

ritualism can be understood as partially an attempt to escape from personal anxiety. But 'the collective offered different ways of resisting anxiety but no way in which the individual could take his anxiety upon himself.'¹ Luther, by recovering the sense of direct communion with God through Christ without the need for priest or ritual, recovered also a basis for the self-confidence of the individual in the face of his own guilt and anxiety.

Now this central element in Luther's teaching is of considerable importance for understanding the Faust-narrative as it was known to Marlowe. The German *Faustbuch* has been recognized as a piece of Lutheran writing; it may even be argued that it is more, for Faustus is implicitly presented as an antithesis to Luther himself. An interesting article of 1966² has argued that *Doctor Faustus* is an inverted saint's life, turning the traditional narrative-pattern upside-down 'to tell the story of a man who after an orthodox early life is "converted" to the devil and seals his pact with a diabolic sacrament; who undergoes a series of "temptations" by the Good Angel and his own conscience, from which his mentor Mephostophilis "rescues" him; who performs "miracles" that are quite literally conjuring tricks; whose heavenly vision is a Greek strumpet; who is received at his death by his eternal master Lucifer.' But if the life of Faustus is seen against Luther's, the contrast is more direct. Faustus taught at the University of Erfurt, which had been Luther's own place of residence.

¹ Paul Tillich, *The Courage To Be* (London: Fontana Library, 1962), p. 158.

² Susan Snyder, 'Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* as an Inverted Saint's Life', *Studies in Philology* LXIII (1966), pp. 565-77.

Like Luther he came against hostile authorities: he was expelled from the cities of Nuremberg and Ingolstadt. And Faustus lived for a while at Wittenberg, Luther's own place of residence, which became the *mise-en-scène* of the *Faustbuch*. Like him, Luther believed in personal encounters with demonic forces, and had his experiences of extreme despair, from which he recovered by faith in God's love and by a life of hard, purposeful work. In 1527 Luther wrote, 'The devil can so beleaguer a heart, so terrify it, that it will avoid God, become His enemy, and blaspheme, for to a miserable conscience there is nothing other than that God, devil, death, sin, hell, and all creatures are eternal unceasing enemies. . . . For more than a week I was close to the gates of death and hell. I trembled in all my members. Christ was wholly lost. I was shaken by desperation and blasphemy of God.'¹

The diptych of Luther and Faustus comprises two very different portraits of Renaissance individualism. Each in his own way, the two men challenged the suppositions of conservative society; each had consequently to face his personal devils; one survived in integrity, the other did not. Ernst Troeltsch, the German sociologist, has contrasted the individualism of the Protestant Reformation with Renaissance individualism. The Protestant emphasis on freedom of conscience in belief was accompanied by a stress on secular vocation as a means of relating oneself lovingly to mankind through one's work, performed in a spirit of duty, earnestness, and industry. Thus individualism of conviction was tempered by social concern. Renaissance

¹ Quoted by Roland Bainton, 'Luther's Struggle for Faith', *Church History* XVII (1948).

individualism, on the other hand, was more extreme, its ideal the *uomo universale* (the universal man), 'the man without vocation who receives freedom for self-development and self-achievement in the universal scope of his strength and talents through joining the ruling powers, through annuities, or through his own exploitation of government'.¹ This characterization of the man of the Renaissance is particularly pertinent to our understanding of Faustus' trying out of different 'vocations', as well as to his use of magic as a means of self-aggrandizement and hob-nobbing with the ruling powers. Troeltsch's analysis followed Burckhardt's classic study, *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), which gives plentiful evidence of the lack of moral scruple with which individualistic goals were pursued in practice in political and personal life. Yet the tone of much Renaissance thought, at least before Machiavelli, was idealistic, and certain important Italian writings attempted to accommodate a new sense of man's capacity for self-expression and self-expansion to older religious values, including self-restraint.

One of these important documents is an oration by Pico della Mirandola, 'On the Dignity of Man', which has been regarded as embodying the quintessence of Renaissance thought about man. Near the beginning Pico tells his version of the tale of the creation of Adam. The Creator completed the structure of nature before making man, and so decided that man should be an indeterminate and composite being, representing the whole range of

¹ From E. Troeltsch, *Renaissance und Reformation* (Tubingen, 1925), trans. in L.W. Spitz, ed., *Problems in European Civilization: The Reformation, Material or Spiritual* (Boston, 1962), pp. 17-27.

nature within himself. He then addressed man in these words:

We have given to thee, Adam, no fixed seat, no form of thy very own, no gift peculiarly thine, that thou mayest feel as thine own, have as thine own, possess as thine own the seat, the form, the gifts, which thou thyself shalt desire. A limited nature in other creatures is confined within the laws written down by Us. In conformity with thy free judgement, in whose hands I have placed thee, thou art confined by no bounds; and thou wilt fix limits of nature for thyself. I have placed thee at the centre of the world, that from there thou mayest more conveniently look around and see whatsoever is in the world. Neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal have we made thee. Thou, like a judge appointed for being honourable, art the moulder and maker of thyself; thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures, which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine.¹

Pico then comments, 'O great liberality of God the Father ! A great wonderful happiness of man ! It is given him to have that which he chooses and to be that which he wills.' And later he reflects, 'Let a certain holy ambition invade the mind, so that we may not be content with mean things, but may aspire to the highest things and strive with all our forces to attain them: for if we do, we can. Let us spurn earthly things; let us struggle towards the heavenly. Let us put in the last place whatever is of the world; and let us fly beyond the chambers of the world to the chamber near the most lofty divinity . . . let us compete with the angels

¹ Translated by Charles Glenn Wallis in *Pico della Mirandola On the Dignity of Man, On Being and the One, Heptaplus* (Indianapolis: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1965), p. 5.

in dignity and glory.' Yet along with his high view of human potentialities Pico held a rather traditional view of the ascetic discipline and moral life necessary for man to achieve his full scope. His position is notable for the checks and balances which he offers to man's aspiration, even when advocating a much more open-minded and syncretistic approach to the world's religions and philosophies than was usual during the Middle Ages. For example, the medieval Church had condemned magic outright, whereas Pico carefully distinguishes between good and evil magic:

The first sort is put together by the work and authorship of demons, and is a thing, as God is true, execrable and monstrous. The other sort is, when well explored, nothing but the absolute consummation of the philosophy of nature. . . . Not only the Christian religion, but all laws, every well-ordered state, condemns and curses the first. All wise men, all nations studious of things heavenly and divine, approve and embrace the second. . . . For as the first magic makes men subject to and delivered over to the powers of wickedness, so the second makes him their prince and lord. Finally, the first cannot claim for itself the name of either art or science. The second is full of the deepest mysteries and includes the most profound and hidden contemplation of things, and finally, the knowledge of all nature. . . . For nothing impels more towards religion and the worship of God than assiduous contemplation of the wonders of God. When we shall have well explored these wonders by means of this natural magic we are speaking of, we shall be inspired more ardently to the worship and love of the maker, and shall be driven to sing: 'The heavens are full, the earth is full of the majesty of Thy glory.'¹

Nothing could be clearer than Pico's distinction between kinds of magic, between black magic or necromancy and the

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 7; pp. 26-8.

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understanding and use of natural forces, for example in that mixture of chemistry and occult symbolism which was alchemy, or that branch of medicine which utilized a supposed correspondence between stars and medicinal plants. Yet Pico's interest in the **Hermetic writings**, in **Orpheus** and **Pythagoras**, in the **Jewish Cabbala**, is symptomatic of the widened intellectual curiosity of his times, which when freed from his scrupulous reservations could run into dangerous places.¹

Pico saw dialectic, natural philosophy and theology as three complementary disciplines in carrying man towards the end of his aspirations. In contrast, Faustus' dissatisfaction with different areas of study—dialectic, law, medicine, divinity—may look like an egotistic parody of Pico's view of man's divine dissatisfaction and his hunger for the universal. Yet it is Marlowe's achievement to make us feel the solemn and ominous power of this initial restlessness, poised in all its potentiality for good or evil. Like Pico's man of aspiration, Faustus yearns upward beyond his midway status in the ladder of creation: 'A sound magician is a demi-god.' But to be like God in goodness is one thing; to aspire for his power without his holiness is another. Faustus does not distinguish, as Pico did, between kinds of magic: if his ambition is to soar into the heavens, both physically and intellectually, the means he uses are those of the kinds of magic that Pico condemned.

It is in the writings of Pico's contemporary and mentor

¹ Extended studies of the subject are D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (London, 1958; paperback reprint, University of Notre Dame, 1975); and Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London, 1964).

in the Florentine circle of the Medici, Marsilio Ficino, that we may find a version of the idea of human dignity with a more tragic potentiality than Pico's. In his *Platonic Theology on the Immortality of Souls* (1482) he regards man's reason as free from three levels of determining causes in the universe—providence, fate, and nature—and sees it in operation in actively changing and re-creating the world of nature by means of art and industry.

. . . Men are the inventors of innumerable arts which they practise according to their own decision. This is shown by the fact that individuals practise many arts, change, and become more expert by extensive exercise, and what is marvellous, human arts make by themselves whatever nature makes, so that we seem not to be servants of nature but competitors.

The human mind vindicates to itself a right to divinity not only in forming and shaping matter through the methods of arts . . . but also in transmuting the species of things by command, which work is indeed called a miracle, not indeed because it is beyond the nature of our soul, when it is made an instrument of God, but because, since it is something great and rarely done, it generates admiration.¹

The different human activities so prominent in the Renaissance period—not only man's striving for excellence in public life and in the arts, but his competitive urge towards success, his desire to be everywhere, his desire for fame, for pleasure and opulence—are all interpreted as signs of his potential divinity. Yet he may mistake his ends; and his striving is characterized by restlessness and anxiety.

But meanwhile the intellectual reason eagerly seeks the

¹ *Theologia platonica*, Book XIII, trans. Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness. Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought* (University of Chicago, 1972), Vol. II, pp. 482, 486.

causes of things and anxiously consults on the execution of actions, or the imaginative reason invents and demands new pleasures. It is spurred on by repentance, troubled by suspicion.

Anxiety of this sort is peculiar to man himself, since it arises from the characteristic powers of the human soul, not from the corporeal elements, nor the animals powers which have been satisfied in us. . . . That is why man alone in this present condition of life never relaxes, he alone in this place is not content.¹

So it is not surprising that an eminent scholar has called Ficino's vision 'Faustian', relating more closely 'with the *vita activa et operosa*, ("the active and industrious way of life") of the Renaissance, whether manifested by the statesman, the businessman, the craftsman, the lawyer, the physician, the publicly-employed humanist secretary, the astrologer, or the Aristotelian natural philosopher',² in contrast to Pico's more inward and mystical vision of man.

(2) FAUSTUS, LUTHERANISM, AND FOLK TRADITION

Several of the genuine contemporary records of Faustus come from the Luther circle, and include mention of him by Luther himself in his *Table-Talk* as an assistant of the devil, and by his humanist friend Melanchthon, university teacher at Wittenberg and reformer of German higher education, as a magician who met with a violent death.³ It was at Wittenberg in 1521 that Melanchthon's *Passional*

¹ *Theologia platonica*, Book XIV, *op. cit.* Vol. II, p. 493.

² Trinkaus, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 493-5.

³ Philip Mason Palmer and Robert Pattison More, *The Sources of the Faust Tradition from Simon Magus to Lessing* (New York, 1966), III, 'The Historical Faust', prints extant records in English translation.