

What is Marlowe suggesting about the nature of knowledge?

- Good or bad respective of its use: Faustus begins as a scholar, but then as the play progresses his knowledge is used for childish means (i.e. entertaining others and himself.) The latter is immoral because it only provides selfish gains.
- Marlowe is probably musing simultaneously about the changing face of knowledge in the late sixteenth century (the increase in people going to university and the rise of humanism) and about the presence of the belief in magic in society and the anxieties that it provoked.
- Marlowe might be criticising the idea that knowledge can be bought, which may be a jibe at the religious institutions (not necessarily only the Catholic ones) for the way their influence could be bought.

Faustus' power:

- Potentially representative of those in positions of authority who wielded their power for negative means.
- Mages were seen as more respectable than witches - is Faustus' downfall a subversion of this?
- Ironical that not only does Faustus go against everything that Christian doctrine directs but in doing so he gets further and further away from having access to the highest form of (divine) knowledge. Indeed, he becomes an ape of the devil, who in turn is an ape of God (and therefore can only have power accessible to God, or less.)

The monetary nature of power:

- Given the social context of a growing middle class, Faustus' belief that he can buy power may well be a reference to those who are trying to buy better status, associating certain types of merchant trading with witchcraft.
- Economic exchanges pervade the story: Faustus' deal with Lucifer, the Horse Courser's deal with Faustus, Wagner bribes the clown to his servant in return for learning some magic. Crucially, all of these are occasions in which one man exploits another.

Faustus' desire for sexual knowledge:

- The first thing he asks Mephistopheles for is a wife who is like a 'whore'. He describes himself as 'lascivious' (potentially ironic as it is what he desires to be but isn't.) He then again desires Helen of Troy in one of his final acts. Innuendo with Emperor's wife.

The presence of the Old Man:

- The Old Man is a *memento mori* figure - a reminder of the inevitability of death.
- It's also possible that he represents Faustus himself (24 years have passed) and/or an aspect of Faustus' conscience, the part that wants to repent, making more prominent the idea of Faustus struggling with himself than the rather more 'external' figures of the angels.
- He stands as a reminder of God's omnibenevolence, and the fact that Faustus can always repent.

Is Faustus a sympathetic character?

- His soliloquies suggest a frustration and aspiration that encourage a critical sympathy for Faustus: something to which an audience (and particularly one surrounded by the rising humanist outlooks in Elizabethan England) could relate.

Wittenburg:

- Possible link to Hamlet, who was also a student at Wittenburg: literary trope that is symbolic of education and knowledge. Faustus wants to die here ('shortening my days and thread of vital life...let us make haste to Wittenburg') which is symbolic of his return to knowledge/education; where his downfall began (his 'study') and will end.
- 'Would I have never seen Wittenburg, never read a book!': Wittenburg and books are both symbolic of Faustus' (former) desire for knowledge, which he now blames for his downfall (and again when he says 'I'll burn my books!')