

Theodicy and Damnation in Dorothy Sayers' *The Devil to Pay*

The Faust Tradition

Be sure to read both Sayers' brief introduction to the play and her essay "The Faust Legend and the Idea of the Devil."

1. What makes it so difficult to keep the devil from being an attractive character in literature, especially on stage?
2. How does she compare and contrast the literary devils of Marlowe (a fool), Milton (an affected nobility), Goethe (the spirit of negation), and Dante (the idiot, slobbering horror)?
3. How does each contribute to her portrait of Mephistopheles?
4. How does the issue of metaphysical evil drive some of the play's concerns?

The Movement of the Plot

Scene 1—*Doctor Faustus' Case against the Creator*

1. The world appears ill-designed, full of suffering and sickness.
2. Desire for total knowledge and powerful technology to ease or reverse human suffering.
3. Seeking for meaning in the "tormented universe."
4. Classic problem of evil: Is God not powerful enough to stop it? Or not good enough to care?
5. God must be infinitely cruel.
6. Call for revolutionary change.
7. Longs for youth, beauty, and the power to erase despair.

[12 Months Later] **Scene 2**—*Doctor Faustus' Case against the Church and the Pope*

1. The Church is an instrument of deception that keeps people in their suffering and illusion.
2. Throw off the bounds of superstition.
3. Rejects the Pope's reasoning from the cross as deception and incompetence.
4. Drawn away by the erotic illusion of a return to original innocence without a sense of good or evil.
5. Must swear his soul in payment.

[24 Years Later] **Scene 3**—*Faustus' Descent into the Bestial*

1. Faustus has grown cruel and cynical.
2. He rejected rather quickly the illusion of Helen.
3. He is moved by war, voyeurism, and constant distraction.
4. He is mad; he has no remaining conscience.
5. His soul is that of a beast.

[In the Court of Heaven] **Scene 4**—*The Judgment of Faustus*

1. Mephistopheles wants justice!
2. Mephistopheles in seeking to bring Faustus beyond good and evil reduced him to a beast.
3. Faustus' earlier self recognizes that he has not been happy or achieved anything he sought.
4. God will not turn back time to what was before Adam. There is no way out of the closed circle of the self.
 5. Faustus is condemned to the houseless state of the uncommitted.
 6. Mephistopheles admits to being the negative non-being that arises from being.
 7. Faustus chooses to descend into hell rather than lose sight of God even from afar.
 8. He is promised purgation and that God will "not be robbed."

Other Discussion Questions

1. How does Sayers' Faust play explore and answer the problem of evil? Do you consider her answer an effective one? Explain.
2. How does Sayers adopt the Lilith myth in order to explore the meaning of Helen?
3. *The Devil to Pay* is often called Sayers' weakest play. Why do you think this is said? Do you agree?
4. What roles do Wagner, Lisa, and the Pope play? What positive principles hold up their actions?
5. Why does Sayers insist on such an elaborate medieval staging? How does this shape the meaning of the play?