

Dr. Faustus
Summary and Analysis Scene 5

Summary

Faustus, alone in his study, tries to bolster his own resolution to forget God and dedicate himself solely to Lucifer. The Good Angel and the Evil Angel appear. The Good Angel admonishes Faustus to think on heavenly things, while the Evil Angel emphasizes the value of power and wealth. Faustus decides to think on wealth and summons Mephistophilis, who then tells him that Lucifer will agree to the bargain, but it must be signed with Faustus' blood. Faustus stabs his arm, but as he begins to write, the blood congeals. Mephistophilis rushes to get some fire in order to make the blood flow. As Faustus begins to write again, an inscription — "Homo, fuge!" — appears on his arm. Faustus finishes signing the bond and orders Mephistophilis to deliver it to Lucifer.

After the bargain has been completed, Faustus begins to ask again about the nature of hell, but while Mephistophilis is describing hell, Faustus becomes skeptical and refuses to believe in hell. Then, all of a sudden, Faustus changes the topic of the conversation and tells Mephistophilis that he wants a wife because he feels wanton and lascivious. Mephistophilis convinces him that he does not want a wife and offers to bring him any courtesan or paramour that he desires. Before Mephistophilis leaves, Faustus demands three books — one for incantations and spells, one for knowledge of the planets and the heavens, and one for understanding plants and animals.

Analysis

In the first part of this scene, Faustus' mind begins to waver. There is a conflict within Faustus as to whether he should carry out his plan. This inner conflict is then externalized by the appearance of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel. The advice of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel serves to keep constantly before us the struggle which Faustus is facing and reminds the reader that Faustus is in severe danger of eternal damnation. The problem of salvation and damnation is now central to Faustus' conflict. He is deeply concerned over his own fate. In each appearance, Faustus is more influenced by the advice of the Evil Angel, and thus Faustus centers his thinking on the wealth and power that he is about to receive.

In the contract scene, the bond is presented in legal terms. Lucifer demands the security of having the contract written in blood. There is an old superstition that a contract signed in blood is eternally binding. As soon as Faustus signs with his own blood, he commits himself to eternal damnation. He later realizes that only the blood of Christ could release him from such a bond.

During this scene, two omens appear to indicate to Faustus that he is in dire danger of damnation. The first is the fact that his own blood congeals, the second is the inscription "Homo, fuge!" which appears on his arm. The inscription warns Faustus to flee. He ignores both of these warnings and continues blindly on his way to damnation by insisting on signing the pact. Faustus even believes that his senses are deceived by the signs, but it is not his senses but his reason which is deceived in signing the contract.

At the crucial time in this scene and all through the rest of the play, whenever Faustus begins to ask questions about essential things, the devil or Mephistophilis brings forth something to delight Faustus' mind. Mephistophilis constantly tries to discover things which would divert Faustus' attention away from his search for knowledge. Consequently, however noble Faustus' original plans were, he obviously loses part of his nobility simply by dealing with evil forces. Any association with evil forces causes a person to deteriorate as a result of the association.

Immediately after signing the contract, Faustus begins to question Mephistophilis about hell. Again the view of hell is essentially the same as expressed in Scene 3:

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
 In one self place; for where we are is hell
 And where hell is there must we ever be.
 And, to conclude, when all the world dissolves,
 And every creature shall be purified,
 All places shall be hell that is not heaven.

Basically, Mephistophilis explains that hell is simply absence from the presence of God. As Mephistophilis tries to describe that he is now in hell because he is away from the presence of God, Faustus is in a state of complete skepticism. Consequently, we see how rapidly Faustus has degenerated. His intellect is so topsy-turvy that Faustus is unable to believe in anything. He does not even believe that death exists. This is paradoxical since the pact was originally made to escape death. Even though his aim was to conquer death, he also maintains that death does not exist. Marlowe is using this paradoxical situation to show that Faustus' logical or reasoning powers are rapidly dwindling into insignificance as a result of his pact with the devil.

Although Faustus asserts that he wants a godlike power over the world, he spends all of his time satisfying his senses. Instead of noble discussions about the nature of heaven and hell, Faustus suddenly begins to feel lascivious and wants a wife. He now wants to yield to coarse physical desires rather than search for ultimate knowledge.

Faustus does not realize that he is being cheated out of all that he was promised. He is unable to have a wife as he demands for marriage is a condition sanctified by God. Later in the scene, he is also denied knowledge that he was promised. He expected to have all of his questions about the universe answered, but when he asks who made the world, he is refused an answer.