

with philosophy, law and divinity in his letter of committal to the Evil One. But the brilliant depth and coherence of view are all Marlowe's own, setting before us the commanding height and scope of Faustus' vision of what he might do with the help of magic. It is in contrast to this that the succeeding levities of the inherited Faustus legend are all the more startling.

Early in the play Marlowe intensified the episodes leading to the signing of the devil's bond, partly by re-arrangement (Mephostophilis' first discussion of the fall of Lucifer and the nature of hell, and Faustus' first moment of doubt come before the contract is made in Marlowe, after in *The Damnable Life*), partly by compression (*Doctor Faustus* I. iii draws on *The Damnable Life*, Chapters 2, 3, 4, 10 and 16, II. i draws on Chapters 4-7, 9-11, 14 and 16), and partly by a significant deepening of the theological interpretation of what Faustus is doing. In *The Damnable Life* Faustus first tries to obtain the services of Mephostophilis without losing his soul, whereas Marlowe's Faustus already assumes that he is damned. He also appears to be more in command of the situation, in contrast with *The Damnable Life*—it is he who sets the twenty-four-year limit, it is he who asks Mephostophilis to reappear as a friar, so that his discussion of who took the initiative, he or the satanic world, is all the more ironic. And the ominousness of the actual signing of the bond is increased, both by the presence of Mephostophilis throughout, by the congealing of Faustus' blood, as though nature refused to co-operate, and by Faustus' *consummatum est* ('it is finished'), echoing Christ's words on the cross. The telescoping into Act II Scene i of

events which happened over an extended period of *The Damnable Life*, and the sharp switch from scepticism about hell there to longings for heaven in Scene ii, all reinforce the impression of Faustus' continual wavering and change of purpose which M. C. Bradbrook noted in 1935.<sup>1</sup> The basis for despair in *The Damnable Life* is quite otherwise: 'he looked up to heaven, but saw nothing therein; for his heart was so possessed with the Divil, that hee could thinke of nought els but of hell, and the paynes thereof' (Chapter 15). Marlowe's Faustus, on the other hand, fixes his mind on heaven, and, by a clever combination of Mephostophilis' astronomical instructions in Chapter 21 with Faustus' question about the maker of heaven in Chapter 18, is forced by the combined pressure of Lucifer, Belzebub, and Mephostophilis to think about hell, and forget about his dissatisfaction at Mephostophilis' dry answers.

In Acts III and IV Marlowe (assuming that he planned these Acts, whatever assistance he may have had or not from collaborators in writing them), stuck fairly close to the source in the choice of conjuring-scenes. It is in Act V that we are again aware of Marlowe's art of telescoping and re-arrangement and re-creation. Scene i combines motifs from Chapters 56, 57, 45, 48, 55 and 49, in that order. Scene ii combines Chapters 62-63 with hints from Chapters 58-61. Again compression and re-arrangement (with the appearance of Helen and the Old Man transferred from seven years before to the end of Faustus' life) give a sense of heightened conflict and contrast at the eleventh hour. On the one hand Marlowe strengthens the impression

<sup>1</sup> *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1935), p. 150.

that Faustus is to some extent in command of the situation: in *The Damnable Life* he is forced to renew his contract in the seventeenth year by Mephostophilis, and is afraid to call up Mephostophilis in the last phase of his life, whereas Marlowe makes Faustus offer to renew the contract near the end. Yet on the other hand Marlowe makes us aware of the devils' haunting presence when the contract is renewed, and they stand as silent witnesses above the last feast. One has only to read the sermonizing of Faustus' last speech in *The Damnable Life* to realize how far Marlowe has soared beyond it in achievement.<sup>1</sup>

#### DOCTOR FAUSTUS AND THE EARLIER DRAMA

##### MYSTERY PLAYS

Devils first appeared on the medieval European stage either as tempters or as punishers of sin in the context of sacred story. Their first appearance was in Latin drama, in France and, more significantly, in Germany. When the *Foolish Virgins* meet their doom in the twelfth-century *Sponsus*<sup>2</sup> in a manuscript of Limoges in France, or when King Herod dies suddenly after ordering the slaughter of the children of Jerusalem in the thirteenth-century Christmas play<sup>3</sup> in a manuscript of Benediktbeuern in Germany, these personages are hailed away from the stage into hell by devils. In the German play the shepherds at Christ's nativity are tempted by a devil to disbelieve the

<sup>1</sup> On Marlowe's use of sources, see also E. M. Butler, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-52; Douglas Cole, *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Princeton, 1962), chap. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (Oxford, 1933), Vol. II, pp. 361-69.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 172-96.

angel's message; in the play of Mary Magdalene in the same Benediktbeuern manuscript she too is poised between a devil and an angel before her conversion.<sup>1</sup> (This is carried over into the late fifteenth-century Digby Mary Magdalene play in England).<sup>2</sup> The role of Satan in plays on The Harrowing of Hell, in the traditional attribution to him of the question, 'Who is this king of glory?', is that of the sceptic probing the assurance of believers.<sup>3</sup>

In the vernacular mystery-cycles, such appearances of devils are developed with a sense of macabre comedy. One thinks of the appalling confrontation of Herod at his triumphal feast in *Ludus Coventriae* with Mors (Death) and Diabolus (the Devil), who says ironically:

I xal hem teche pleyes fyn,  
 And showe such myrthe as is in helle . . .  
 I xal yow bere forth with me,  
 And shewe yow sportys of oure gle . . .<sup>4</sup>

Satan's promise of entertainment in hell can be related to the thirteenth-century 'Vision of Thurkill' in which the damned are compelled to act out their former sins and to represent various vices for the pleasure of their devilish masters,<sup>5</sup> as well as of course to the appearance of the pageant of the vices in *Doctor Faustus*.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 518 ff.

<sup>2</sup> A. W. Pollard, *English Miracle Plays, Moralities and Interludes* (Oxford, 1914, 6th edn. rev.), pp. 48-63.

<sup>3</sup> Young, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 421-32, the Klosterneuberg play; cf. Vol. I, p. 176, Bamberg ritual of 1587.

<sup>4</sup> *English Mystery Plays*, ed. Peter Happé (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 341.

<sup>5</sup> Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (London, 1972), pp. 30-32.

In the **Harrowing of Hell** scenes of both the York and Wakefield cycles in England, Sathanas is accompanied by boisterous fellow-devils, Ribauld and Beelzebub. The Benediktbeuern plays, with their touches of humorous realism, are found in the famous manuscript containing also the *Carmina Burana*, one of the most celebrated collections of medieval Latin lyrics associated with the *vagantes*,<sup>1</sup> *goliards*, or unattached scholars whose work is secular, often ribald and drawing on popular currents. In England it was the much later plays associated with an anonymous writer known as 'the Wakefield Master' of the fifteenth century which developed a strain of humorous realism most notably.

One medieval dramatic theme which is a special analogue to the Faust-story is the legend of Theophilus, who sold his soul to the devil for the sake of ecclesiastical promotion, but was saved by the Virgin Mary. A French play, *Le Miracle de Théophile*, was composed by Rutebeuf around 1260. In England the only tantalizing suggestions of possible dramatic performance are scenes, either carved or in glass, in five medieval churches—Lincoln Cathedral, Beverley Minster, Norwich and Ely Cathedrals, and a church in York. All these towns were centres of religious drama, but no text of such an English play has yet been found.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faustus was called one of the 'wandering scholars' (*scholasticos vagantes*) by Conrad Gesner, the famous sixteenth-century scientist (Palmer and More, *op. cit.*, p. 101).

<sup>2</sup> M. D. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 186-88; Palmer and More, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-77; Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image* (1910, London, 1961), pp. 260-62; Oecalompadius, the friend of Melanchthon, wrote a *Nemesis Theophili* (*The Fate of Theophilus*), in 1517. (See *art. cit.*, p. 18, n. 2).

## THE MORALITY-PLAY

(1) *Development of the Tragic Pattern*

In *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Berkeley, 1936) Willard Farnham has shown that in the early morality play (such as *The Castell of Perseverance*, c.1400–25) the tragic pattern of conflict between the human will and the divinely-laid-down conditions of life, the sequence of temptation, sin and remorse are only part of a wider optimistic pattern which includes repentance, divine forgiveness and recovery. The medieval belief in the possibility of repentance after death and promotion to heaven from purgatory stands in the way of a completely tragic rendering of this theme, and indeed makes for a comic resolution, in its special medieval sense of 'bliss after woe'.

The belief in purgatory was rejected by the Protestant reformers, with a consequent increase in the sense of the decisiveness of man's earthly disposition as a preparation for heaven or hell. This would account for changes in certain Tudor morality-plays, in which the themes of despair, doom and retribution play a much more important part than in earlier moralities. A play with a simple climax of unexpected doom falling on an unrepentant figure (rather like the *Ludus Coventriae* Herod), *The Cradle of Security*, was being played in Gloucester in the 1560s:

The desolate Prince starting up bare faced and finding himself thus sent for judgement, made a lamentable complaint of his miserable case, and so was carried away by wicked spirits. This prince did personate in the morall, the wicked of the world.

Robert Willis, *Mount Tabor*, 1639.

In some plays, such as *The Trial of Treasure*, *The Tide Tarrieth No Man*, and *Nice Wanton*, there are, instead of a central figure poised between good and evil, two contrasted figures, in whom are embodied good and evil destined for reward and punishment. Or, in a related type of play, 'the virtuous characters remain, but exist mainly for purposes of good counsel, stern warning and choric comment; the active characters are the worldly ones, who choose evil and move steadily towards a fatal end.'<sup>1</sup> Yet the fatal end need not be apparent, and the protagonist may look as though he is moving from success to success, with the help and instruction of the Vice and his accomplices, who however by their ironic comments and asides make the real state of affairs apparent to the audience. So irony, both in action and speech, is characteristic of this kind of morality play, and comic farce concludes in the moment of tragic and despairing recognition of the truth.

(2) *The Vice : External and Internal Forces*

From earlier to later morality, as Bernard Spivack has so brilliantly demonstrated in his book *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (Columbia, 1958), the agent of temptation to evil is the Vice, who in his multiple role of allegorical aggressor, homiletic preacher and humorist operates in an area between the didactic and the comic, and entices his victim by guile and intrigue into the path leading to damnation. He is not identical with Satan or Belial (the lord of evil), but is rather an emissary of his who does his destructive work among men. Different moralities have different

<sup>1</sup> J. M. R. Margeson, *The Origins of English Tragedy* (Oxford, 1967), p. 37.

Vices according to the moral emphasis of the play—whether the Titivillus of *Mankind* (c. 1470) who tempts man in dreams, the Sensuality of Medwall's *Nature* (c. 1516–20), or the Ambidexter of *Cambyses* (c. 1569) in whom the role of jester taking the audience into his confidence is more interesting than the role of tempter. William Wager's late 'Comedy or Interlude', *Enough is as Good as a Feast* (c. 1570), with its protagonist Worldly Man poised between the influence of the stately sober trio, Heavenly Man, Contentation, and Enough on the one hand, who convert him temporarily to moderation, and Covetous (or Policy) and his trio Temerity, Inconsideration and Precipitation (*alias* Agility, Reason, and Ready Wit) on the other, presents temptation in terms of sophisticated argument which corresponds only too well with Worldly Man's own inclinations. As Enough puts it, in a statement balancing the idea of free-will against the idea of character determined by habit,

It will not out of the flesh that is bred in the bone verily.  
The worldly man will needs be a worldly man still.

Well, choose you; I will let you alone, do what you will.  
(ll. 862–64)<sup>1</sup>

One of the Vice's offices is to create a confusion of values, so that the protagonist can no longer distinguish the true from the false. As Worldly Man's oppressed tenant puts it, 'This reasonable speaking cometh from an unreasonable mind' (1141). It is his very nature to turn the world upside-down, and this is symbolized in those passages of fanciful nonsense in which a whole succession of Vice-figures

<sup>1</sup> Ed. Mark Benbow, in *Regents Renaissance Drama Series* (London, 1968), p. 118.