

NOTES

1. Quotations are from Richard Wilbur, *New and Collected Poems* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1988) and Karl Shapiro, *Selected Poems* (Random House: 1968).
2. Karl Shapiro. "The Progress of Faust." *Selected Poems*. pp. 121-122.

The Progress of Faust

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.

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.
 Many a life he whispered up the stair
 To teach the black art of anatomy.

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 playgoing folk.
 Weekending with a scientific crowd,
 He met Sir Francis Bacon and helped draft
 "Colours of Good and Evil" and read aloud
 An obscene sermon at which no one laughed.

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,
 He published penny poems about his sins,
 In which he placed the heavy emphasis
 On the white glove which, for a penny, wins.

Some time 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,
 As plausible a figure as you please.

Then back to Germany as the sages' sage
 To preach comparative science to the young
 Who came from 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.

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
 In an American desert at war's end
 Where, at his back, a dome of atoms rose.

Richard Wilbur. *New and Collected Poems*. pp. 245-246.

Merlin Enthralled

In a while they rose and went out aimlessly riding,
 Leaving their drained cups on the table round.
 Merlin, Merlin, their hearts cried, where are you hiding?
 In all the world was no unnatural sound.

Mystery watched them riding glade by glade;
 They saw it darkle from under leafy brows;
 But leaves were all its voice, and squirrels made
 An alien fracas in the ancient boughs.

Once by a lake-edge something made them stop.
 Yet what they found was the thumping of a frog.
 Bugs skating on the shut water-top,
 Some hairlike algae bleaching on a log.

Gawen thought for a moment that he heard
 A whitethorn breathe *Nimiane*. That Siren's daughter
 Rose in a fort of dreams and spoke the word
Sleep, her voice like dark diving water;

And Merlin slept, who had imagined her
Of water-sounds and the deep unsoundable swell
A creature to bewitch a sorcerer,
And lay there now within her towering spell.

Slowly the shapes of searching men and horses
Escaped him as he dreamt on that high bed:
History died; he gathered in its forces;
The mists of time condensed in the still head

Until his mind, as clear as mountain water,
Went raveling toward the deep transparent dream
Who bade him sleep. And then the Siren's daughter
Received him as the sea receives a stream.

Fate would be faded; dreams desire to sleep.
This the forsaken will not understand.
Arthur upon the road began to weep
And said to Gawen *Remember when this hand*

*Once hailed a sword from stone; now no less strong
It cannot dream of such a thing to do.*
Their mail grew quainter as they clopped along.
The sky became a still and woven blue.