above the entrance of Chorus.
- At the very bottom of p. 38, remind yourself that you need to read Chorus's speech from p. 34 here, before continuing with Scene X.

If you make these changes, the play will make much more sense. Most modern editions of Doctor Faustus—even when they are based only on the A Text—correct this mistake on the basis of internal evidence and clues from the B Text.

Glossary
(use with caution—words often have multiple meanings)

Axletree: Axis.

An: If (sometimes).

At any hand: On any account.

Awful: Full of awe; awesome.

Bear: To tolerate, but also usually a sexual pun about bearing children, as well.

Belike: Most likely.

Bill: A contract.

Boots: Avails (when used as a verb).

Bottle: A bundle (sometimes).

Brimstone: Sulfurous; from hell.

Chafing: Scolding (but also a sexual pun).

Chary: Careful.

Cheer: Disposition; mood.

Clean: Completely.

Clifts: Split hooves (but also vaginas).

Closet: Private room.

Conceit: Idea, thought; this thought.

Dardania: Troy.

Dutch fustian: Gibberish. (Literally, it is a cheap, coarse fabric.)

Fall to: Get on with it; hurry up.

Familiars: Familiar evil spirits—usually animals—that were obedient to their masters, such as magicians and witches.

Favour: Permission.

Flagitious: Villainous.

Forehead: Often an allusion to the horns people in the Renaissance associated with cuckolded husbands. Even though we soon tire of these jokes, horn jokes were always good for a laugh in the Renaissance, when paternity could never be proven with certainty.

Forward: Ambitious; eager.

Glass windows: Eyeglasses.

Gratulate: Congratulate; celebrate.

Great-bellied: Pregnant.

Horsebread: Fodder; bran.

Horse-courser: Horse-dealer.

Ilium: Troy.

Impeach: Accuse.

Indian Moors: American Indians. The Spanish had settled the Americas long before the English arrived on the East Coast.

Meat: Food.

Meet with: Get even with (but not always).

Menelaus: Helen's husband, the king of Sparta.

Metempsychosis: A theory attributed to Pythagoras about the passing (transmigration) of the soul from one body to another at death.

Ostler: Horsegroom, stableman.

Otherways: Different.

Paris: A Trojan prince who started the Trojan War by abducting Helen, the queen of Sparta.

Periwig: Wig.

Plackets: Skirt-slits (but, as you can imagine, also vaginas).

Privy chamber: Private apartment in a palace.

Quick: Alive.

Rape: Abduction; theft.

Saba: Sheba, a lost ancient civilization in modern Yemen.

Semele: One of Jupiter's human mistresses. When she insisted on seeing Jupiter in his divine form, Semele was turned into a flame.

Snipper-snapper: Whipper-snapper; an arrogant young man.

So: Provided that (sometimes).

Sometimes: Formerly; used to.

Squibs: Firecrackers; special effects!

Still: Ever, always.

Straight: Straight away; right away.

Styx, Acheron, and Phlegthon: Three of the five rivers in the classical underworld.

Succeed: Come after. ("Success" here is related to "successor" or "predecessor.")

Summum bonum: The greatest good (Latin).

Surfeit: Surplus; excess.

Survey: Gaze.

Swill: Guzzle.

Swons: Zounds, short for "By Christ's wounds," a mild oath.

Toy: Trifling (a "ceremonial toy" means a "trifling ceremony").

Vain: Worthless, but also prideful. Again, emptiness is the operative idea here.

Wanting: Lacking.

Watch: Clock.