

**DOCTOR FAUSTUS AND THE COLOSSUS OF RHODES**

EDITING MARLOWE'S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS* continues to pose a formidable difficulty for modern scholars. The nature of this textual problem and the way in which scholars had generally dealt with it until about twenty years ago were admirably described by Roma Gill in her edition, which remains one of the best and most popular:

Two early texts, published within a few years of each other yet differing widely, make *Dr. Faustus* a most complicated editorial problem. The version now referred to as the A Text appeared in 1604 and was reprinted, each time with a few minor changes, in 1609 and 1611. In 1616 another version, the B Text, was published; this was reprinted five times before 1633. The second (1619) edition of this text tells us that it is 'With new Additions' - a piece of information that ought to have been given three years earlier. For a long time it was thought that A was the more original and that the new parts of B (III.i, 90 ff.; ii; IV.i-vi; vii, 32 ff.; V.ii, 1-23, 85-130; iii) were the 'adicyones' for which Henslowe paid £4 to a couple of his hack writers, Bird and Rowley, in 1602. Modern bibliographical study, however, has worked to reverse these views. Leo Kirschbaum in 1946 demonstrated that A bears all the stigmata of a reported text - a text assembled by an actor, perhaps from memory. Greg, already at work on his *Parallel Texts*, followed up this line of thought to argue that A is indeed a reported, shortened version of the play represented by B; that B was set up in different parts from a copy of A3 (1611) alone, from A3 corrected by the author's manuscript, and from MS. alone; and that the additional writing had been there from the beginning. To account for the occasional superiority of A (most notably at V.i, 25-33) he postulated a revision of the play by Marlowe which found its way into the theatrical prompt-book but not into the original MS.<sup>1</sup>

Kirschbaum and Greg substituted one kind of orthodoxy for another, and for a while it looked as if what they had argued would become the only tenable proposition from about 1950 on, when, in one and the same year, W.W. Greg published, in Oxford, his edition *Marlowe's 'Doctor Faustus' 1604-1616: Parallel Texts* and his tentative reconstruction of the text.<sup>2</sup> So influential was Greg's view that John Jump, when editing the play some twelve years later for the prestigious 'Revels' series, freely acknowledged that his own analysis of the A and B Texts substantially followed Greg.<sup>3</sup> More strikingly, perhaps, J.B. Steane, the editor of the popular Penguin *Christopher Marlowe: The Complete Plays* (1969), observed that 'nowadays it is the 1616 text that is in favour. Consequently this is the version on which the present edition is reluctantly based' and added: "Reluctantly", because the editor's personal opinion is that the play is artistically stronger in its shorter form' (p. 261).

We have no wish to suggest that Steane should have acted on his literary evaluation. It is, of course, possible that his good taste told him a truth which his scholarship did not reveal. Nevertheless, we see it as the editor's duty to try and establish, from conflicting evidence before him, just what the author wrote, even if this may lead to unpalatable conclusions from a literary point of view. Thus we support Steane when he describes his preference for the A Text as critical, not editorial, and when he concludes: 'The editor has to present the "best" text, and that does not necessarily mean the version he finds most artistically satisfying' (p. 262).

Steane however placed his faith so unhesitatingly in Greg that he overlooked the fact that the reaction against Greg had already set in. For example - and most notably - Roma Gill, in her edition of 1965, had expressed various reservations of which Steane, in his text of 1969, appeared to be unaware. On balance, Gill still expressed confidence in the general authority of the B Text while giving less weight to it than Greg, and it is refreshing to see her express the view that 'the authority of the A text is such that in many cases I have preferred its readings to B's' (p. 2). Her refusal to trust uncritically the B Text leads her to adopt some readings which surely must seem convincing to the ordinary, non-specialist reader. Thus, for example, when Faustus tries to persuade himself early in the play that his necromantic books are 'heavenly' (l.49) he comes to the conclusion:

A sound magician is a mighty god;  
Here Faustus, try thy brains to gain a deity.  
(I.i.61-62)

That is, Gill's edition takes 'a mighty god' from the A Text, whereas B has 'a demi-god'. If, as Steane argued, B were authoritative, we would have to accept its 'a demi-god'. Roma Gill, however, with others after her (as we shall see), argues that Greg's position is too one-sided, and that A has more authority than he supposed. This argument then in its turn enables her to select a reading which the non-expert will the more readily accept as Marlowe's because it is superior. Once the authority of B is shaken, and that of A boosted, it is not just acceptable, but necessary for the editor to use discrimination rather than to adhere slavishly - and, as it would turn out, arbitrarily - to one text. The phrase 'a mighty god', crassly misguided as it is in the mouth of the speaker, fits in with the irony, equally unintended, of his mistaken and blasphemous claim that necromantic books are heavenly. If in line 62 he expresses the wish to 'gain a deity', his striving is absolute, and thus it makes no sense for him to say in line 61 that a sound magician is merely 'a demi-god' - a status with which in his arrogance Faustus could not possibly be content. A further and yet deeper irony is that, inasmuch as he could be, or indeed is, of something like divine stature at the beginning of the play, his fall is the more awesome and tragic at the end.

The point Archived at Flinders University, [dspace.flinders.edu.au](http://dspace.flinders.edu.au) would replace Greg's bibliographical scholarship, but rather that, if that scholarship can be shown

to be less than perfect by subsequent scholars, literary criticism may well have a place in efforts to determine the correct text. The primary question remains, nevertheless, whether or not that text can be established on a bibliographical basis. If it can be, such a procedure would seem preferable to that of literary criticism with its inevitable subjectivities.

So far, it does not seem to us that scholars have as yet succeeded in dislodging Greg's arguments to the extent that we can persuade ourselves that it is now *known*, indisputably, that it is the A Text, not the B Text, which has paramount authority. It is unnecessary, and quite beyond the scope and purpose of this article, to try and summarise all the reasonings produced by Roma Gill and others which have the effect, or in fact intention, of tempting readers towards A. Even so, we should briefly like to refer to some of the main writings in this category.

The textual problems of *Doctor Faustus* have always appealed to the minds of bibliographers, and it is only logical that Fredson Bowers should be one of its main editors. His *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe* first appeared, in Cambridge, in 1973. The two-volume edition (with *Doctor Faustus* in the second volume, preceded by a lengthy introduction on the text) was reprinted, with revisions, in 1981, and it is to this edition that we shall refer.

In general, Bowers might almost be said to hedge his bets a little, or, more kindly, to adopt a positive attitude to both A and B. With respect to the Greg tradition, he says that since Kirschbaum's 1946 article 'it has been generally accepted that the A-text represents a so-called "bad quarto", which is to say a memorial reconstruction of some acting version, contrived without direct reference to any manuscript in the authorial line' (p. 125). Bowers' own view of the A text nevertheless turns out to be more favourable than Kirschbaum's or Greg's. Thus, he refuses to go along with 'the accepted view that the B-text represents the unified original play and no more' (p. 131). Like many of the previous editors, Bowers thinks that the B Text contains the 1602 additions to the text.<sup>4</sup>

In this way, it becomes tempting to think that the A text contains a good deal of authority after all, and - even more daringly - to see the B text as derived from A rather than *vice versa*. David Ormerod and Christopher Wortham recently edited *Christopher Marlowe - Dr Faustus: The A-Text* (1985), and would like to see Bowers as one of their camp. They say in their Preface that they were influenced in their decision to edit A by Bowers, and Constance Brown Kuriyama who has argued that the extra material in B is not Marlowe's but Rowley's.<sup>5</sup> Thus Ormerod and Wortham appear to think both scholars support them in seeing what they call 'the primacy of the 1604 A-text over the 1616 B-text' (p. v). In their view, B does derive from A, and not the other way round, and concerning the possibility that A does justice to the author's intention they believe that there are 'grounds for cautious optimism' (p. xxvii). Bowers himself, however, had said that 'no question now exists of

the general superiority of the B to the A-text in the tragic sections and of the fact that it appears to be more complete' (pp. 126-27). This view seems to be more moderate than that of Ormerod and Wortham. Thus the situation continues to be puzzling. Hopefully Roma Gill will have solved the problems by the time her forthcoming new edition of *Doctor Faustus* sees the light of day.

It has been a tendency amongst editors to act as though they must prefer either A or B, and do so at the expense of the text which is not their first choice. We would say that as things now stand there is such uncertainty about the supposed superiority of B over A, or *vice versa*, that, until something more definite emerges, scholars should consider the problems as unsolved, and offer both texts as being, in principle, of equal status. Anything, in either A or B, may well be valuable. If the two texts agree, an editor should be loath to disregard that agreement, and be hesitant about 'emendations' which could be completely unwarranted. If the texts disagree, there is no *a priori* case for believing the one text to be more authoritative than the other. An editor must feel free to express a preference, but is not at liberty to reject the alternative, since that alternative, however unattractive it perhaps is, may well have authority. These considerations are particularly relevant to passages almost certainly written by Marlowe himself, such as the Prologue by the Chorus, which is central to this paper.

Caution is also needed in relation to sections for which Marlowe is not usually held responsible, such as the Duke of Vanholt scene (referred to as either IV.vii or Scene xvii by modern editors). This scene, which will also be considered in our argument, was very probably not written by Marlowe. It could be that this scene, which only occurs in B, is to be regarded as a later, unauthorised addition. It is entirely conceivable that the scene was written by a collaborator who produced something of which Marlowe approved. At present we just do not know. So long as there is a possibility that such a scene contains anything worthwhile, it should be seriously considered and not discarded.

Bearing all this in mind, we now turn to the Prologue by the Chorus. There, the reader learns amongst other things about Faustus:

Now is he born, of parents base of stock,  
In Germany, within a town called Rhode.

Thus are Marlowe's lines reproduced in Gill's edition, and her representation is not unlike those of most modern editors. We do not quarrel with the modernisation, but with the form *Rhode*. In the original A and B Quartos, the word is *Rhodes*. So far as we can make out, this form did not bother any of the early editors before F.S. Boas, who edited his *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* in 1932.<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to reflect that his predecessors apparently considered *Rhodes* quite an acceptable reading, although they were probably aware that there was no *Rhodes* in Germany.

Havelock Ellis, for example, who edited the play as part of his *Christopher Marlowe* (London, 1887), did not 'emend' *Rhodes*, but in a footnote connected the word to Roda, in the Duchy of Saxe-Altenburg. It is not clear why no one before Boas altered the *Rhodes* of the Quartos into the *Rhode* found in almost all editions coming after Boas's. Perhaps some editors did not know of Roda. Others, however, clearly did know, but must have decided that there were reasons for not altering the reading of the earlier texts. It is unprofitable to try and speculate what those reasons may have been in each instance; all we propose to do here is to give our own reasons as they come to mind if the passage is considered in isolation from the remainder of the play. We shall later relate the Prologue to IV.vii.

We do not think the existence of Roda a very important factor. Boas offers his reasons for printing *Rhode* in a footnote. If we understand Boas correctly, he believed that Marlowe would have automatically adopted *Rhode*, as he is known for fidelity to his sources in the matter of place names. The form *Rhode* is the one printed in the English version of the German *Faust Book* which influenced Marlowe, and represents the town of Roda in Germany. Hence, in Boas's view, we must assume that Marlowe copied *Rhode* from this source, and took it to mean Roda. However, the early printers were more familiar with the word *Rhodes*, and thus mistakenly inserted that for Marlowe's *Rhode*.

Surely what applies to the printers is likely to apply to Marlowe as well. He was very learned, but would *Rhode* have meant anything to him when he found it in the English *Faust Book*? Almost certainly not. Perhaps he thought that it was an error for *Rhodes*, but, in any case, as neither he nor his audience would have found *Rhode* at all meaningful, it must have been very tempting to use *Rhodes* instead. Marlowe showed sufficient fidelity to his source by opting for *Rhodes* rather than a totally different word, and the addition of just one letter enables him to use a word which anyone would have accepted as German enough. Moreover there was the major advantage of implicitly associating Doctor Faustus with the island of Rhodes in the Aegean Sea which was familiar to those members of his audience who had some knowledge of Greek culture. Those who had never heard of Rhodes would probably not have known of Roda, and thus there was no point in using the word *Rhode*.

Apart from these considerations, there is the crucial fact that both A and B have *Rhodes*. If either A or B had had *Rhode* it would have been impossible to decide to which text to give priority, and the choice between *Rhode* and *Rhodes* would have become one of literary argument only. As it stands, the bibliographical evidence is unambiguous, and we feel that it is an editor's duty to retain *Rhodes* unless an overwhelming case can be presented against this reading. If the literary argument for *Rhodes* as against *Rhode* is equally strong (and we believe it is superior), there can be no reason at all for rejecting it on bibliographical grounds.

We could rest our case here, and simply say that, as there appears to be no compelling argument for not retaining *Rhodes*, the evidence of A and B must be accepted. We find it surprising that it has become the custom of modern editors not to question Boas's case, but to retain his *Rhode*. Thus Greg includes it in his *Conjectural Reconstruction* (1950), as does Jump in his edition (1962), Leo Kirschbaum in his (part of *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, Cleveland and Ohio, 1962), Irving Ribner (*The Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, New York, 1963), Gill, Keith Walker (*Doctor Faustus*, Edinburgh, 1973), Bowers (both in 1973 and in 1981), E.D. Pendry and J.C. Maxwell in their *Complete Plays and Poems* (London, 1976), and, to the best of our knowledge, every other modern editor except Steane. Oddly, Steane does not explain why he deviates from the new orthodoxy.

As Boas's 'emendation' has found such strong support, we should now like to extend our case in an attempt to remove any remaining doubt which our readers may still feel. We shall do this by examining some relevant evidence in the Duke of Vanholt scene (IV.vii in Gill's edition, scene xvii in e.g. Jump's).

It will be recalled that in a previous scene (IV.v;xv) the horse-courser purchases a horse from Faustus. Faustus warns him: 'in any case ride him not into the water' (11-12). Shortly afterwards the horse-courser returns, exclaiming: 'I riding my horse into the water, thinking some hidden mystery had been in the horse, I had nothing under me but a little straw, and had much ado to escape drowning' (27-30). Finding Faustus asleep, the horse-courser pulls off his leg when he attempts to wake him. Of course, he is mistaken in thinking that he has really pulled off Faustus's leg, for the latter is physically protected by the devil until his death. Shortly afterwards Faustus calls out, 'ha, ha, ha, Faustus hath his leg again, and the horse-courser a bundle of hay for his forty dollars' (39-41). The horse-courser, however, understands these things prosaically. To him, the leg which he has got is one of only two, and he informs others, in the next scene, that 'now 'tis at home in mine hostry' (49). He, the carter and others interrupt the Duke of Vanholt scene, and when offered some beer, the horse-courser says to Faustus: 'I'll drink a health to thy wooden leg for that word (beer)', whereupon Faustus replies: 'My wooden leg? What dost thou mean by that?' (70-72). When pressed, he pretends that he remembers nothing of the episode in which the horse-courser pulled off his leg. The carter, obviously in amazement, asks: 'Be both you legs bedfellows every night together?' and receives from Faustus the intriguing response: 'Would'st thou make a colossus of me, that thou askest me such questions?' (89-91).

This is a curiously cryptic response on Faustus's part. The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers as its first meaning for 'colossus': 'A statue or image of the human form of very large dimensions; the most famous in antiquity being the bronze Archived at Flinders University, [space.flinders.edu.au](http://space.flinders.edu.au) even wonders of the world, reported to have stood astride the entrance to the Rhodian harbour...'

Faustus probably does not have all this in mind, but most likely he means something like this: 'How rude you are with your question. If I were to be the sort of creature that you would want me to be, I should have to be like a huge statue, incapable of moving, and with legs so large that everyone can clearly see them, positioned to look like the traditional Colossus of Rhodes, straddling the harbour'. Obviously, the question as to what happens to the legs of a colossus at night could not arise; thus the learned Doctor has neatly managed to avoid answering the question.

Whoever wrote this scene was well aware of the connection with the word *Rhodes* in the Prologue, and that the connection is ironic. Far from being anything like a colossus, our hero, who was born at Rhodes and might have been like Apollo, has shrunk in stature so as to become, in effect, a petty hollow man who can do little more than play pranks.

Once we are aware of the connection between these two points, we should see yet another link. Marlowe himself is generally considered to be the author of the Epilogue, which opens as follows:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,  
 And burned is Apollo's laurel bough,  
 That sometime grew within this learned man.

In making the Chorus speak these lines, Marlowe must have wanted to connect the reference to Apollo with the Chorus's mention of *Rhodes* at the beginning of the play. If he had written *Rhode*, there would have been no such meaningful relation between what the Chorus says at the beginning and at the end. The Chorus makes the point that he who was born at Rhodes, and thus might have resembled Apollo's statue there, has lost what sometime grew within him. To 'emend' the original form *Rhodes* which occurred in the 1604 and 1616 texts into *Rhodes* removes a significant set of connections which we feel confident Marlowe would have wished his readers to see.

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## NOTES

1. *Doctor Faustus* London, 1965; 2nd rev. ed. 1967, Introduction, pp. xiv-xv. The text is quoted from this edition throughout, unless otherwise indicated. See also Gill's *The Plays of Christopher Marlowe* London, 1971. She is at present editing Marlowe extensively. As Gill mentions, the information about Henslowe's payment is found in *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. R.A. Foakes and E. Rickert London, 1961, p. 206. Kirschbaum's article, 'The Good and Bad Quartos of *Doctor Faustus*', occurs in *The Library* XXVI (1945-46), pp. 272-94. More detailed references to Greg's work follow.
2. *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marlowe: a conjectural reconstruction.*
3. *Doctor Faustus* London, 1962, p.xxvii. Although meritorious, Jump's edition seems less satisfying - and less original - than Gill's for the 'New Mermaids' series.
4. It is worth noting here that in 1965 Roma Gill suggested that the B Text 'incorporated the Bird-Rowley additions in its third and fourth acts at least' (p.xv). She offers the hypothesis that 'sometime in 1592-3, probably, Marlowe wrote some scenes for *Doctor Faustus* and that a collaborator for the rest, with or without Marlowe's assistance, put together the play largely in the form reproduced memorially by the A-text' (p. 138). Thus, 'the A-text quality may be somewhat better than is commonly supposed' (p. 139).
5. 'Dr Greg and *Doctor Faustus*: The Supposed Originality of the 1616 Text', *English Literary Renaissance* 5 (1975), pp. 171-97.
6. Boas's edition is part of R.H. Case's big edition of the *Collected Works* London, 1930-33. The reader who does not have access to any of the original Quartos but wishes to check the readings of the A and B texts in facsimile will find it useful to consult *Doctor Faustus 1604 and 1616: A Scholar Press Facsimile* Menston, 1970.