RELIGION AND REBELLIOUSNESS IN MARLOWE'S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

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So many things have been said about ***Dr Faustus*** that it seems almost natural to wonder whether it is a religious work at all. This question we could easily answer by stating that, despite and precisely because of the characterization of the protagonist as a human overreacher in line with the Promethean aspirations of Tamburlaine, ***Dr Faustus*** is to a great extent a religious work in much the same way as humanistic man was much more religious than we usually think. For the secularism of the Renaissance man can only stand out against a background of deep religiousness (though in crisis) which was partially favoured by Humanism and ultimately reacted against it.

The end of the XV century and the beginning of the XVI were marked by a sustained interest in religion, notwithstanding that the stress switched from confidence to anguish, and from communal to individual salvation. Many of the humanists were both learned scholars of classical antiquity and religious though very frequently independent individuals. Otherwise, the religious protagonists of the Reformation were very often accomplished humanists, at least with respect to the philological studies of Hebrew and Greek. But, despite the relationship between Humanism and Reformation, the spirit which achieved both Reformation and Counter-Reformation was not the kind of tolerant and secular Humanism of the early XVI century, but rather that of the political dangers derived from the ensuing division of Europe and the intense religious preoccupation and even zeal of the people at that time. To the religious preoccupation of great masses of people Humanism, which lay the emphasis on the individual moral development and self-knowledge, could not be an answer. What the majority of people needed at that time, as summarized by Melanchton, was relief against death and against Doomsday. This could only be provided either by the Catholic sacraments or by the justification by faith of the Protestant Reformation.

The Reformation in England crept in more as a disciplinary than a doctrinal crisis, which meant that for a long time part at least of the habits and mental attitudes of Catholicism remained side by side with the Reformation and the ongoing religious controversy which the majority of people, though not directly engaged in, were concerned with. To this it must be added the less noticeable undercurrent of the tradition of pagan, sceptical or even atheist Humanism which was secretly active under the cloak of extreme Protestant individualism as is proved by the existence of early reports (T. H. Parker, 1966: 121)[1] or the evidences of a School of Night of which Marlowe, Sir Walter Ralegh, and George Chapman were suspected members. In this respect it is worthwhile pointing out that the court of Elizabeth I was to some extent bent on secularism, astrology and magic (T. H. Parker, 1966: 144).

All these factors seem to point to the existence of a unique cultural environment, which marks Elizabethan taste. To our understanding this composite nature of the Elizabethan society and audience explains the conflicting interpretations in terms of the rebelliousness of Dr Faustus' character. For the play is influenced by three contemporary currents, the mediaeval traditions of the Catholic moralities, a certain Renaissance scepticism, and the new Protestant thought. These three worlds are, however, perfectly integrated to serve the development of the protagonist both as a complex individual and a symbolic man of his time, and to render the issue of rebelliousness the more dramatically effective, by paralleling Faustus' development as a character (overreacher, clown, reprobate) with the advance of the action from a wider to an increasingly narrower scope for salvation. The deterministic elements impose themselves little by little till, with the withdrawal of the Old Man and the Good Angel, there is a strong sense that Faustus is predetermined and damned, which could not be otherwise, since the tragical climax plainly depends on Faustus facing his appalling fate of eternal punishment without possibility of retreat by way of repentance. It is the Good Angel and the Evil Angel, the Old Man, or the Seven Deadly Sins which represent the "Old Religion", reminding us by their very presence on the stage that the gate to salvation is still open, that the "psychomachia" is still undecided, that Faustus can repent and obtain grace.

More particularly the Good Angel seems to stress Faustus' will and responsibility as playing an important part in his own salvation:

Oh stay, good Faustus, stay thy desperate steps.
I see an angel hover o'er thy head,
And with a vial full of precious grace,
Offers to pour the same into thy soul.
Then call for mercy and avoid despair.
(V. i. 58-62).

Accursed Faustus, miserable man,
That from thy soul exclud'st the grace of heaven
and fliest the throne of his tribunal seat.
(V. ii. 117-9).

It is no coincidence that when Faustus's destiny is decided he disappears, speaking before the Evil Angel leads Faustus to confront his own damnation (V. ii. 120-123). This passage does not sound very deterministic, unless we suppose that the Good Angel is vicious enough to torment the poor reprobate for what he had never the chance to get. Rather it implies that Faustus had the opportunity, but did not seize it. The Evil Angel, Mephostophilis, and Lucipher's discourses, on the other hand, tend to state the deterministic view of Faustus as already condemned in order to counteract the Good Angel and to prevent Faustus' retreat into salvation. When Faustus wants to repent, they foster Faustus' own sense of guilt:

Faust: When I behold the heavens then I repent
And curse thee, wicked Mephostophilis,
Because thou hast deprived me of those joys.

Meph: 'Twas thine own seeking, Faustus, thank thyself.
(II. i. 1-4).

The Chorus is less clear in its implication. At first sight it seems to represent an overture prior to the starting time of the action, as it is presented in the first act (I., 15-21). But, after reading Bluestone (1969: 35-6),[2] the equivocal meaning of the time sequence, the possible ironic meaning of the word "grac'd" repeated twice, the ambivalence of "cunning" and "conceit" raise

doubts about whether it does not stand for an absolute time, and a deterministic and conspiring heaven.

The reformed character of the play is already given by the myth itself as it came to Marlowe. The German source of Marlowe's ***Dr Faustus***, has a lot to do with Reformation (Martínez López, 1989: 2649, 2654-56, 2662-64 and Marlowe, 1983: 26-33 in the introduction of J. C. Santoyo).[3] Besides the general admission that the real George or John Faustus was turned into a legendary figure within the circle of Melanchton in Wittenberg and that the Faustbuch printed by Spiess in Frankfurt in 1587 was written by an earnest yet unknown Protestant, we find several features in the conception and structure of the myth (and hence the play by Marlowe) that makes it Protestant coloured.

In the first place it is difficult to imagine how ***Dr Faustus*** could have arisen in a Catholic background, which was still the realm of moralities where the Christian saves his soul or condemns himself on the grounds of his own deeds (even if there is a psychomachia going on or he needs the assistance of faith and sacraments) and where the gate to salvation is open until the very last moment; not to mention that the sequence of salvation is "repentance - faith-grace-salvation". This fits neither with the general atmosphere of reprobation and predestination which we shall deal with a few paragraphs below nor with the sequence of salvation in ***Dr Faustus*** which to our mind seems to be typically Calvinistic (lack of grace -unattainability of faith, impossibility of repentance, damnation). In the mediaeval German legends which are thought to be forerunners of the ***Faustbuch***, namely the low German drama ***Theophilus*** and the legend of Ciprianus, both characters repent and are saved -in the case of Theophilus through the Virgin's intercession and in the case of Ciprianus through his turning from evil magician into a saint and a martyr (Koch: 1927, 92).[4] Besides, it is the Protestant ferment with the theological preoccupation for the individual salvation which brings to the fore the tragical conflict between human will and divine fate, against which man is going to strive in vain.

But, moreover, the Protestant world brings about something new which was outside the scope of the hierarchized and fixed theological system of Catholicism. Breaking up the dogmatic interpretation of the Church's teachings by making available the Bible to all and establishing it as the highest sanction for faith, Protestantism is opening the door to the risks of interpretation. Marlowe's Faustus exemplifies these dangers perfectly. He is led into error by

his own pride and by the tricks (or perhaps the influence) of the devil as Mephostophilis triumphantly akcnowledges:

> I do confess it, Faustus, and rejoice.
> 'Twas I that, when thou were't i' the way to heaven,
> Damned up thy passage; when thou took'st the book
> To view the scriptures, then I turned the leaves
> And led thine eye.
> (V. ii. 100-4).

What is more, in spite of his blunder in the assessment of sciences and Theology, Faustus was perfectly aware (or should have been according to his words) of the importance of getting the right interpretation: "When all is done Divinity is best./ Jerome's Bible! *Faustus, view it well.*/ Stipendium peccati mors est" (I. i. 38-40). *Faustus, view it well* seems to emphasize the necessity of regarding it carefully. This is more telling if we notice the Good Angel's words (I. i. 69-72). Of course, it is said by way of opposing the reading of the Scriptures to the reading of the book of magic, but is it not as well an invitation to go back to St Paul and correct Faustus' misreading?

On the other hand, his not viewing it well, i. e., his reading only of the negative partial truths of the quotations by St. Paul and St. John, is going to cause Faustus's rejection of Theology and consequently his damnation as the Good Angel states later: "Hadst thou affected sweet divinity,/ Hell, or the devil, had had no power on thee" (V. ii. 120-1).

A Catholic Faustus would not take these risks, since he can only follow a canonical reading of the Bible, which is not his, but that of the Church's teachings and free from error -"[...] though we would we cannot err", says the Pope in III. iii. 154. We can bring here for comparison the acritical assent of Everyman in his attempt to gain salvation with regard to the dogmas of faith as they are explained by Knowledge. Likewise the problem of election and the ensuing tragical outcome of it is out of Everyman's scope. On the contrary, the critical humanist or the Protestant of the XVI century must read the Bible and arrive at the correct interpretation, since his soul is at stake. In this respect the historical context of ***Dr Faustus*** seems to be that of the theological disputes of Wittenberg of the 1520's and 30's where religion and Humanism merge one into another.

The Protestant overtones are evident in the play from the very beginning. The unleashing circumstance that starts the tragedy is Faustus' aspiring mind, but whereas his dissatisfaction regarding the sciences points to the old scholasticism discredited by the humanist thought, his dissatisfaction with respect to Divinity points to the new Protestant Theology (I. i. 37-46). The choice of the quotation of Romans VI, 23 and of John I, 8 is not innocent. Romans VI, 23, was common subject of discussion at the time. Saint Paul, especially through the Epistle to the Romans, was central to the Protestant doctrine:

> The Protestants had been taught by Luther, by St Augustine, and by the Epistle to the Romans that they could not deserve heaven, that the Christian moral life and its consequences hereafter were to be accepted through faith as a gift of God's mercy and love. God chose some and not others -Scripture taught it, and observation confirmed it.
> (Chadwick: 1974, 94).[5]

Calvinistic doctrine was also rooted in St Paul, and Calvin himself tried to make it known worldwide:

> Calvin abhorred the notion that this [predestination] was a detached problem for the mind [..] The doctrine, though a mystery, was not a mere mystery for the critics of the lecture room. There were texts about it in the Epistle to the Romans and the Ephesians and elsewhere in the Bible. These texts must have been given that they might convey knowledge, they must be preached from the pulpit and taught to simple people. Every soul should be led in faith to be conscious of his calling, assure himself that God's merciful hand was upon him, until with St Paul he could profess himself that nothing could separate him from the love of God. (Chadwick: 1974, 94-5).

Furthermore, the Calvinistic conception of man as essentially sinful and corrupt and the subsequent dogma (which Faustus so piteously misses or ignores), that, however, God's misericordy gratuitously does not impute it to the elect is found now and then in Calvin in the same words quoted by Marlowe:

> (Nous) prononçons que le loyer du péché est mort. Au reste, que les péchés des fidèles sont véniels; non pas qu'ils ne méritent la mort, mais d'autant que par la miséricorde de Dieu il n'y a nulle condamnation sur ceux qui sont en Jésus-Christ. (Boyer: 1973, 80, quoting Calvin's. ***(L'Institution de la Religion Chrétienne, III, 4, 28)***.[6]

Christopher Marlowe, who was a resident and a candidate for holy orders at the University of Cambridge (Sanders, 1980:244),[7] a voracious reader, and a XVI century Englishman, would surely not ignore the bearings of these texts on the Protestant creed. We may well believe that Faustus is not only stating his disatisfaction with Theology in general, but with the particular kind of Protestant Theology insisting on predestination which seems not to meet his longings. So, after his perusal through the sciences, he reserves his worst disparagement for Theology (I. i. 105-9). Of course Theology is harsh, but much more so if the Theology in question is the Calvinistic doctrine that makes so little of man and so much a capricious tyrant of God, something that even Calvin himself was quite aware of (Boyer: 1973, 113).

For all we know about Marlowe's works and life (even if we are cautious about the Baine's reports and the Arian disputation), we can be fairly sure that his sceptical, independent and ironic temperament would disregard this doctrine as harsh and contemptible to say the least, and consequently will not improbably make use of it to present a more poignantly dramatic rejection of Theology on the part of Faustus. To the playwright, the intellectual and the general public already prejudiced against the Puritans (as the mocking speech of Wagner in I., ii exemplifies) it was easier to identify the harshness and baseness of Theology if it was associated with an unpopular faction who were disapproving of earthly joy and possessed "a stern standard of private morality", and at the same time aspired to impose their morality on others (Chadwick: 1974, 176), a creed which was very unpromising in his first premise "Why,

then, belike, we must sin/ And so consequently die./ Ay, we must die, an everlasting death" (I. i. 44-6), though very reassuring, provided that one is endowed with faith, in the second (appropiately omitted by Marlowe): *But the Just shall live by faith* (***Epistle to the Romans***, Introduction, 17).

Likewise, the aspiration to know "more than heavenly powers permit" (V. iii. 27), magic included, yields more poignant if we are aware that for Calvinism more even than for Catholicism, to aspire to know God's secret designs is always sinful: "Pour Calvin [...]. Toutes sortes de doutes et d'inquiétudes naissent de ce prurit de savoir ce qui nous dépasse" (Boyer, 1973:116).

The unleashing circumstance of the conflict is not only the unlawful aspiration of Faustus, but, as Orstein (1968: 1381) says, the grievous awareness in his opening speech "that man's condition is merely pitiful; [that] he lives like a criminal under the sentence of death, and his crime is inherent in his humanity", and this is certainly antihumanistic, but Lutheran or Calvinist rather than mediaeval. In his acute awareness of human insignificance and guilt in relation to a wrathful God, Faustus seems to react to a Protestant rather than to a Catholic belief.

Likewise ***Dr Faustus*** is subject to a "static theology" where the main concern is not to procure salvation through effective actions, but rather to wonder at whether one is going to be saved or not. Whereas in ***Everyman*** the main problem is how one can be saved, in ***Dr Faustus*** it seems to be whether Faustus shall be saved, and even the constant use of the passive appears to point to the deterministic philosophy of reprobation. Everyman, who risks falling into despair as well, does not delay, but takes effective steps to seek for salvation (even when summoning Fellowship or Goods) and has to learn and follow his way to it. Faustus, on the other hand, lingers on, though from the very signing of the compact doubts about his fate arise. He postpones the problem without being able to get rid of the fatal (or rather fatalistic) question "Shall Faustus be saved?" to finally succumb to his doom.

Predetermination is present in numerous features throughout the play, though one must make the point that this is not an absolute all-explaining element of the complex ideological construction of ***Dr Faustus***, but rather coexists with the aspiring mind of the Renaissance man, the heterodoxy of Marlowe and the mediaeval elements which so effectively contribute to the well

integrated and unyielding ambiguity of the play. This granted, we can realize how ***Dr Faustus*** grows increasingly into a Calvinist "case of conscience". The Calvinistic nature of the Theology against which Faustus rebels is almost explicitly stated in the play:"What doctrine call you this? *Che sera, sera./* 'What will be, shall be. 'Divinity, adieu!" (I. i. 47-8).

And although there is a passage in which Faustus appears to join both paganism and determinism into a pagan concept of *fatum* (V. ii. 167-8), on the whole the accent is Christian and very often presented as a Calvinistic case of conscience: "Now, Faustus, must thou needs be damned?/ And canst thou not be saved?" (I. v. 1-2). See, (II. i. 18-21) and (V. ii. 41).

The coincidences of the aforesaid quotations with a Calvinistic case of conscience such as this of Francis Spira are beyond mere correlation of parallel situations:

> I am a Reprobate like Cain, or Iudas, who casting away all hope of mercy fell into despair... having sinned against the holy Ghost, God hath taken away from me all power of repentance... I earnestly desire to pray to God with my heart, yet I cannot... God hath left mee to the power of divels: but such they are, as are not to be found in your Letanie: neither will they be cast out... if I could conceive but the last sparke of hope of a better state hereafter, I would not refuse to endure the most heavie weight of the the wrath of that good God; yea, for twentie thousand yeares, so that I might at length attaine to the end of that misery, which I now know to be eternall [...]. (Spira documents as quoted by Sanders: 1980, 250).

Yet the coincidences are more illuminating if we compare the Spira document with the Faustus quotations in which God is explicitly mentioned. See (V. ii. 176-80), (V. ii. 56-64), (V. ii. 149-164) and (V. ii. 197). The God of Faustus is the Calvinistic God of reprobation who "doit une fois monter sur son Thrône iudicial, pour demander conte des toutes oeuvres et parolles" (Boyer, 1973, 76, quoting Calvin).

Furthermore, this God is as well (Orstein, 1968: 1383)[8] the Marlovian God of Tamburlaine, embodying the inexorable cosmic powers that rule the

firmament, of which Tamburlain himself is a self-appointed offspring on earth ("the scourge of God"), but Faustus no more than a weak and hesitant sourcerer's apprentice, who, despite his boastful tirades in acts I and II, is always mastered by the very forces he has summoned and, unlike the Jew of Malta, yields piteously and alternatingly to them and to this cosmic God.

Christ, not to speak of the Virgin or saints, might have been the bridge to connect the insurmountable cosmic God with the limited and sinful human nature of Faustus, but Christ in ***Dr Faustus***, in accordance with the conception of God, is too Arian, too humane, too ineffectual to provide that link according both to Marlovian, for Marlowe "could not imagine that the supreme God might assume man's contemptible weakness" (Orstein, 1968: 1383), and to the Calvinist Christ, who shows a certain tendency towards Arianism (to Catholic standards) in its stronger distinction between Christ and God (Boyer, 1973: 89).

This conception already belittles Faustus' dimension as a rebel, for Faustus' blasphemies cannot aspire, as did Tamburlaine's boasts, to challenge the universe. At the utmost, they can tragically mock Christ's sacrifice (for Christ is human) and make of him an anti-Christ, in the sense of a reverse of Christ (Ornstein: 1968, 1384), but without even really attaining a real or dramatic challenge to the Father.

Still what makes immortal and prevailing the myth of Faustus is the heroic dimension within a cosmic tragedy which is bestowed on man by the terrible compact with the devil. Here is where we find the most overreaching, boasting, Tamburlain-like Faustus.

> What, is great Mephostophilis so passionate
> For being deprived of the joys of heaven?
> Learn thou of Faustus manly fortitude
> (I. iii. 83-5).

For whereas the ordinary mortal is damned through conventional ways which do not question explicitly the order of God, Faustus through an explicit and precise act of will and some confusing doses of atheism sets himself up as an opponent of God. This is enough for Catholicism, but if we view it within the Calvinist conception of man and God, the blasphemy is rendered monstruous and unforgivable. And mainly against this background is to be seen

the first characterization of Faustus' rebelliousness, i. e., that of the humanistic, atheistic, and overreaching Faustus.

But ironically enough, and this proves to be congenial with Marlowe, Faustus is caught within the web of circumstances of the deluding and manipulating devils and has no chance to challenge God at all. He neither builds an altar and a church to Belzebub nor offers "lukewarm blood of new-born babes" (I. v. 13-4), nor does he command "all things that move between the quiet poles" (I. i. 56), nor chase the Prince of Parma from Germany (I. i. 92). From Act II onwards Faustus' stature as a rebel and a religious overreacher dwindles. Throughout acts III and IV, he declines into the practical joker who plays tricks on the Pope, frees the schismatic Bruno as a champion of the Protestant England within a biased anachronic context, and, finally, sinks into a pliant and servile court-entertainer in act IV, somewhat tinged with shades of the clever clown who plays tricks on ordinary fellows (IV. v. & vi). In fact Faustus has developed by now into a rather passive poor devil (and this to be taken in a literal sense that he is a "spirit" subject to demonic possession, too), boasting, and self-deluding, who has started and now walks the path to his own damnation. This marks the transition towards the final characterization of Faustus as reprobate, something that, nevertheless, was apparent even in the second act, but overshadowed by Faustus' overreaching and bombasting speeches. As the typical reprobate Faustus had started checking despair by taking refuge in a escapist hedonism which, eventually, ruins his overreaching figure as we can see it in Tamburlaine. This was the most prevalent facet of Faustus' personality which grows completetly overwhelming in act V, where Faustus develops into a "case of conscience" caught in the exacting logic of Calvinism.

The starting sin might well have been pride (the sin of the aspiring mind), but the unforgivable sin is despair (the sin of the defeated reprobate). To Marlowe, pride can be forgiven, "The serpent that tempted Eve may be saved [...]", but not despair, that is "not Faustus". Our playwright has not wanted to allow Faustus a way out of the vicious circle of despair. So, for this purpose, the Calvinistic theory of predetermination served him well, but he had to dispose of the last allegorical Catholic elements which could spoil the terrible catharsis of man before an overwhelmingly cruel fate.

This is characteristically Marlovian, for the general problem of rebelliousness is seen in him within the tragical and ineffectual struggle of his

heroes in pursuit of their own inordinate fulfilment, his ironical view that the "conspiring heavens" are always in the end far beyond human reach and that, in pursuing one's absolute freedom, the only outcome is annihilation.

About 1590, the Renaissance man was already learning that rebelliousness very often led from one tyranny to another, and that the limitless horizons of Humanism were narrowed and made more sombre by human weakness set against overwhelming circumstances. After ***Tamburlaine*** Marlowe seems to be conscious of this. In ***Dr Faustus*** he shaped in his most accomplished form the ironical and tragical exposure of the impossibility and the price to be paid for the ineffectual attempt to be more than merely human, or just merely so.

NOTES

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2.- Bluestone, M. "Libido Speculandi: doctrine and dramatury in contemporary interpretation of Marlowe's ***Dr. Faustus***" in Norman Rabkin (ed.) ***Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama***. (New York: Columbia U. P.) 1969. p. 33-88.

3.- Martínez López, M. "Marlowe's Faustus at the Crossroads. Mediaeval Elements and Diabolical Games", in M. Martínez López (ed.) ***Literature, Culture and Society of the Middle Ages***. (Barcelona: P. P. U.) 1989, and Marlowe, C. ***La Trágica Historia de la Vida y Muerte del Doctor Fausto***, introducción de J. C. Santoyo y notas de J. M. Santamaría, traducción de J. C. Santoyo y J. M. Santamaría. (Madrid: Cátedra) 1984.

4.- Koch, P. ***Historia de la Literatura Alemana***, vol. 1. (Editorial Labor) 1927.

5.- Chadwick, O. ***The Pelican History of the Church***, Vol. 3: ***The Reformation***. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd). 1974.

6.- Boyer, C. (S. J.), ***Calvin et Luther. Accords et différences***. (Rome: Universitá Gregoriana) 1973.

7.- Sanders, W. ***The Dramatists and the Received Idea. Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare***. (Cambridge: C. U. P.) 1988.

8.- Ornstein, R. "Marlowe and God: The tragic Theology of Dr. Faustus" in ***P.M.L.A.*** Vol. 83, nº 5, October, pp. 1378-1385.