



Scene 8 : Analysis Comic Relief and Parallel Structure

An exploration of Marlowe's use of comic subplot to mirror and critique the main action through the characters of Robin and Rafe.

Scene 8: The Servant's Mimicry

Scene 8 introduces a crucial comic subplot featuring Robin the ostler (stable hand) who has stolen one of Faustus' conjuring books.



The Theft

Robin steals a conjuring book from Faustus' library, mimicking the protagonist's own theft of forbidden knowledge.



The Ambition

Like Faustus, Robin desires power for carnal pleasures—specifically to make village maidens "dance naked" before him.



The Contract

Robin establishes a master-servant relationship with Rafe, promising him the kitchen maid in exchange for service.

This comic interlude deliberately mirrors the main plot through vulgar parody, offering both relief and critical commentary on Faustus' own actions.

Structural Parallels Between High and Low Characters

Faustus & Mephistophilis

- Scholar seeking forbidden knowledge
- Summons supernatural power
- Desires wealth, knowledge, and women
- Makes pact with devil
- Uses power for increasingly trivial purposes
- Elevated, poetic language

Robin & Rafe

- Stable hand stealing forbidden knowledge
- Attempts to conjure a devil
- Desires village maidens and kitchen maids
- Establishes servant-master relationship
- Plans trivial, bawdy tricks from the start
- Common language with obscene puns

The parallel structures create a **critical mirror** that reflects and distorts Faustus' actions, suggesting that despite his learning and lofty ambitions, his desires aren't fundamentally different from those of the lowly stable hand.



Interpretive Significance

Comic Relief

The scene provides necessary comic relief after the intense Rome sequence, allowing audience respite through bawdy humour whilst maintaining thematic continuity.

Moral Commentary

By placing Faustus' desires in the mouth of a rustic servant, Marlowe suggests the **baseness of the scholar's ambitions** despite their grandiose presentation.

Class Critique

The parallel between learned scholar and illiterate servant democratises sin, suggesting that regardless of education or social position, human desires follow similar patterns.

This scene ultimately reinforces Marlowe's complex moral vision: Faustus' greatest tragedy is not his damnation per se, but rather the **trivial ends** to which he applies his extraordinary means. The ostlers' comic subplot makes this waste starkly apparent.