

Why Faustus almost backs out on his Pledge:

It seems odd that Faustus would so wholly embrace his pledge to the Devil and then flip-flop so quickly later on. What are Faustus's reasons for the original sale to the Devil and what causes him to question it? In the opening scene of the play he speaks of his studies and his dissatisfaction with the limits of science. The drudgery of the natural is not enough for him - he seeks divinity and magic, something more extraordinary. "These metaphysics of magicians; And negromantic books are heavenly;" (I. i. 47-48) Faustus has a thirst for something from the gods that will make life more interesting.

However, as soon as Faustus begins to practice magic it is immediately not as glamorous as he assumed. The first Devil that appears is not what he expects: "I charge thee to return and change thy shape; Thou art too ugly to attend on me." (I. iii. 25-26) As Mephostophilis is summoned, Faustus is disappointed to find out that Mephostophilis will not be his servant and that he still serves Lucifer. Faustus had imagined himself as a new prince of dark magic, but is very quickly discovering that will not be the case. However, he sets it aside at the moment and still offers to pledge his soul to Lucifer.

The first time he questions himself is as Mephostophilis returns and asks him to "write a deed of gift with thine own blood" (II. i. 36) and he all of the sudden turns cold. He lightly asks what good his soul will really do to Lucifer. It seems that the thought of actually giving something real, his blood, is more than he had bargained for. Faustus is selfish, wanting everyone to give him gifts of power and magic, but when it comes down to the wire he chickens out to some extent.

He finally gains enough confidence to do the deed as soon as Mephostophilis reminds him that he will be Faustus' slave at the moment his soul is given to Lucifer. Faustus's two main characteristics are selfishness and greed, and are the primary motivators behind his flip-flop, wanting to save himself yet wanting to get material and magical gifts.

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