

### **Introduction to the Faustbuch 1587**

The first book devoted entirely to Faust was a mixture of legend and fantasy published by Johann Spiess in 1587-88 under the title, *Historia & Tale of Dr. Johannes Faustus* (called the Faustbuch). It was quickly translated into English as the English Faustbook, which became Marlowe's main source for the tragedy *Dr. Faustus*.

**The Faustbuch transforms the ancient Theophilus legend into a fable for the 16thc.**

**Two important changes:**

1. The story is focused on the human character, Faustus, not on the struggle between God and the Devil.

2. The story is pessimistic. In the medieval legends, the sinner believed he could be saved; here, he does not believe salvation is possible, for his sin is too great and his damnation is predestined.

**Political, religious and cultural context of the Faustbuch's publication**

The 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> cc fixation on the Devil was a position adopted by the educated and spread by them to the populace through preaching, literature and litigation. The *Faustbuch* aimed to educate people in the wrongness of their traditional beliefs in magic, superstition and sorcery and attempt to change them into Orthodox Lutherans.

1. The *Faustbuch* preached one basic idea to its readers – every decision in your life presents a choice between the Devil's way or Christ's: if you're lazy and loaf at work, you're following the devil; if you rebel against your superior, don't attend church, drink a lot, pig out, sleep around, – ditto. Thus, stories like Faust and the Devil served the overall mission of social control, replacing popular folkways with an authority approved popular culture.

2. The main political goal of the authorities (church and state) was to eliminate the sprawling network of spell-casters and fortunetellers (i.e. Fausts) whose activities had been competing successfully with the services offered by the official church and state. "The great problem facing the

16<sup>th</sup> century reformers was to detach people from an alternative religion and to bond them to the elite-determined obligations of church, court, doctrine, parish, law book, and catechism." (Strauss, in *Lives of Faust*, p 45)

3. In the 1580s a battle was still raging between orthodox and moderate Lutherans over the correct interpretation of Luther's theology. The orthodox party won.

4. The publisher of the *Faustbuch*, Johann Spies, belonged to the orthodox wing of German Lutheranism and published the *Faustbuch* in part to propagandize the orthodox point of view.

5. Interestingly, the moderate faction was centered at the University of Wittenberg while the Orthodox faction looked to the universities of Leipzig and Jena for doctrinal authority. Faustus's alleged professorship at Wittenberg must have been intended to cast disrepute on that institution, especially for more educated readers.

**The Faustbuch as religious-political propaganda - an assault by orthodox Lutheranism on popular occultism, part of the orthodox Lutherans' agenda for cultural reform.**

**Faustus is intended as a negative example**

- Faustus craves wealth and the freedom to enjoy it
- Faustus wants someone to do his bidding; he likes to have his questions answered
- Conjuring (unlike the study of Divinity) can satisfy Faustus's wishes, which leads Faustus to a satanic pact.
- Faustus is reproached for being a speculator, "eager to search for all the causes in the heavens

- and on the earth.” He also, dangerously, questions authority (Church, Theology, God)
- The *Faustbuch*’s Faustus is NOT a learned scientist of the Renaissance, however; he pursues the occult in order to make a profitable career for himself among the gullible. Though described as a man of learning, Faust is in all respects, a 16<sup>th</sup> c Everyman, who is undone by his damnable trait of smug self-sufficiency. He places confidence not in God, but in his own wit and reason. “Where the devil finds a self-assured person...there he enters and makes himself at home.” (Preface to the *Faustbuch*)
  - Faustus himself delivers the intended message at the end (chapter 68) when he says, “Always struggle against the devil and never stop trying to defeat him.”
  - The *Faustbuch* dispenses conventional Orthodox Lutheran wisdom (the Ptolemaic model of the cosmos (21, 25); the influence of the stars on people’s lives (28, 31, 32); the debunking of Catholicism and the papacy; marriage and the work ethic as the bases of civic virtue and capitalism; the inescapable punishment for people who follow the devil.