

Scene 2 Analysis

This analysis explores the dramatic function of Scene 2 in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, examining how comic scenes reflect and comment on the main action while providing structural and thematic contrast. We'll consider how Marlowe uses these techniques to develop character, advance themes, and engage his audience through varied language registers.



Scene 2: A Comic Echo of Faustus's Fall

Summary

Two scholars approach Wagner seeking Faustus, but instead of answering directly, Wagner engages in absurd scholastic logic to evade their question. After his display of ridiculous disputation, Wagner finally reveals that Faustus is inside with Valdes and Cornelius—known practitioners of magic. Alarmed, the scholars resolve to inform the Rector, hoping his "grave counsel can reclaim" Faustus from his dangerous path.



Wagner's pretentious mimicry of scholarly debate serves as both comic relief and commentary on the misuse of knowledge, creating a deliberate parallel to Faustus's own intellectual pride.

Functions of the Comic Interlude

1

Echo Scene

Wagner's scene functions as an "echo scene"—a dramatic technique where a minor character parodies the actions of a major character. Wagner's misuse of logic mirrors Faustus's own misapplication of knowledge in Scene 1, but in a ridiculous rather than tragic context.

2

Dramatic Contrast

The scene creates contrast in both tone and substance. While Faustus uses his intellect to justify pursuing forbidden knowledge, Wagner employs similar rhetorical strategies for trivial purposes, highlighting the emptiness of intellectual posturing without wisdom.

3

Expanding Consequences

This scene demonstrates that Faustus's choices affect others beyond himself—Wagner mimics his master's worst qualities, while the scholars' concern establishes that Faustus's fall has wider implications for his academic community.

These functions were common in Renaissance drama, where comic scenes often commented on the main action while providing necessary temporal breaks between major dramatic developments.

Language and Class in Elizabethan Drama

Marlowe employs distinct language registers to signal social standing and character traits—a technique Shakespeare would later perfect. This linguistic stratification was a hallmark of Renaissance dramatic practice:

- Noble characters speak in elevated, formal blank verse ("Marlowe's Mighty Line")
- Lower-class or comic characters speak in plain prose
- The contrast between these registers creates both meaning and humor

Wagner's pretentious but clumsy attempts at scholarly language reveal his aspirations and limitations, while heightening our appreciation of Faustus's genuine but misused brilliance.



Linguistic Parallels

Similar linguistic class distinctions appear in Shakespeare's works, including *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the mechanicals' rough prose contrasts with the nobles' poetic speech, creating both comedy and commentary.

Critical Implications for Understanding *Doctor Faustus*

Technical Function

Scene 2 allows time to pass dramatically between Faustus's decision to pursue magic and his actual conjuring, creating realistic temporal progression while maintaining audience engagement.

Thematic Reinforcement

The scholars' desire to "reclaim" Faustus emphasizes the gravity of his choice—the word choice suggests he is already lost, heightening the theological stakes of his decision to pursue forbidden knowledge.

Marlowe's Craft

This scene demonstrates Marlowe's sophisticated dramatic technique, using comic interludes not merely for entertainment but to deepen characterization, advance themes, and provide structural contrast to the main tragic action.

Understanding these comic scenes is crucial for appreciating the full artistry of Marlowe's work. Rather than mere digressions, they form an integral part of the play's exploration of knowledge, pride, and damnation—themes that resonate throughout Renaissance drama's engagement with humanism and Christian theology.