

Christi und Antichristi was published, with diptych illustrations by the celebrated artist Lucas Cranach, contrasting Luther with the Pope.¹ Apparently this binary way of thinking belonged to the Luther-Melanchthon circle. In his programme of university reform Melanchthon was deeply influenced by Erasmus: both condemned an education which was a matter of words rather than the solid truth. From a university speech of Melanchthon on the intellectual irresponsibility of sophists, both in Plato's time and in his own, we can gather something of his views:

These undisciplined, lawless spirits were very dangerous; whatever pleased their fancy, this they never ceased to magnify, but everything disagreeable to them they rejected as of no account; that which looked plausible they insisted upon as true . . . they employed clear and well-defined terms to express nothing, and threw around sober realities an air of irony.²

As a university official, Melanchthon was also responsible for trying to quell the 'public tumults at night' caused by bands of unruly students. And this was the very Wittenberg in which the *Faustbuch* places Faustus as the central figure of a revelling and irreverent student group. Recent critics³ who have pointed to the element of levity and superficiality

¹ A. G. Dickens, *Reformation and Society*, Plates 23, 24. The *Faustbuch's* account of Faust's visit to Rome and comic encounter with the Pope is developed by Marlowe or his collaborator into a more positive anti-Roman episode involving the rival Pope (Bruno) and the German Emperor.

² C. L. Manschreck, *Melanchthon, The Quiet Reformer* (New York, 1958), p. 149.

³ Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea* (Cambridge, 1968), chap. 11; H. W. Matalene, 'Marlowe's *Faustus* and the Comforts of Academicism', *English Literary History* XXXIX (1972), pp. 495-520.

in Faustus' pursuit of his intellectual interests are responding to something real, not only in Marlowe's play, but in its source.

Even before the Reformation period Faustus was mentioned, beginning from 1507, in humanist letters as a pretentious braggart, a cheat and a homosexual, as well as a prognosticator of events. The first mention of his strange death, as well as a few of his strange feats, is in the *Sermones Conviviales* (1548) of a Protestant preacher, Johannes Gast. In fact it seems that soon after his death he had become both a leader of carnival in popular story-telling and a suitable example of levity and buffoonery for the moral instruction of Reformed Germany. One of the most interesting short accounts of him is found in *Operae Horarum Subcisivorum* (1561) by the humanist Philipp Camerarius whose father had personally known Faustus. He rationalizes Faustus' magic as illusionism practised before a drunken audience, but notices 'how subtly, and yet seriously, even in things that seem to us ridiculous, that arch-conjurer the devil undermines the safety and well-being of mankind.' It is just this mixture of the serious with the absurd which characterizes the longer narratives of Faustus' life.

The first complete life of Faustus in print, published by Johann Spies in Frankfurt on the Main in 1587, and so known as 'the Spies *Faustbuch*', is more or less identical with a manuscript of perhaps the 1570s, belonging to Wolfenbüttel, which combines sensational legendary story with awful warning to the student community as well as to the world in general. The English *Historie* of 1592, which has been described by Palmer and More as 'a very

free, frequently grossly inaccurate, rendering into English of the Spies edition of 1587 or one of its immediate successors¹ contains, like it, several themes and episodes from the medieval literature of festivity, which have been transferred to Faustus, yet begins and ends as a serious religious tract on the dangers of impiety. The association with carnival tales is particularly explicit in Chapter 42, 'How Doctor Faustus kept his Shrovetide',² Chapter 43, 'How Doctor Faustus feasted his guests on the Ash-Wednesday' (when fasting was supposed to begin), Chapter 44, on 'The last Bacchanalia' of this particular Lent season, followed by his revelation of Helen of Troy to his student friends in Chapter 45 and the old man's warning in Chapter 48 (incidents which were transferred by Marlowe to the very last month of Faustus' life, though here they are placed seven years before his death). These tales of feasting, jesting, the conjuring of abundant food, wine, music, wearing of masks, and apparent fun ending in violence, cruelty and death, all come straight from the carnival celebrations of the German Middle Ages on the one hand and **goliardic literature** on the other. Other related episodes are the visit to hell and the visit to the Pope. In medieval Germany, carnival processions were

¹ *Ed. cit.*, p. 132.

² E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, I, p. 382, discusses the association of the German *Fastnachtspiele* (or Shrove-tide plays, performed in the season preceding the Lenten fast) of Nuremberg with spring-time sword-dances at which the fool must appear. For a Reformation satirical drama, *Eckius Dedolatus*, drawing on the conventions of the carnival farce, and belonging to the Pirckheimer circle in Nuremberg (close to Melanchthon in friendship), see Hans Rupprich, 'Willibald Pirckheimer: A Study of his Personality as a Scholar', in Gerald Strauss, ed., *Pre-Reformation Germany* (London, 1972), p. 407.

interpreted as the march of figures from hell: in sixteenth-century Nuremberg this was still so,¹ and the whole contraption of giants, devils and fools, stocked with fireworks, was burnt before the town hall as the grand finale. So it is not surprising if devils in the *Faustbuch* appear repeatedly before Faustus as phantasmagoric carnival figures, now one grotesque shape, now another. The story of Faustus' visit to the Pope and his comic interruption of his banquet belongs to a related old tradition, the story of the gluttonous feasting of the Roman Curia, Pope and cardinals, appearing as early as the eleventh century in 'The Treatise of Garcia of Toledo'.² A version of the Pope's comic feast, with the devil as president, appears in a propaganda-play belonging to the early Reformation-movement.³ Among Luther's own tales told to his friends at the table is one about a Satanic compact with a monk, who ate up a load of hay in consequence, and another about the Emperor Maximilian's father, the Emperor Friedrich. In a magical contest with a guest, the Emperor turns the guest's hands and feet into claws, and in return the guest puts stag's horns on his head, so that he cannot draw it back through the window after looking through at a commotion outside.⁴ Still another

¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. from the Russian by Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 393, and *passim*.

² Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, pp. 290-91.

³ Roland H. Bainton, *op. cit.*, p. 241. Steven E. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities* (New Haven, 1975), pp. 108-20, describes satirical German propaganda-poems in which exorcism of devils is a motif. See also *The Continental Renaissance* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), ed. A. J. Krailsheimer, pp. 349-51, 416, 496-8, on German Reformation satire.

⁴ E. Belfort Bax, *German Society at the Close of the Middle Ages* (London, 1894), chap. 4, 'The Folklore of the Reformation', pp. 149-51.

conjuring episode of the *Faustbuch* may have had special contemporary German relevance—the producing of fruit in winter for the Duchess of Vanholt. For the Peasant Wars were said in contemporary chronicle to have been sparked off by the unreasonable demands of a countess from her serfs that she be brought strawberries and cherries out of season.¹ Such is the farrago of comic, grotesque, and moralizing episodes which reached Marlowe. A later section will discuss the ways in which his play *Doctor Faustus* relates to earlier European drama; but we should keep in mind that the *Faustbuch* itself reflects certain kinds of public dramatic spectacle and entertainment common on the German streets and in student circles.

MARLOWE AND HIS SOURCE

Considering that Marlowe kept so close to *The Historie of the damnable life, and deserved death of Doctor John Faustus* in many ways, it is remarkable how he both penetrated into the character of Faustus far further than his source had done, and rearranged and compressed episodes in such a way as to sharpen the tragic effect. Of course several of what we have described as the carnival-episodes were retained. But his treatment of them was free, making their entertainment-value not simply a matter of devilish frolics and fireworks, but also of Rabelaisian verbal tricks, such as the parody of ritual at the Papal feast and the grotesque speeches of the Seven Deadly Sins. Like the comic underplot in which man parodies master in his dealings with devils, the good and evil angels have been introduced from

¹ Leopold von Ranke, *History of the Reformation in Germany*, trans. S. Austin (Philadelphia, 1844), pp. 210-11.

the morality-play tradition; but Valdes and Cornelius are Marlowe's own development, from a hint in his source, learned gentlemen enticing Faustus in dignified language farther along the way he has already entered. For a moment the audience may have the impression of a corporation of magicians, but for a moment only. Faustus characteristically performs alone before admiring viewers, both those on the stage and those in the audience.

In *The Damnable Life* Faustus' motives for seeking contact with the devils are hardly explored beyond the terms of his agreement: he wishes to have a devil at his own personal command, he wishes to satisfy his obsessive curiosity about what hell is like. This is more prominent than in Marlowe, and is possibly related to Lucian's famous dialogue 'Menippus', about a descent into hell through magic, to see what is the fate of the famous dead, a Renaissance favourite from the Latin translation of Sir Thomas More, in his joint edition of Lucian with Erasmus (1506) through Rabelais. In contrast, Marlowe's Faustus is drawn on by his powerful sense of human potentialities, which critics have so often associated with the Renaissance mood of aspiration. For Faustus' speech, 'How am I glutted with conceit of this', Marlowe could have picked up a hint in Mephostophilis' speech in *The Damnable Life*, Chapter 18, on the wonders to be revealed by devils,¹ and another from Chapter 6, from Faustus' remarks on his dissatisfaction

¹ E. M. Butler, *The Fortunes of Faust* (Cambridge, 1952), p. 35, notices how *The Damnable Life* inserts a passage not in the *Faustbuch* on the cosmic accomplishments likely to be Faustus' on signing the bond, and lays less emphasis on his sexual and material ambitions, more on his burning desire for knowledge ('The unsatiable Speculator'), and on the hopelessness of his situation as damned.