

Thoughts on Caligari and Faustus

1. The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari

While I know that the shocking and distorted imagery in the film was part of the larger movement of German Expressionism, the use in this film seems to have special significance. I say this because the distorted scenery and lighting only appear during the 'story' part of the film, all of which is apparently an invention of the crazed mind of the main character. Therefore, it seems to signify his madness, and in retrospect, might have been a clue, pointing toward the final narrative twist.

It's hard to judge Caligari's role as a mastermind, since there are two different Caligari character's in the film. If however, we focus on the 'evil Caligari', it would seem that he is a fair example of a mastermind. He has much academic knowledge, as he has gained the top position at the hospital, and has discovered powerful manipulations of the somnambulists mind. He also is a good salesman it seems, as he is able to pack his tent at the fair. However, he makes several terrible judgments throughout the story. He is exceptionally overconfident about his ability to avoid getting caught. It really doesn't take much cleverness to catch him, despite the fact that he even gets fairly lucky, when the other townsman redirects the suspicion towards him, when attempting murder himself. He seems to take so much joy in terrorizing these people that he misunderstands the risks. He permits his somnambulist to predict the death of the first victim, and then still proceeds to have that man killed. It is a ridiculously overconfident and foolish mistake. So while he is quite knowledgeable, he does not seem very wise.

2. Dr. Faustus

Faustus, as we discussed, also lacks in wisdom, while being full of knowledge. I haven't read any other of Marlowe's plays, so I don't know how complex his characters tend to be, but Faustus seemed like a character of limited range. At all times he was either blustering with sadistic pride and ambition, or else lamenting his past mistakes. He never learns from his mistakes though. He never understands his own patterns. He is no Hamlet, no Macbeth. It only takes simple arguments to win him over to the devil's side. The evil angel simply needs to mention wealth or power and Faustus is instantly won over.

The simplicity of the character seems to fit the style of the play though. Faustus isn't supposed to be a realistic and well rounded picture of humanity. He represents one area of our faults: pride and blind desire.

The intent of simplicity is clear through the format of the play. It starts out with a traditional Greek Choral opening, already moving toward an older, simpler style. There is usually only one interaction per scene, and there is a steady pattern of switching between tragic and comedic acts. The concepts of good and evil are clearly laid out, with no real gray area. It therefore is more of a rhetorical play than a realist play, teaching a lesson about pride, in the context of the Protestant religion.

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