

Dr. Faustus Summary and Analysis Scene 9

Summary:

Later at the German court, Emperor Carolus tells Faustus that he has heard reports of his magical powers and he would like to see some proof of Faustus' skill. Faustus responds humbly that he is not as skilled as the rumors report him to be, but he will try to please the emperor. The emperor wonders if anyone will ever attain the stature of Alexander the Great, and he asks Faustus to bring Alexander and Alexander's paramour back to life. As the emperor makes this request, a knight in the court makes several skeptical and sarcastic remarks about Faustus' powers. At Faustus' request, Mephistophilis leaves and returns with two spirits in the shape of Alexander and his paramour. After the emperor inspects a mole on the paramour's neck, he declares that the two spirits are real. Faustus asks that the sarcastic knight be requested to return. When the knight appears, he has a pair of horns on his head. The knight is furious about his situation and abuses Faustus. Then, at the emperor's request, Faustus releases the knight from the spell and the horns are removed. The emperor thanks Faustus for the conjuration and promises to reward him bounteously.

Analysis:

\This scene shows no significant development or change in the nature of Dr. Faustus. He is still pleasing himself with his new powers and is still using these powers to satisfy the most trivial demands of other people. This action does not imply that summoning two people from the past is trivial, but rather, that Faustus is trying to impress people with his feats rather than striving to use the powers for noble purposes. Before Faustus made the pact, he had anticipated benefiting humanity and Germany with his newly acquired capabilities. Instead of probing into the mystery of the universe, he simply makes horns appear on the head of a knight.

In the time that has elapsed since the first part of the play, Faustus has gained fame and reputation. Because of his reputation, the emperor himself expresses an interest in Faustus and invites him to the imperial court. But the point, as noted above, is that Faustus does not use his advantage to instruct the emperor, but only to entertain him by simple magical tricks and illusions.

It is ironic that Faustus summons up Alexander the Great — a man who conquered the entire world and performed almost impossible tasks. Faustus has at his

command the means to surpass the deeds of Alexander but fails to take advantage of them. Whereas Alexander had sovereignty over the entire known world, Faustus has power to hold dominion over the unknown world. Alexander accomplished the feats he performed only by means of human power, whereas Faustus has had to pay dearly for superhuman capabilities.

The incident with the knight demonstrates how Faustus has become increasingly proud of his occult powers. The knight is presented at first as the unbeliever. Because he is sarcastic and insulting to Faustus, he becomes a type of foil for Faustus. Thus Faustus makes a pair of horns grow on his head. For Marlowe's audience, a man whose wife was unfaithful to him was known as a cuckold and was represented as having a pair of horns growing out of his head. Therefore, besides the comic physical appearance of the knight, there was the added comedy of his being the cuckold or foolish man.