

English 434  
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## **Differences Between The A and B Texts of *Doctor Faustus***

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### **1. Act 2, scene 1**

The A text represents Faustus as more thirsty for knowledge than the B text does. When given a book that can be used for magic and conjuring spirits, he asks for knowledge of the heavens and the earth (p. 155, ll 157-77). In B, Faustus is more interested in magic and conjuring. When given the same book, he is pleased with the ability to conjure spirits and perform magic (p. 202, ll 153-60). Does this mean, perhaps, that in A Faustus should know from the beginning what a bad bargain he has made and therefore be more ready to repent?

In A, Faustus's character is more aggressive. In this text he asks for a wife and Mephistopheles is not pleased. In the B text, Faustus is far more passive than in A. Mephistopheles gives him everything, including a promise of as many courtesans as Faustus can stomach. Faustus does not ask for knowledge in this text.

### **2. Act 2, scene 2**

In the B text, Robin's desire for vengeance and the severity of his evil are both more apparent than in the A text. Robin is more capable of using magic and has a darker, more evil presence because Dick tries harder to stop Robin from using his magic. To show more of his mastery in B, Robin actually reads from the conjuring book.

In A Robin's "sin" seems to be lust, since he wants to see maidens dancing naked. In B, he is more prone to gluttony, being attracted to alcohol.

Dick's name is Rafe in the A text.

### **3. Act 2, scene 3**

The main difference between these two texts is line 4 (p. 203 in B text), where Mephistopheles tells Faustus that "Twas thine own seeking." Meph. points out that Faustus was looking for power, which inevitably leads to damnation. In the A text Faustus was more a victim of damnation.

In the B text, Faustus makes more entreaties to God. Mephistopheles is more coercive and forceful in the B text.

### **4. Act 3, scene 1**

The addition of the Chorus guides us toward a more severe, moralizing interpretation of Faustus's actions. Riding in the chariot of dragons, Faustus seems more like Icarus and is imaginatively linked with

Mephistopheles, who first appears to Faustus as a dragon. Faustus also may be seen as more powerful, as he whizzes about the heavens, which is properly the domain of God.

On the other hand, the B text shows that Faustus still has human characteristics, because he becomes tired and must rest.

The episode with the Pope is more severely anti-Catholic in the B text. Faustus cannot defeat the church, he can only humiliate the "false" Catholic authority, the Pope.

Furthermore, The addition of Bruno as rightful pope suggests a distinction between true and false power and good and illegitimate power. Faustus's power is illegitimate. Faustus, like the Pope, is a tyrant. By contrast, the English audience would have seen Faustus's desire to liberate Bruno from the pope as a good thing.

### **5. Act 4, scene 1**

The episode with Benvolio in the B text makes Faustus seem to have a darker side. He flaunts his power and seems more vindictive. He mocks Benvolio with cuckold's horns and has his enemies pursued and physically tortured by demons. The A text makes Faustus seem more of a scholar and kinder.

In the B text, Alexander the Great kills Darius, takes of Darius's crown and gives it to the emperor. This change suggests both a greater interest in masque scenes at the later date and emphasizes Faustus's absorption with power in the B text. Like the Emperor, he is interested in crowns and power.

### **6. Act 4, scene 6**

In general, Faustus seems more corrupt because of the added comic scenes in the B text. Although the scenes are more humorous in B, Faustus rather Mephistopheles is involved in humiliating and cheating other people (a far cry from the day when he cured plagues!) More characters accuse Faustus of malice against them in B, and Faustus's act of charming all the characters dumb shows that he is malicious. He also rips of the hostess.

In the episode with the horse-courser, Faustus also seems more corrupt in B than in A. Unlike in the A text, Meph is not involved. He cheats a poor man, but also tempts the horse-courser as he himself has been tempted by telling the horse-courser not to drive the horse into the water.

### **7. Act 5, scene 1**

In the A text the Old man is more of a sever preacher and he is harsher toward Faustus. See lines 35ff in the B text versus lines 35-36 in the A text. A makes Faustus's case seem hopeless; it is unlikely that he will be saved.

In B Faustus is more "hapless" than "hopeless." Hell in B is considered to the effect of Faustus's own actions and a consequence that he can avoid with a last-minute repentance.

The Old Man's speech in B is more theological in its emphasis. The Old Man tells Faustus to leave this "damned art" and stresses the possibility for redemption. No matter how bad Faustus's deeds have been, there is still an opportunity for repentance.

In the B text the Old Man considers Faustus a victim of magic, which will "charm" his soul to hell (35). Telling Faustus that his "hour is almost come," The Old Man stresses that Faustus still has a chance. In A, the "hour *is* come. Thus, B is more religious than A and gives more of a sense of what hell is like. Marlowe's atheism is more prominent in the A text.

### **8. Act 5, scene 2**

In the B text, Mephistopheles claims that he deliberately misled Faustus in his perusal of scripture. On the other hand, the Angels are quite nasty, and stress to Faustus that he has lost "celestial happiness" (105). He sees the throne that will now not take him to heaven and is given a glimpse of the fiery lay-boy in hell, where the damned souls rest themselves. The Good and Bad angels finally seem to agree with one another, and both stress how stupid Faustus has been.

### **9. Act 5, scene 3**

In the A text, Faustus is simply taken away by devils. The B text, by contrast, puts the fear of God into the audience. In B, damnation is fully understood. The image of Faustus scattered limbs, the threat that Lucifer finally makes good on, is graphic and frightening. SO is the evocation of the noises and screams that the scholars heard. The torn limbs also prove that you cant trust the devil, because Lucifer tears Faustus limb from limb, even though Faustus did not break his pact.

The B text is more orthodox in its religion. In the A text God seems to conspire with Mephistopheles against Faustus ("heavens conspire" Faustus-as Icarus's overthrow). In B the scholars see God and Lucifer as entirely separate forces.

In B, the scholars give Faustus's limbs a Christian burial, suggesting that he was still a person and did not become a spirit in body and substance.

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