

Prologue

The chorus announces that this play will not be concerned with war, love, or brave deeds. Instead, it will present the good and bad fortunes of Dr. Faustus, who is born in Germany and who goes to the University of Wittenberg, where he studies philosophy and divinity. He so excels in matters of theology that he eventually becomes swollen with pride, which leads to his downfall. Ultimately, Faustus turns to a study of necromancy, or magic.

The technique of the chorus is adapted from the traditions of classic Greek drama. The chorus stands outside the direct action of the play and comments upon various parts of the drama. The chorus speaks directly to the audience and tells the basic background history of Faustus and explains that the play is to concern his downfall. The chorus is also used to express the author's views and to remind the audience of the proper moral to be learned from the play itself. The opening speech of the chorus functions as a prologue to define the choice of the play.

The chorus speaks in very formal, rhetorical language and explains that the subject of this play will not be that which is usually depicted in dramas. Instead of a subject dealing with love or war, the play will present the history of a scholar. The purpose of this explanation is that, traditionally, tragedy had dealt with such splendid subjects as the history of kings, great wars, or powerful love affairs. Tragedy is concerned with the downfall of kings, and Marlowe's tragedy does not fit into this formula since this drama deals with the downfall of a man of common birth.

The Icarus image is used in the opening passage to characterize the fall of Faustus. Icarus was a figure in classical mythology who because of his pride had flown too high in the sky, had melted his wax wings, and subsequently had fallen to his death. This classical image of the fall of

Icarus reinforces the Christian images of the fall of Lucifer brought out in Scene 3. Both images set the scene for the fall of Dr. Faustus. Another image used by the chorus to describe the situation of Faustus is that of flooding an appetite by greed. Throughout the play, Faustus is seen as a person of uncontrolled appetites. His thirst for knowledge and power lead him to make the pact with the devil which brings about his downfall. The chorus points out the dangers involved in resorting to magic. It makes clear that Faustus is choosing magic at the danger of his own soul.