

THE PROGRESS OF FAUST

5 He was born in Deutschland, as you would suspect,
And graduated in magic from Cracow
In Fifteen Five. His portraits show a brow
Heightened by science. The eye is indirect,
As of bent light upon a crooked soul,
And that he bargained with the prince of Shame
For pleasures intellectually foul
Is known by every court that lists his name.

10 His frequent disappearances are put down
To visits in the regions of the damned
And to the periodic deaths he shammed,
But, unregenerate and in Doctor's gown,
He would turn up to lecture at the fair
And do a minor miracle for a fee.
15 Many a life he whispered up the stair
To teach the black art of anatomy.

20 He was as deaf to angels as an oak
When, in the fall of Fifteen Ninety-Four,
He went to London and crashed through the floor
In mock damnation of the play-going folk.
Weekending with the scientific crowd,
He met Sir Francis Bacon and helped draft
"Colours of Good and Evil" and read aloud
An obscene sermon at which nobody laughed.

25 He toured the Continent for a hundred years
And subsidized among the peasantry
The puppet play, his tragic history;
With a white glove he boxed the devil's ears
And with a black his own. Tired of this,
30 He published penny poems about his sins,
In which he placed the heavy emphasis
On the white glove which, for a penny, wins.

35 Sometime before the hemorrhage of the Kings
Of France, he turned respectable and taught;
Quite suddenly everything that he had thought
Seemed to grow scholars' beards and angels' wings.
It was the Overthrow. On Reason's throne
He sat with the fair Phrygian on his knees
And called all universities his own,
40 As plausible a figure as you please.

45 Then back to Germany as the sage's sage
To preach comparative science to the young
Who came to every land in a great throng
And knew they heard the master of the age.
When for a secret formula he paid
The Devil another fragment of his soul,
His scholars wept, and several even prayed
That Satan would restore him to them whole.

50 Backwardly tolerant, Faustus was expelled
From the Third Reich in Nineteen Thirty-nine.
His exit caused the breaching of the Rhine,
Except for which the frontier might have held.
Five years unknown to enemy and friend
He hid, appearing on the sixth to pose
55 In an American desert at war's end
Where, at his back, a dome of atoms rose.

BY KARL SHAPIRO