Dr. Faustus

Summary and Analysis Scene 13

Summary

Faustus declares to the three scholars who accompany him that he is in a dejected state because of what is about to happen to him. He admits that he has sinned so greatly that he cannot be forgiven. The scholars urge him to call on God, but Faustus feels that he is unable to call on God, whom he has abjured and blasphemed. He says: "Ah, my God, I would weep, but the devil draws in my tears! . . . I would lift up my hands but, see, they hold them, they hold them!" Faustus tells the scholars that he has done the very things that God most forbids man to do: "for vain pleasure of twenty-four years hath Faustus lost eternal joy and felicity."

One of the scholars volunteers to stay with Faustus until the last minute, but Faustus and the others admit that no one will be able to help him. He must face the final moments alone.

After the scholars leave, the clock strikes eleven, and Faustus realizes that he has only an hour left before eternal damnation. He suffers because he realizes that he will be deprived of eternal bliss and will have to suffer eternal damnation. As the clock strikes half past eleven, he pleads that his doom not be everlasting. He would suffer a hundred thousand years if at last he could be saved. As the clock strikes twelve, he cries out for God not to look so fierce upon him. Thunder and lightning flash across the stage and the devils arrive to take him away.

Analysis

The basic situation in this final scene evokes many literary parallels. For example, we are immediately reminded of Job, who had his friends with him to comfort him during his suffering, but the friends were no help to him. Likewise, in the play *Everyman,*Everyman wants to take all his friends with him to the grave. In *Doctor Faustus,*the doctor has his friends with him and one of the scholars wants to stay with him, but Faustus realizes that he must face death alone.

It is in this scene that Faustus completely realizes what he has done. Because he wanted to live for vain joys, he has lost eternal life. There is a constant interplay throughout the scene between living and dying. Faustus makes a statement to one of the scholars that "had I lived with them then had I lived still, but now I die eternally." In spite of all the admonitions, Faustus even at the end makes no real effort to turn to God. As he realizes the magnitude of his sin, he is almost afraid to turn to the God whom he has abjured. He knows that he has committed those very things which God most strictly forbids. Faustus' only excuse for not turning to God is that "the devil threatened to tear me in pieces if I named God, to fetch both body and soul if I once gave ear to divinity." This excuse is not rational. In the previous scene, Marlowe demonstrated the example of the old man who abjured the devil and turned to God.

Consequently, Faustus' explanation is false and empty. All he can finally do is to ask the scholars to pray for him.

Man's limitation is that he lives in time, and in his final speech, we see Faustus fighting against this very limitation. As the clock strikes eleven, he realizes that he has only one hour left to live. He suddenly understands that one power he does not possess is the ability to make time stop; he desires to have more time to live and thus repent of his sins.

Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease and midnight never come;
Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul!

The drama of the scene is heightened by this constant awareness of the passing of time. Faustus is almost frantic as his end approaches. But even in this final scene, Faustus cannot remain resolute and call on God or Christ. He tries at one point to invoke the aid of Christ but ends up by asking Lucifer to spare him. He pleads then that his body suffer punishment but that his soul be spared.

As the clock strikes half past, Faustus then asks that he be punished for a hundred thousand years, but finally he requests that his soul be spared from eternal punishment. Furthermore, he begins to question the existing order of things. He wonders why a person must have an eternal soul. It would be better to accept some other theological system where a person's soul could return to the earth in the form of an animal or simply cease to exist. But Faustus is a man with an immortal soul, and this soul is damned.

As the clock strikes the final hour, we have one of the most dramatic scenes in all of Elizabethan drama. During thunder and lightning, horrible-looking devils appear to take Faustus off to his eternal damnation. His last pleading words are an effective statement of the horror of trafficking in the black arts. His final speech is incoherent and incomplete, as though he were suddenly dragged off in the middle of his plea.

The chorus makes the final and closing comment on the fall of Faustus. They comment that he had tried to go beyond the limitations of humanity and had thus fallen into eternal damnation. The chorus admonishes the audience to take note of Faustus' example and not go beyond the boundary of lawful things. The chorus expresses the medieval view that Faustus' fall resulted from his pride and ambition.