

(Eng. Hons.) "Doctor Faustus"

(2nd Sem.)

Fall and slow moral disintegration of
Doctor Faustus.

Marlowe is primarily interested in a study of the mind of a character. In the play "Doctor Faustus", Faustus's career is presented so as to show us his mental development. For instance, the first speech of Faustus is meant to suggest, in a telescoped fashion, a long period of mental debate, not to represent a single occasion and the tempo is quickened beyond that of ordinary life. The prologue prepares the spectators for the summary ~~presented~~ presented in the soliloquy of Faustus, whose character is not one of fixed determination, and his own contrary impulses are personified as the two Angels of Good and Evil.

As soon as Faustus has decided that necromancy is the only study worth his while, he seeks the aid of Valdes and Cornelius who are already proficient in this forbidden art. These two friends have not yet gone very far because they have made no use of this art and they have been careful not to sacrifice their salvation for the attainment of supernatural powers. Even when they agree to guide Faustus in his explorations of magic, they leave us in no doubt of their intention to use Faustus as a tool rather than run into danger themselves and paint a gloaming picture of possibilities before him.

When Faustus goes to conjure alone for the use to which he will put his newly-acquired powers, he speaks in a heroic vein about the world of profit and delight, of power, of honour and omnipotence. He will become a demi-god, who will cull all ~~of~~ Germany with brass and chase the Prince of Parma from his land. But, soon Faustus lapses into luxury and buffoonery and this deterioration is not an automatic result of his pact with the devil, because, in spite of his genuine desire to know the truth, the seeds of decay existed in his character from the first. Besides his passion for knowledge, he has a lust for riches and pleasure and power. After he has signed the bond with his blood, we can trace the stages of his gradual deterioration. His discussion with Mephistophilis on the subject of Astronomy is curiously barren. The actual degradation of his character has not yet received much emphasis, as yet only his childish pleasure in the devil-dance and the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, hints at the vulgar trivialities to which he will descend. His flights on the back of a dragon and at last his presence in the Pope's private chamber brings out very pointedly the progressive silliness and meaninglessness of his character. This is a very different Faustus from the fearless teacher his students used to know, whose least absence from the class-room used to cause anxiety.

The climax of his career is his union with the immortal beauty of Helen and this sensitive appreciation of beauty could be

something that has survived uncorrupted from the days of his innocence. It would seem to be some strange flowering of moral decay. Thus with Faustus's union with Helen, the nice balance between possible salvation and imminent damnation is upset. Urged by the old man, ~~he~~ he has tried for the last time to revolt against the devil but in making the devil his paramour Faustus commits the sin of demoniality. In the final scene he is still haunted by the idea of salvation beyond his reach;

" See, see, where christ's blood streams
in the firmament!
one drop would save my soul,
half a drop: Ah, my christ!"

The legend of Faustus was believed to be a terrible and ennobling example, and a warning to all christians to avoid the pitfalls of science, pleasure and ambition which had led to Faustus's damnation. But it has to be noted that all that the Renaissance value is represented in what the devil has to offer, and one is left wondering whether it is the religious life or the worldly life that is more attractive. Thus this play presents the fall and slow moral disintegration of an ardent, but erring spirit — Faustus.

— R. D.