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JANE K. BROWN

Faust

Faust has been seen as the paradigmatic text of modernity almost since its conception. By 1836 Karl Gutzkow was claiming that Goethe was 'set by the gods as a boundary-stone to mark where the past ends and modernity begins',¹ while for Matthew Arnold he was the great manifestation of the modern spirit.² Innumerable critics have identified Goethe's most famous work as the beginning of this or that tradition. Whether or not one fully agrees with these characterizations, *Faust* is undeniably one of those rare works that capture some major turning point in our history. Composed over six decades, from 1773 to 1832, *Faust* comprehends far-reaching changes in philosophy, science, political and economic organization, industrialization and technology that might best be summarized as Europe's confrontation with the impact of secularization. Europe entered the eighteenth century with institutions and structures still defined in terms of a cosmos ordered by a divine principle; but increasingly the universe was felt to operate on its own and sometimes seemed entirely the product of natural processes. The resulting sense of crisis as the old institutions no longer corresponded to the naturalized world is reflected in political upheavals – the American and French Revolutions, the Napoleonic Wars, the Restoration and the July Revolution of 1830. In literature and the arts the upheaval is generally identified as Romanticism, in philosophy as the Kantian Revolution, in economics and technology as the Industrial Revolution. To understand *Faust* as modern one must thus read it against these various revolutions.

Goethe began *Faust* not in Germany, but in the Holy Roman Empire. By the time he finished it the Empire had been officially dissolved for twenty-five years and the German lands were well on the way to the consolidation that led to the modern nation-state of Germany in 1871. In the process Goethe, like all Europeans, had to reflect on the spectacular collapse of divine right monarchy in France and on the not always attractive birth pangs of democratic government. Goethe watched the French Revolution, career

of Napoleon, and Restoration with profound ambivalence, and his concerns saturate *Faust*. There are passages of topical satire in scenes such as 'Walpurgis Night's Dream' and in the Emperor's restoration of his court after the dubious defeat of the alternative Emperor in Act IV of Part II. War lurks in the background throughout the play – in the soldiers and references to war in 'Before the City Gate', the military profession of Margarete's brother Valentin, military activity constantly alluded to in the first three acts of Part II, and explicit battle scenes in Act IV. More profound yet is the theme of revolutionary subversion implicit in the impotence of Mephistopheles, the spirit who always denies and who always steals the show (HA III, line 1338).³ Equally subversive is Faust's pact with the devil, which requires him to achieve salvation not by renouncing sin, but by pursuing it as far as possible. Faust and Mephistopheles are the successors to Milton's Adam and Satan, and Goethe was among the first to see Satan as a great revolutionary. Even where *Faust* operates with imagery of the older God-centred cosmos, its rhetoric betrays the presence of the new. The archangels in the 'Prologue in Heaven' celebrate the competing 'brother-spheres' of the creation (144; my emphasis). The poet of the 'Prelude on the Stage' may hate the mobs to whom the director caters, but his poetry similarly speaks of the rights of humanity, conferred by Nature (136). By the end of Part II Faust himself has for all practical purposes replaced the Emperor as the ruler of active millions, and he was celebrated in this role by the Communist state in East Germany. Despite the fact that Goethe's own politics were often conservative, *Faust* embodies the revolutionary ethos of its time so profoundly that it has been seen as celebrating phases of that development that had not even been conceived at the time it was written.

Goethe represents various stages of the shift in economic power from landowning classes to bourgeoisie in the Industrial Revolution, which was just beginning in the early nineteenth century. Part I is set in the pre-industrial world of the German small town as it survived into the late eighteenth century. Act I of Part II offers a sophisticated analysis of the changing economics as a monetary system based on precious metal equivalence gives way to one based on signification and the authority of the nation-state. Act 4 sketches in passing life in the capital of a petty eighteenth-century German principedom, but then the newly restored Emperor grants Faust huge tracts of swamp which Faust drains and has settled, becoming himself the ruler of a productive people: power has passed to the rising technocratic class as the play recapitulates the economic evolution of its time. At the same time the last act contains prescient warnings of the dangers and potential inhumanity of the new regime. The modern nation-state that emerged on German soil from this process in 1871 was still officially an empire that accorded

considerable respect to its old feudal class, but power actually resided in the hands of its industrialists. Small wonder that it adopted Goethe's *Faust* as its representative text.

German philosophy in Goethe's day was preoccupied with the gap between the subject, the self in its capacity as perceiver, and the object or non-self. Thus Faust appears repeatedly in the drama 'imprisoned' in small gothic chambers and literal prisons from which he longs to escape into nature, into the world, into a freedom to experience everything that can be known to the human spirit. German Romantics experimented with various models of mediation between subject and object, the most famous of which is Hegel's dialectic. Goethe completed *Faust I* at a time when he often discussed literature and philosophy with the active Romantic circle in Jena, which included, among others, Hegel (shortly before he wrote his *Phenomenology of Mind*). It is not surprising, therefore, to find innumerable contrasting principles at work in *Faust* that are brought into relationship with one another in various fashions, often dialectically.

In the generation before Goethe the sons of the rising middle class still normally studied theology at university, but the fashionable discipline for Goethe's generation was the more humanistic classical philology — a shift registered in *Faust* by the move from a traditional devil's-sabbath Walpurgis Night in Part I to a 'Classical Walpurgis Night' in Part II. Goethe's maturity saw the birth of new, even more human-focused disciplines such as linguistics, psychology and anthropology. At the same time history became a part of all disciplinary thinking in unprecedented fashion. No longer simply a repository of past information or a model to be emulated, history was now understood as an assemblage of cultures, each of which had its unique character and course of development. Classical antiquity, the ideal of European culture at least since the Renaissance, was now understood to have a history that could be studied, but never relived or recreated. The sixteenth-century setting so effortlessly created by Goethe in Part I becomes increasingly in Part II a gateway through which the play leads us ever further into a cultural past that is itself not static, but receding yet deeper from our view. From its evocation of wavering forms from the past in 'Dedication' (line 1), the play is preoccupied with memory and forgetting, with recovering the past to create a future, with making the fullest use of a present unfettered by the burden of memory. The essence of Faust's pact with Mephistopheles is to live each moment to its fullest and let it pass. Despite the framework of the 'Prologue in Heaven' the play has little concern with theology or with human life understood as occurring in a time that began with the Creation and will end with the Last Judgment. In *Faust* time is measured, as the hero himself

recognizes at the beginning of Part II, by the throbbing pulse of human life (4679).

The making of *Faust*

The compilation of texts going back to early Christian times and now known as the 'Faust tradition' about the scholar who makes a pact with the devil was inspired by the stature of Goethe's text in the late nineteenth century. Most of its components — figures such as Simon Magus, Robert Diabolus, St. Cyprian, Theophilus and Cenodoxus — illuminate Goethe's *Faust* insofar as their stories entered into the legends that became attached to the name Faust, and primarily as indications of paths Goethe chose not to follow. The Faust legend in the narrower sense began in the later sixteenth century, when the scholar who makes a pact with the devil was connected to the historical figure Georg Faust (c. 1480–c. 1540), a notorious astrologer, alchemist, physician and magician who was expelled from various south German cities. In 1582 the *Historia von Dr. Johan Fausten*, the first of several chapbooks (collections of legends and anecdotes in the vernacular for a popular audience), appeared anonymously in Frankfurt, though it was evidently the work of a Protestant pastor; an expanded version of 1589 was reprinted 22 times by 1600. It was substantially revised in 1599, 1674 and again in 1725. This last was the basis for innumerable cheap pamphlet versions, in one of which Goethe probably first encountered his hero. The original chapbook appeared in English within two years of its first publication and was dramatized by Christopher Marlowe as *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*. Brought back to Germany by itinerant English players by 1608, the play was soon translated into German and became a standard among travelling troupes, and, in the eighteenth century, in ballet and puppet theatres — a form in which Goethe is also known to have encountered the material as a child.

The biographical backbone of the first Faust chapbook warns against the dangers of excessive knowledge, both scientific and historical, and thus expresses the ambivalence of the early modern age towards its expanding horizons. Faust's magic embodies the combination of knowledge, intuition and power that enthralled the Renaissance, when the lines between the occult sciences and other kinds of knowledge were still unclear. In the Middle Ages the church had demonized whatever aspects of antiquity it had not absorbed. The Renaissance successfully absorbed the classical material that came west after the fall of Byzantium in 1453, but still drew the line at magic as the work of the devil. Protestantism, with its increased emphasis on faith, only strengthened this tendency: knowledge led to pride and thus jeopardized

the salvation of the soul through grace. The Faust myth as we know it seems to have been born from the conflict between the Renaissance thirst for knowledge of all kinds and the Reformation insistence on the purity of faith.

This conflict became the subject of high art when Gorthold Ephraim Lessing, leading critic and playwright of the German Enlightenment, proposed a Faust tragedy in 1759 as a possible German masterpiece. In order to encourage German dramatists to establish their independence from French and, to a lesser extent, English models in the theatre, Lessing suggested Faust in the seventeenth of his *Briefe die neueste Literatur betreffend* (Letters on Modern Literature) as a specifically German theme and published one scene of the play he had in mind. Goethe was not the only poet of his generation to follow Lessing's advice, for the older critic was widely admired, but his reputation as the greatest genius of the renaissance German literature had been so firmly established by the success of *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (The Sorrows of Young Werther) that *Faust* was recognized as Germany's new masterpiece as soon as word got out that Goethe was writing it.

Nevertheless, the Faust tradition constitutes but a fraction of Goethe's sources for *Faust*. From the first Goethe problematized the Faust material by explicit allusions to and parodies of other works. The affair between Faust and Margarete, the heart of Goethe's original conception, is stylized in terms of a seduction plot that was still recognizably English in Goethe's Germany, and even more in terms of the relation between Hamlet and Ophelia; the connection is marked by one of Ophelia's songs sung by Mephistopheles. The end of the 'Walpurgis Night' alludes repeatedly to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the masque in Act I of Part II draws in complicated ways on *The Tempest* – to mention only the most obvious of the Shakespeare allusions. At crucial moments, particularly in the pact scenes and at the beginning of Act IV, Milton's Satan strands behind Mephistopheles. Goethe similarly conducts a kind of interpretive conversation with Rousseau in the pact scene and in Faust's courtship conversation with Helen. At other times Goethe draws on the Spanish Golden Age dramatist Pedro Calderón de la Barca and on Dante. The play is saturated with biblical allusions, from the presence of the Book of Job in the 'Prologue in Heaven' to the last act of Part II. Biblical material appears so consistently and with such complex ironies that the drama constitutes an extended critique of the place of Christianity in European culture. Almost as pervasive are the allusions to classical antiquity, beginning with Virgil in the earliest stages of the play; in the later stages, particularly Part II, the canon expands to include Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Herodotus, Apollonius of Rhodes, Lucan and Ovid. At times the allusions extend to opera, painting (primarily of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and sculpture from ancient Egypt to the

seventeenth century. By anchoring his play so thoroughly in the European tradition, Goethe claims it for Germany, which had previously played but a marginal role in the classical revival in Europe, and simultaneously claims for Germany a place in that tradition. *Faust* is a comprehensive synthesis of European culture and as such is largely responsible for the widespread perception that Germany in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had reached the pinnacle of cultural development.⁴

Begun probably in 1773 and last corrected in 1832, *Faust* survives in four separate stages. The first, commonly known as the *Urfaust* (*Faust* in original form) and published only when a manuscript copy was discovered in 1887, probably represents the state of the manuscript when Goethe arrived in Weimar in 1775 and consists primarily of the tragedy of Margarete (or Gretchen). In Italy, more than a decade later, he revised most of this version into verse and added the scenes 'Forest and Gavern' and 'Witch's Kitchen'. He published most of it, but without the final scene, 'Dungeon', as *Faust. Ein Fragment* in 1790. In this form the play had a major impact on the German Romantics and also on Madame de Staël, who popularized this version in France and the English-speaking countries in *De l'Allemagne* (On Germany). Goethe returned to the play at Schiller's urging in 1797 and completed the remainder of Part I in 1806; it appeared in 1808. To this stage of the play belong the prologues, the second half of 'Night' with the Easter chorus, the pact scenes and the 'Walpurgis Night'. Although Goethe drafted parts of the Helen scenes and of the final scenes of Part II even before he finished Part I, he did not return in earnest to the manuscript until the mid-1820s; he published Act 3 (Helen) in 1827 and parts of Act 1 in 1828. In the summer of 1831 he sealed the completed manuscript of Part II for publication after his death, but made a few minor corrections the following January. It appeared in 1832 as the first of his posthumous works.

This long gestation has led many critics to assert that *Faust* cannot be understood as a unified work. The incompleteness of the *Urfaust* and *Fragment* has contributed to the sense of incoherence, although the unity of tone in the *Urfaust* has made it a favourite of critics since its recovery. Much work in the last generation has demonstrated the fundamental coherence of the text, but it is still helpful to understand the different stages of composition, for succeeding layers of the text elaborate and interpret their historical predecessors. The *Fragment* and even more so Part I transform the events of the *Urfaust* by recontextualizing them, so that a coherent document of the Storm and Stress movement becomes an equally coherent, if complex, document of the age of the French Revolution and German Idealism. Part II further elaborates, interprets and reinterprets the text of Part I from the point of view of the older and wiser survivor of the Napoleonic wars and their aftermath. Given

the length of the play, some 12,000 lines, it is rarely performed complete. The habit, begun with the first performance in 1817, of extensive cutting has doubtless contributed to the perception that the play has no inherent structure. Given that *Faust* does not observe the traditional unities of action, time and place canonized by Aristotle, it is worth considering just what kind of tragedy it really is.

Its length and scope have prompted many readers to regard it as an epic rather than a drama. Three kinds of evidence support this thesis. First, Goethe never staged the play during his tenure as director of the Weimar theatre. Second, it describes all the stage action as it occurs, as if Goethe intended from the first to compensate for the likely absence of a visual realization. Third, the play constantly evokes milestones of European verse narrative. Allusions to the Bible, the *Aeneid* and Homer occur so frequently that many go unrecognized. The 'Prologue in Heaven' is explicitly modelled on the biblical Book of Job, the introduction of the Earth Spirit is equally clearly modelled on *Aeneid* III (192–9), and Faust's great monologue at the beginning of Part II in response to the rising sun evokes Dante in *terza rima*. The 'fortunate fall' in *Paradise Lost* stands behind the morally ambiguous pact in *Faust* and its Satan behind Mephistopheles, whose parody of the newly arrived devils in Hell (as in *Paradise Lost*, Book I) at the beginning of Act IV calls attention retrospectively to Milton's central presence even in the classical-romantic phantasmagoria of Act III: Faust's distribution of Greece to his Germanic followers echoes Milton's mapping of Christian devils onto their original pre-Christian locations (*Paradise Lost*, Book I, lines 376 ff.), and the identification of the narrative of the birth of Euphron as a late imitation of the birth of Hermes repeats in reverse Milton's identification of Vulcan's fall as a late imitation of Satan's (I, 739 ff.). Milton evidently marks for Goethe the crucial dividing line between ancient and modern, and epic underpins the history of the European tradition even as Act III explicitly traces the history of tragedy.

Scholars who regard *Faust* in epic terms emphasize the generic uniqueness of the play, but it is wise to remember that Milton himself hesitated between writing *Paradise Lost* as classical epic or as baroque dramatic spectacle. The fact reminds us that dramas with *Faust*'s sweep 'from Heaven through the earth to Hell' (242) were still widely acknowledged and indeed performed in the seventeenth century, when court masque, municipally sponsored morality play, Jesuit school drama and opera dominated the European stage. Goethe was more aware than we are of the degree to which French neoclassical polemics had narrowed the options available to serious dramatists, and he himself still wrote numerous court masques and libretti. If *Faust* fails to observe the Aristotelian unities of time, place and even action, and

ignores the simplest categories of causality, its tendency to represent the world in thematic, allegorical terms derives from the religious and court drama that was still vital everywhere in Europe in the seventeenth century and in remoter outposts of Germany into the late eighteenth. *Faust* is full of inset examples of these genres – the 'Walpurgis Night's Dream', the court masque and dumb show of Part II, Act I, the pastoral opera of Act III – and of allusions to practitioners of these forms, particularly to Calderón, the most formidable allegorical dramatist of both religious and secular stage in the seventeenth century. Such drama represents its figures and themes in recognizable relation to the cosmic context and so might best be thought of as 'world theatre'.

World theatre represents not what is real in the ordinary sense, but cosmic or eternal truths. Hence its audience judges the illusions on stage not for their reality, but as instruction about what is beyond human sight. It was the great achievement of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* to help shift English drama out of this allegorical mode into the form of drama more familiar to us, in which we focus on the psychology of the characters more than on their place in a larger context. Writing as he was in a world in which God had withdrawn from daily affairs, Goethe lacked the fundamental underpinnings for the genre. At the same time he had at his disposal all the techniques of the tragic tradition of the inner self Marlowe helped to establish. As a result Goethe's world theatre looks quite different from that of his predecessors and must be regarded as a remarkable attempt to re-establish an outmoded genre on a new, post-Kantian basis in which cosmic allegory is replaced by symbolism of nature. For this reason the drama is often characterized as 'divine comedy' or 'mystery play'. Goethe subtitled it 'tragedy', but since world theatre must by definition affirm the cosmic order, tragedy in the normal sense of the term is impossible. It must be regarded here rather as a challenge to rethink our presuppositions about dramatic genre.

Issues in interpretation

In order to take account of both the inherent unity and the layered process of composition, it makes sense to approach each stage as a separate entity with its own agenda and thus treat *Faust* as four concentric texts, each of which encloses its predecessor in a web of elaboration and reinterpretation. Most scholarship has considered the stages as three distinct texts (with *Faust. Ein Fragment* taken as a slight variant of Part I), so that by reading the stages separately we shall be in one sense following a traditional model, yet diverging from it in seeing the stages, especially Part II, as elaborations of one another.

The *Urfaust*, composed between 1773 and 1775, is essentially a document of the Storm and Stress. As such, its central concerns are psychological. In the opening monologue, whose sources ultimately go back to Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, Faust rejects book learning in favour of magic. But the positive lights towards which he turns, first the moon shining outside his window, then the Macrocosm and Earth Spirit, evoke from him the language of eighteenth-century sensibility. Faust is interested primarily in his emotions, and his narrow gothic room, emblem of his dry intellectual world, offers no space for them to overflow. In this preoccupation with his feelings Faust resembles the hero of *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, Goethe's novel of precisely the same years. Faust's extreme subjectivity explains why the love affair with Margarete, Goethe's original and most influential addition to the Faust legend, so quickly displaces the original plot. The scene between Mephistopheles and the student adumbrates the turn to love, and after a brief traditional episode from the Faust chapbook in 'Auerbach's Tavern' – into which Goethe inserts a few gratuitous love songs – the tumultuous love plot leaves ample scope for Faust's titanic feelings. Faust's speech welcoming the twilight in Gretchen's room in 'Evening' echoes both the rhyme sounds and motifs of his first emotional speech to the moon (2687–94).⁵ Thus Gretchen, like Werther's Lotte, disappears as an individual in the plethora of emotions and ideals Faust projects onto her; her tragedy is that she does not really exist in the face of Faust's subjectivity.

The more obvious aspect of her tragedy is that she is seduced and abandoned by a lover above her in rank. Faust is another of the well-meaning but undependable heroes of the bourgeois tragedies popularized in Germany by Lessing (particularly *Emilia Galotti* of 1772), and indeed the Gretchen tragedy is the most compelling example of the genre in Germany. Goethe had Werther commit suicide with a copy of *Emilia Galotti* open on his desk, so it is hardly far-fetched to see Faust in the role of Lessing's indecisive prince, torn between his love for a pure woman and the evil advice of his scheming companion. Goethe translates this mode into the Shakespearean idiom popularized by his own *Götz von Berlichingen* (1773) with its often colloquial, abrupt language, occasional bawdiness, mixture of prose and verse, and use of crowd scenes. The intense subjectivity and rudimentary class consciousness of the *Urfaust* appealed especially to the vitalism of the late nineteenth century and contributed to its construct of 'the young Goethe'.

By the time Goethe returned to the manuscript he had become more critical of Werther's extreme subjectivity, as his revisions of the novel in the late 1780s reveal. *Faust* became more objective in a variety of ways. First, Goethe regularized the verse and versified some of the prose scenes, in particular 'Auerbach's Tavern'. It may not be obvious today that versification implies

a reduction of subjectivity, but it clearly did for Goethe. The late 1780s is precisely the period in which he created his great blank-verse dramas of German classicism, and when he revised *Iphigenie auf Tauris* into verse he calmed, indeed repressed its more extreme emotions and even reduced the number of personal verb-subjects. Second, Goethe simply dropped the most pathetic scenes of the *Urfaust*: everything that came after 'Cathedral' – the scene with Valentin, the material that later became 'Gloomy Day, Field' and 'Night, Open Field', and 'Dungeon' – was laid aside. Third, he added two scenes composed in Italy, 'Forest and Cavern' and 'Witch's Kitchen'. Both change the course of the drama and also the meaning of much of the *Urfaust*.

'Forest and Cavern' introduces nature as the central theme and thereby redefines the significance of Faust's conjuring in 'Night'. In the *Fragment* the scene replaces the confrontation with Gretchen's brother Valentin as Faust's last appearance on stage and even incorporates Faust's speech from that scene beginning 'Was ist die Himmelstreu in ihren Armen' ('What use celestial joy in her arms, 3345–65). In the *Urfaust* the speech expresses Faust's remorse for Gretchen's seduction, but in 'Forest and Cavern' it is balanced by Faust's magnificent blank-verse prayer of thanks to the sublime spirit that gave him full access to nature. Now the speech expresses not Faust's remorse but a change of mood associated with Mephistopheles's arrival. The new scene marks a point of balance between two courses of action for Faust, indeed between two Fausts – the scholar and the seducer. Faust's description of nature is not simply the emotional overflowing typical of 'Night' but a reflection that connects passion and calm, perception and memory, in which the silver forms of the past (who exist independently of Faust) 'calm the severe pleasure' of his contemplation (3239). The tone contrasts dramatically with Faust's violent vision of Gretchen's destruction at his hands in the second (older) half of the scene. Since the spirit addressed seems to be the Earth Spirit that rejected him in 'Night', the speech retroactively gives the figures conjured earlier by Faust an objective existence they lacked in *Urfaust*, and a status independent of Mephistopheles. This is most obvious from the abrupt shift of mood that accompanies Mephisto's appearance at the end of the speech; but it is also evident from a changed stage-direction in 'Night' that Goethe has decoupled the magical evocation of the signs of nature from Faust's eventual partnership with the devil. In the *Urfaust* the Earth Spirit appears in a flame 'in appalling shape' (after line 481); in the *Fragment* the last phrase is omitted. As the spirit gains in dignity it is less an emanation of Faust's fevered sensibility and more the representation of a real nature with which Faust must come to terms.

'Witch's Kitchen' changes the conception of the play even more. Goethe placed it after 'Auerbach's Tavern', and at first glance it seems to continue

Mephistopheles's unsuccessful attempts to woo Faust with low pleasures on the way to the Gretchen tragedy; the 'pleasure' is Faust's rejuvenating draught or, as it is often understood, aphrodisiac. But something more important happens to Faust: while Mephisto and the apes perform an idiotic play about the world, Faust sees in a magic mirror a beautiful woman – a recumbent Renaissance Venus according to Goethe's own sketch of the scene. Faust reacts to it in the same language of transcendence and excessive emotion he uses with the magical signs and with Gretchen. Mirrors are common images of subjectivity; yet this magic mirror reflects not the self, but the vision projected by that self. Here is an explicit image of Faust projecting his vision of ideal beauty – or of the Ideal per se – onto something outside of himself; and the something onto which he projects it is a framed image. As Mephistopheles and the apes present a play within the play – a framed dramatic image – about nature, Faust creates his own image of the Ideal. Faust's subjectivity is contrasted with Mephisto's objectivity, but both find expression as aesthetic illusions. Because Faust is magically rejuvenated in this scene, in effect costumed for his encounter with Gretchen, all that follows, namely the Gretchen tragedy, is effectively transformed into a play within the play. Now the fact that Gretchen is the mirror onto which Faust continues to project his own vision reflects not only his subjectivity but also his creativity. In 'Night' Faust rejects the sign of the Macrocosm as 'play only' (454) and derides his scholarship as bombastic political tragedy (583); these references are easy to overlook, but once 'Witch's Kitchen' establishes aesthetic illusion as a vehicle for perception of the Ideal, they take on new significance, and it becomes necessary to read 'Night' differently, which, as we shall see, Goethe did in his revisions for Part I.

Because 'Witch's Kitchen' has so little mimetic significance it also makes the imagery of the play largely independent of the characters. The invocations of the Macrocosm and Earth Spirit both refer to drinking as a means of healing, achieving wholeness and unity with nature, and in Auerbach's Tavern the split wine goes up in flame, the most powerful element of nature in *Faust*. But only in 'Witch's Kitchen' does Faust actually drink: the act both rejuvenates him and enables him to locate his ideal in any passing woman – 'With this drink in him, / He'll see a Helen in every woman', as Mephistopheles puts it (2603–4). Drinking is now an image of perception, and the terms in which the Ideal is to be perceived are explicitly classical. Here is the germ for Faust's preoccupation with Helen as the embodiment of classical antiquity in Part II. Furthermore, the appearance of this Venus/Helen figure in the mirror establishes the play's central image for the synthesis of real and ideal required for perception of the Ideal in the world: Faust gazes at the figure in the crystal mirror while Mephistopheles and the apes occupy themselves

around the fire. In Part II the conception of Helen from the rape of Leda by the swan is figured three times as the lightning god Zeus (represented by Homunculus in the last scene of the 'Classical Walpurgis Night') coming to the woman in the water, which, in the first occurrence, is the 'fluid crystal of the wave' (6910) and in the second is a 'moist mirror' (7284). The marriage of fire and water that dominates most of Part II is thus first adumbrated in 'Witch's Kitchen'. Similarly, the mysterious and powerful old women who figure so importantly in the 'Walpurgis Night' and in Part II (the Mothers, Erichtho, Manto, the Phorkyads) are all prepared for by the witch of this scene, as are the low dark spaces of mysterious creation in Part II (the depths of the Mothers, Wagner's laboratory, the cave of the Phorkyads, the hut of Baucis and Philemon). Helen is first mentioned in the play at the end of 'Witch's Kitchen' and Faust is really set on his path to meet her through his rejuvenation there. The contrast between the scene's conceptual importance and its deliberate stylistic obscurity sets the agenda for Goethe's new conception of the play in the strongest possible terms: *Faust* now addresses the Romantics' epistemological dilemma that the Ideal can be perceived only in the chaos of Reality.

Faust I consists of the text of the *Fragment* with the restoration of 'Dungeon' (now revised into verse) plus additions that doubled the length of the text and made the 'tragedy of the scholar', as the first half of the drama is known, equal in impact to the tragedy of Margarete. The additions include the three prologues, the second half of 'Night', Faust's Easter walk, the pact scene and the 'Walpurgis Night'. Goethe wrote this material mostly in the late 1790s in a period when Jena, where he spent several months of each year, was the centre of German philosophy. It is thus natural that *Faust* in this form is the representative text of German Idealism. The three prologues frame the play to come in terms of the central epistemological issues of the period. 'Dedication' focuses on the poet's mediating role between present and past and thus introduces both the epistemological function of poetry and of memory, and also the worries about retaining access to the past brought on by the emergence of historicism in the later eighteenth century. The 'Prelude on the Stage' addresses similarly the mediating role of the dramatist between the poet's longings for eternal ideals and the director's insistence on fulfilling the demands of the day in the real world. The 'Prologue in Heaven', finally, with its ultimately unknowable God (so identified in the hymn of the archangels) represented by a stagy old man, questions the place of humanity in a universe in which God has been replaced by living nature. If the Lord of this prologue is certain that erring man can be saved so long as he strives, the devil is confident that he can win his bet: a universe in which the moral principle remains invisible behind the law of

nature raises serious questions about the possibility of social justice. In this context Faust's seduction of *Margarete* becomes a more complicated moral problem.

In this 'tragedy of the scholar', Faust's course is no longer the outpouring of an increasingly isolated subjectivity but instead oscillates between imprisoning cells and open spaces to embody the idealist dichotomies of subject and object, of self and world, and of self and transcendental Other. The sequence of dichotomies culminates in Faust's recognition at the end of 'Before the City Gate' that he has two souls that pull him in opposite directions (1112); in answer to his prayer for a spirit to mediate between them the poodle that will become *Mephistopheles* appears. As a result the pact with *Mephistopheles* finally becomes necessary to Goethe's plot. *Mephistopheles* will now mediate, or eventually provide Faust with the wherewithal to mediate for himself, between his desire for knowledge of the unknowable Other (what the German idealists called the Absolute) and his desire for participation in the real world. Ultimately, the play shows us, the Other can be perceived only when embodied as nature or art. By placing all of the real world at Faust's disposal and often serving as a kind of stage manager, *Mephistopheles* reveals himself to be in this conception less a principle of evil than a principle of nature; he is, in fact, a nature spirit.

Under these circumstances the traditional pact with the devil is impossible, and Goethe substitutes instead a bet: *Mephistopheles* will serve Faust so long as Faust remains unsatisfied with anything the devil has to offer, that is, with anything the world alone has to offer. The traditional significance of the pact is subverted, since Faust must now embrace every temptation of the pact in order to be saved. More important is the specific formulation: 'Werd' ich zum Augenblicke sagen: / Verweile doch! du bist so schön!' (Should I ever say to the moment: / Tarry a while, thou art so fair!, 1699-1700). The word *Augenblick*, 'moment', contains in it the word for 'eye'. Such moments of temptation to make time stand still and lose the bet will be moments of vision, moments in which Faust somehow can 'see' the ineffable Absolute in the world. The bet articulates both the instability of any knowledge of the Other and also its dependence on an insight projected from within. Subjectivity is less a problem, as it was in the *Urfaust*, than a necessary component of knowledge. But the concept 'moment' is also important for itself. History is now temporality. As such it opens to the active mind an infinite realm of experience, but it also mandates impermanence in all things, including love. The shift from pact to bet thus advances the idealist critique of the possibilities and dangers of the now virtually complete secularization of European culture: the grounding of identity exclusively in the self on the one hand allows Faust the full development of his inherent capacities, but on the other

hand leaves him to seek a basis for a knowledge of the non-self and for a morality grounded outside of the self. The dilemmas to which Rousseau and Kant had brought their century are here writ large.

Because, however, experience achieves its full significance for Goethe, as for Wordsworth, only in recollection, *Faust* transforms encounters with the world into 'staged' enactments of such experiences, so that the play becomes a series of plays-within-the-play, foremost among them the Gretchen tragedy. In the *Urfaust* the central axis was Faust-Margarete; now it is Faust-Mephistopheles, and we are offered less a depiction of typical modes of being than an allegorical analysis of specific themes and problems. In accordance with this shift, supernatural features take on greater prominence and become at the same time less shocking. It is in fact hard to imagine a less exciting scene than Goethe's 'Walpurgis Night': however much theatre directors have sought to make it otherwise, opera composers like Gounod and Berlioz recognized this truth and substituted ballets for it. Goethe's own poem, 'Die erste Walpurgisnacht' (The First Walpurgis Night), written shortly before the scene itself, treats the supernatural aspects of the celebration explicitly as a masquerade to hide the rites of druidical nature worship from superstitious Christians. If *Mephistopheles* is a nature spirit, his magic powers are really to keep the play moving efficiently, as when he explains that Faust could dig in a field for eighty years instead of drinking the witch's potion (233-61). They also are a shorthand to express the basic relationships in the play: when Mephisto's wine turns to fire in 'Auerbach's Tavern' we recognize that wine is literally as well as figuratively 'fire-water' or 'spirits', and that everything in this play is to be understood allegorically. Even though God is ineffable, language and art in *Faust* carry meaning of the most important kind. Such certainty about the possibility of access to the order of the cosmos, however ineffable it may be, explains why Goethe can change the end of 'Dungeon'; instead of ending with Mephisto's condemnation of Gretchen, a voice from above declares her saved: in Part I *Faust* has become world theatre.

Faust II repeats structures and episodes from *Faust I*, but simultaneously broadens them as it unfolds their implications. The simplest way to recognize the analogies to Part I is to think of Part II as consisting of two parts: Acts I-III deal with Faust's recovery of Helen, his subsequent 'marriage' to her, and the birth and death of their son Euphorion; in Acts IV and V Faust returns to modern Germany and engages in the land reclamation schemes in which he completes his career. As Part I divides into the tragedy of the scholar (in which Faust renounces words for deeds) and the Gretchen tragedy, so Part II divides (symmetrically, we note) into the Helen tragedy and the tragedy of the man of deeds who finds his way back at the very end to the power of the master's

word (II502, cf. II423). The opening scene, 'Charming Landscape', like the prologues of Part I, introduces the general issues, which are still primarily epistemological and aesthetic. Act I repeats in the person of the Emperor the frustrations Faust experiences at the beginning of Part I in connecting his intense desires with a reality outside of himself. And as Faust's longings for knowledge turned into love for Margarete, the Emperor's longing for gold (and thus an orderly effective empire) mutates into a desire to see Helen, who then represents the Ideal also for Faust until Act IV.¹ In a scene that reminds Faust explicitly of the witch's kitchen (6229) he descends to the Mothers to fetch her shade and sets the action of the next two acts in motion. Like Part I, Part II ends with salvation, this time Faust's; the return of Margarete to draw Faust ever onward in the wake of the Mater gloriosa at the end marks the parallel.

If the *Faust* of the 1790s focussed on the individual, Part II focuses on the social implications of idealism and historicism, and thus offers a sociological rather than anthropological perspective. Now Faust acts in the great world of the imperial court rather than in his narrow room or the imprisoning structures of the German petty bourgeoisie, and the drama offers various covert critiques of the state of European politics after the Restoration. This larger world appears in more particularized and varied detail, as one might expect in a drama whose central image for itself is the rainbow invoked at the end of 'Charming Landscape'. Faust is refracted and reflected in innumerable figures who engage in analogous quests – the Emperor, Homunculus who wants to become real, Euphorion who wants to climb and fly ever upward are obvious examples. Even Mephistopheles becomes a Faust analogue who quests for appropriate classical form in the classical Walpurgis Night and barely escapes being saved as he falls in love with the angels who rob him of Faust's soul at the end. Similarly the theme of striving, the essence of being human, is elaborated from seeking knowledge and comprehending the Other to seeking the well-springs of creative force within oneself. It also expands from the individual to the social dimension in the constant plays on the ambiguity of the German words *greifen/begreifen* ('grasp' in the sense of 'grab' and also of 'comprehend'). Part II is full of graspers: Faust causes an explosion by snatching at the shade of Helen in Act I; both Mephistopheles and Euphorion try to catch attractive young women; the courtiers try to grab the illusory trinkets of the Boy-Charioterer; griffins (German: 'Greif') talk about holding fast to gold; Faust's three mighty men cannot hold onto the gold they try to steal in Act IV; Helen's husband Menelaus is characterized as a pirate and the mighty men become pirates in Act V; Faust himself has his spoils of war displayed to please Helen; and the rape of Leda (mother of Helen) by the swan (Zeus) is described twice and finally re-enacted on stage

as Homunculus breaks his vial at the feet of Galatea at the end of Act II in a splendid marriage of fire and water. And when Mephisto's narrative of the birth of Euphorion is identified by the chorus as a plagiarism of the Homeric hymn on the birth of Hermes, the entire allusive poetic method of *Faust* is identified as equivalent grasping. As a result, the already tangled moral questions associated with striving in Part I become infinitely more complicated.

Representation replaces perception as the central concern: it is imaged in the rainbow that can be comprehended but not literally grasped. The remainder of the Helen sequence explores in detail how such representations, which include money as well as art in all forms, can be produced and how they are to be understood. Taken literally they dissolve or become destructive by bursting into flame or exploding, as the shade of Helen does at the end of Act I. They are most effectively comprehended or grasped if one enters into the fiction, as Faust does when he dons medieval garb to meet Helen in Act III. In the last two acts the opportunities Faust generates for others to create their own world become the most concrete example of how human creative vision, which has replaced the visions of transcendent truth from Part I, can be realized in the world. Goethe confronts and complicates his own conviction of the autonomy of art with profound insights into the representational nature of all social existence: in *Faust II* all power, be it financial, military, political or technological, depends on the capacity to create illusions. History is no longer solely the real world in which the Ideal can be perceived in the Real, but, as a realm of successive illusions, is also the relentless destroyer of all human achievement. Nowhere is Goethe's critique of his own project more profound than in the play's encounter with classical antiquity. Because historicism had called into question the eternal classical ideal inherited by the eighteenth century, Goethe recreates his Helen by setting her into the context of the development of antiquity from ancient Egypt on, and by dismissing her to the underworld when she has served her purpose. She is both the great achievement of nineteenth-century philhellenism and a monument to its transience. Faust appears to lose his bet with Mephistopheles by savouring in anticipation the creative activity of his settlers, but ultimately he is saved to continue striving after death for an eternally receding ideal embodied in Margarete and labelled 'das Ewig-Weibliche' (the eternal feminine).

Part II differs from Part I in its more openly allegorical style and its indifference to the unity of action, tone or style. The tendency towards complicated allusions to other texts runs riot: Part II consists to a large extent of what might best be called 'friendly parodies', appropriations of texts and artifacts like sphinxes and griffins that span the history of European culture from Homer to Byron. So complex is the web of irony, parody and allusion in the

final scenes that there is little agreement as to whether Faust's apotheosis is affirmative or nihilistic. The problem, of course, is the deliberate use of cosmic religious imagery, including paintings of the Assumption of the Virgin, to represent a world that is thoroughly secular, and in which the principles of physical and biological development have replaced the Christian God. In the spirit of human creativity celebrated in the play the older imagery takes on new meaning, and yet, as throughout *Faust*, the new necessarily and not always happily destroys the old. For as long as our culture continues to struggle between religious and scientific conceptions of its own existence *Faust* will continue to represent our own modernity.

NOTES

- 1 Karl Gutzkow, 'Über Goethe im Wendepunkte zweier Jahrhunderte', in *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Heinrich Hubert Houben (Leipzig: Max Hesse, n.d.), vii, p. 235. All translations are mine.
- 2 Matthew Arnold, 'Heinrich Heine', in *Essays in Criticism* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1865), 157.
- 3 All further citations are by line number of this text.
- 4 The allusive aspects of *Faust* are analysed at length in my *Goethe's Faust: The German Tragedy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986). For biblical allusions in *Faust* see Osman Durani, *Faust and the Bible: A Study of Goethe's Use of Scriptural Allusions and Christian Religious Motifs in Faust I and II* (Berne: Lang, 1977).
- 5 For ease of reference for the reader working primarily with the final version of the play, all references to *Urfaust* and to *Faust. Ein Fragment* are to the lines' final position in *Faust I*.

6

T. J. REED

Weimar Classicism: Goethe's alliance
with Schiller

Goethe's relationship with Schiller is a rare phenomenon in literature, an alliance of equals that stimulates the work of both but also transcends it in a common cause. The individualism inherent in creative writing is turned, in an extraordinary act of mutual tolerance, into understanding and cooperation. Each offers the other constructive criticism and practical example, they consult and collaborate. Their aim is not just to fulfil their own potential, but to establish new standards for German literary culture. Through theory and practice, and sometimes through satire and polemic, they create what came to be known as Weimar Classicism.

The contrast with earlier classicisms – this is the last one Europe would see – is striking. The French *grand siècle*, the Spanish *siglo de oro*, the Elizabethan and Augustan ages of English literature were all prolonged developments, rooted in a stable national society, concentrated in capitals and major cities, and in each case the work of several great names. The German version was created in just one decade within the borders of a small and insignificant duchy in a politically fragmented Germany that was not yet even a nation; and it was the doing of just two writers, whose contemporaries contributed little of significance or, often, actually opposed them. While it lasted, they were a powerful pairing, isolated but mutually sustaining: two was company.

Their friendship grew out of and in spite of a sense of acute difference, at first antagonism, on Schiller's side an actual love-hate which he compared to the feelings of Brutus for Caesar (to Körner, 2 February 1789). Goethe, ten years older and famous, had been the literary idol of Schiller's youth, but struck him on first acquaintance as egoistic and unapproachable. Schiller was also envious of the way Goethe's poetic career had been favoured by his easy personal and social circumstances, where he himself had risen from humble origins, been pressed by the Duke of Württemberg into an unwanted medical training, been forbidden after a first dramatic success – *Die Räuber* (The Robbers), 1781 – to write any more, and forced to flee his native duchy in the hope of living by his pen. That, in an age before copyright and systematic