

INTRODUCTION

MARLOWE'S LIFE

Interpreters of *Doctor Faustus* have been taxed by the problem of reconciling the tempestuous and blasphemous Marlowe of contemporary record with the playwright of the damnation of Faustus. The son of a Canterbury cobbler, born in 1564, scholar of King's College, Canterbury, then up to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, as Archbishop Parker's scholar in divinity in 1580, he was much away from the University and probably acting as a government secret agent at Rheims, the centre where Englishmen were trained as Jesuits in preparation for return to an underground movement reputedly working for the overthrow of Protestantism in England. At least, when he wished to proceed for the M.A. degree of Cambridge in 1587, and the University authorities expressed suspicion that his presence at Rheims might be due to Catholic sympathies, a letter was sent from the Queen's Privy Council, stating that 'he had done her Majesty good service, and deserved to be rewarded for his faithful dealing.' During the years following, when Marlowe's centre seems to have been the London of the playhouses, he became for fellow-poets, at least when they were not carried away by jealousy or fear to malign him, 'the Muses' darling'. In *Tamburlaine* (first staged in 1587), he gave the London stage pageantry and a spectacle of amoral aspiration sweeping all before it, with death as the only enemy to whom the hero became subject; in *The Jew of Malta* (probably staged in 1589-90)

he gave it an unprecedented kind of tragic farce; the homosexual element which he had introduced into the classical pastiche of *Dido Queen of Carthage* was even more clearly expressed in the historical study of *Edward II* (possibly of 1591). *Doctor Faustus* was most probably the last of his plays, since it is unquestionably dependent on the English translation, *The Historie of the damnable life, and deserved death of Doctor John Faustus*, which appeared in 1592, apparently for the first time, though based on a German work of 1587.

Marlowe had twice before been recorded as involved in violent brawls before the incident which brought about his death. Though the immediate particulars are now available, since the discovery of the report of the coroner's inquest by Leslie Hotson in 1925, the motives for killing him are still a matter of surmise. Had he become politically inconvenient? Was he a victim of homosexual jealousy? He was at the time under investigation on charges of atheism and blasphemy, the evidence being papers discovered in the rooms of the playwright Thomas Kyd, containing unorthodox ideas, which Kyd said had been left there by Marlowe; and the later report of a government informer, Richard Baines, confirmed the charge. All told, whether from the scraps of available biographical information or from the plays themselves, Marlowe appears a complex personality, whose tensions were the seed-bed of drama.

THE TEXT OF THE PLAY

The text of the play published by Thomas Bushell in 1604 (known as the A-text) and the text published by John Wright in 1616 (known as the B-text) are different; and

modern editors (F.S. Boas, and most notably W.W. Greg¹) have carefully studied them in order to decide which is the earlier text. The A-text is shorter (1517 lines), and the presentation of comic material here is less full and satisfactory than in the B-text, which is 2121 lines long. It is now generally thought that the body of the A-text is a shortened version of the play, probably, as Greg suggested, a reconstruction of the play from memory by persons who included at least one actor associated with the original production. The shortening may have been made for provincial touring of the play when the London theatres were closed during the plague of 1592-4. As Bushell first registered the play for publication in 1601, it may be that an edition earlier than the 1604 one had appeared, which is now lost.

The B-text is thought to be an earlier and fuller version of the play, depending on the authorial manuscript. Yet the editor had also before him a 1611 reprint of the A-text : an instance of clumsy use of the A-text to fill out the B-text is in the handling of the Chorus before Act III. A shortened version of the Chorus from the A-text, only 11 lines long, in 1616 appears between Scenes vi and vii (Act II. ii and iii); but a fuller version of the same Chorus, peculiar to the B-text and obviously more satisfactory in content and placing, appears between vii and viii (i.e. before Act III, Scene i). Another type of editorial intervention is evident in the

¹ F.S. Boas, ed., *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (London, 1932); W.W. Greg, ed., *Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus' 1604-1616 : Parallel Texts* (Oxford, 1950); *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe : A Conjectural Reconstruction* (Oxford, 1950).

alteration of passages which might fall foul of the 1606 Act of Abuses, which imposed a heavy fine for blasphemy uttered on the stage. So at V. ii. 143-5 A has

O Ile leape up to my God: who pulles me downe?
See see where Christs blood streames in the firmament,
One drop would save my soule.

In B this becomes

O I'le leape up to heaven: who puls me downe?
One drop of bloud will save me.

Henslowe's *Diary* for 22 November, 1602, recorded that he had paid William Birde and Samuel Rowley £4 'for additions to *Doctor Faustus*'. Are these additions, which are usually taken to be the comic scenes, incorporated in either the A- or the B-text?

Evidence for the existence of the fuller B version of the play in the 1590s and before 1604 is found in references to its comic incidents in the other contemporary plays — the anonymous *Taming of a Shrew* of 1594, which echoes *Doctor Faustus* in five passages, including two which appear only in the B-text, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1600-1), which also refers to a comic incident found only in the B-text. This suggests that we cannot assume that the extra comic material in the B-text consists simply of additions made almost a decade after Marlowe's death. Even if one is inclined to attribute the more poorly-written comic scenes to a collaborator with Marlowe, such as Rowley, it is not unlikely that they were written on the whole with Marlowe's knowledge and in his life-time.

An additional problem arises where A and B versions of

speeches exist both of which look like authentic Marlowe, suggesting that he may have revised his own original version for the prompt-copy. Examples are the two versions of the Scholars' speeches on seeing Helen, and the two versions of the Old Man's speech which follows (V. i). Because of such considerations, as Roma Gill says of her Oxford text, which we are using, 'Absolute trust can be given to neither the A-nor the B-text, and a modern edition must be an amalgam of the two. The present edition is based on the B-text, but readings from A are adopted whenever they seem justified.'

THE FAUSTUS STORY AND ITS PROVENANCE

Though the real Faustus was active in the early sixteenth century, the German account of his life, *Historia von D. Joħan Fausten*, also known as 'the Spies *Faustbuch*', upon which the English version of 'P.F. Gent' was based, did not appear till 1587. The historical Faustus was born around 1480, perhaps in a village near Wurtemberg or Heidelberg in southern Germany, and died in the late 1530s at Staufen in Baden. This means that he was the contemporary of Martin Luther (1483-1546), reformer of the German church. More than that, their lives were lived in response to the same society, sometimes at fairly close quarters to one another, so that Faustus can be better understood in relation to the German situation of his day.

(1) REFORMATION AND RENAISSANCE

In the Germany of Luther and Faustus, humanist influences — an interest in classical learning and experimentation

in educational reform—existed alongside folk-beliefs (the countryside was believed to throng with spirits) and a Church which offered **sacraments**, pilgrimages, **indulgences** and the intercession of the saints as a solace for personal disquiet. Life in this world was regarded as a period of preparation for the next, and to become sure of one's salvation there was no better way than to renounce the world and enter a monastery.¹ Yet although Luther became a monk after being suddenly struck down by lightning in 1505, he gained little or no relief for his tormented conscience, which told him that he was a sinner unworthy of the presence of God who is just and holy. A visit to Rome only convinced him of the levity and corruption of many of the priesthood; while reflection on the sacrament of penance, which required that he confess his sins to a priest before receiving absolution, only made him aware of sinfulness, not simply as a series of acts, but as an inescapable condition, and drove him further into despair. Yet in 1511 he became a professor of divinity at the University of Wittenberg, where his task was to expound the teaching of the Bible. On studying the New Testament directly and in depth for the first time, he discovered that its message of spiritual freedom through trust in God's love was very different from the hard religion of ritualistic, penitential and ascetic practices and blind submission to the priesthood which Christianity had become for very many.

I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us

- See *Glossary of Terms* (pp. 60-64).

¹ See B. Moeller, 'Religious Life in Germany on the Eve of the reformation', in Gerald Strauss, ed., *Pre-Reformation Germany* (London, 1972).

through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through an open door into paradise.¹

At first Luther thought of Church-reform in educational terms: students of theology, and the laity or ordinary people as well, must concentrate on the original documents of Christianity in the Bible, rather than on later commentaries and interpretations which distorted its teaching and made religion a matter of fear and superstition instead of love and reconciliation. But in 1517, when the Reformation is often regarded as beginning, he was drawn into controversy over the sale of **indulgences** by which ritual penance was commuted for money, sanctioned by the Pope, the temporal head of the Church. Luther objected to these as a commercialization of religion and a debasement of its seriousness about human problems. Before long, his reform movement had led to the formation of national churches owing no allegiance to the Pope in several European countries, including England, and to the giving of a greater role to the laity in Church-government.²

At one level Luther's movement can be seen as the last and most cataclysmic of a number of medieval movements (such as the Franciscan movement) concerned with informing secular life with Christian attitudes. At another level it can be seen as a radical attempt to deal with the problem of guilt, anxiety and despair with which late medieval society was ridden.³ Indeed the increasing fervour of medieval

¹ Quoted from Luther in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Mentor, 1955), p. 49.

² See A.G. Dickens, *Reformation and Society in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London, 1966).

³ See J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London, 1924).