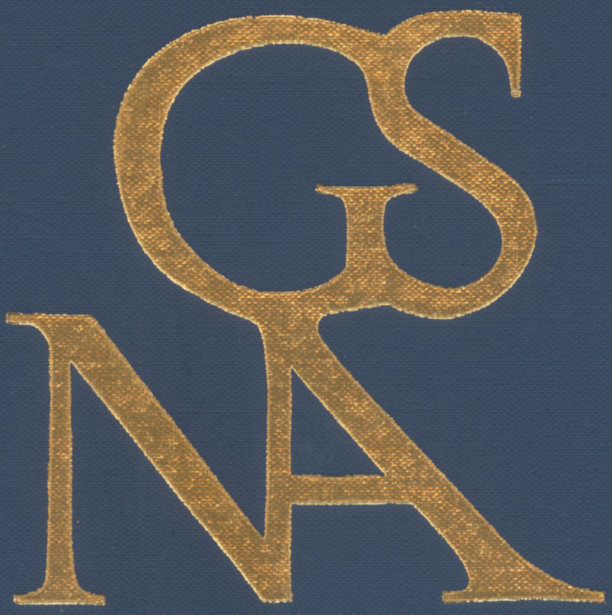

Goethe Yearbook

Goethe Yearbook

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of North America

Edited by Daniel Purdy

With Catriona MacLeod,
Book Review Editor

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Special Section on Goethe and the Postclassical: Literature, Science, Art, and Philosophy, 1805–1815

ULRICH GAIER

Helena, Then Hell: *Faust* as Review and Anticipation of Modern Times

GOETHE IS USUALLY NOT RECOGNIZED as an historian although, with *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and with *Geschichte der Farbenlehre,* he wrote eminent works of history that far exceed the compass of an autobiography or the chronology of a special branch of optics. When he tried to talk his friend Zelter into writing a history of music, Goethe wrote in 1815: "müßtest Du bei einer bedeutenden Periode anfangen, und vor- und rückwärts arbeiten; das Wahre kann bloß durch seine Geschichte erhoben und erhalten, das Falsche bloß durch seine Geschichte erniedrigt und zerstreut werden."[1] In a number of his plays, he uses Herder's theory of intertextuality *Vom neuern Gebrauch der Mythologie,*[2] taking up figures, stories, and problems of the sixteenth century like *Götz von Berlichingen, Egmont, Tasso,* and *Faust,* and finishing with the passionate cry for a future in which the problems that cause Götz', Egmont's, Gretchen's death or Tasso's isolation are solved. These, then, are the questions that the contemporary recipient has to ask himself: would these figures be able to live according to their "prätendierte Freiheit"[3] today? This approach is eminently historical but not in the sense that a historian of the time like Gatterer or Schlözer would have acknowledged as historiography. Goethe consciously establishes a systemic correlation for instance between the introduction of Roman Law and the abolition of the traditional privileges of knighthood in Götz' time, and the burning question of the 1770s whether a general book of law should be introduced or whether regional traditions of jurisdiction should be preserved.[4] History, here, is not any more *magistra vitae* but a critique of present times, and present times, inversely, create an understanding for the relevance of historical events and processes: between the contemporary recipient and history, Goethe establishes an organic system of reciprocation that, as a structure, he holds up until his last years. He adopted the approach of conceiving organic systems from Johann Gottfried Herder who in turn had dynamized Johann Heinrich Lambert's "Systematology" of 1764 for his philosophy of language and culture.[5] I will show in this paper that Goethe used this systems approach not only for history but for his theory of colors, for aesthetics, poetry, and even in politics. *Faust,* as an eminent work of history, and in it, 3,000 years old, Helena, will provide a frame for some excursions into the systems aspect of the other fields just mentioned.

Faust, Part One

In order to make the historical character of his text ostentatious for a recipient interested in sequences and continuities of this apparently incoherent work, Goethe inserted a series of what I call "historische Markierungen," chronotextual markers, into *Faust.* They open up an historical reading of part one that leads from Faust's lifetime in the fifteenth/sixteenth century to the year 1800, and from around 1800 to 1830 in part two. This makes the development from Faust the blundering magician in the scene "Night" to Faust the "super-criminal" (as Wilhelm Böhm said[6]) plausible, constitutes Faust not as a character but as a principle, and invites us to read the various stages of this figure's development as metaphorical or exemplary representations of European history from around 1500 to 1830. In my commentary, I have listed the historical markers such as Nostradamus for the sixteenth century, the hot-air balloon of the brothers Montgolfier for 1783, a periodical called *Genius der Zeit* until 1800 for an exact date of the last scenes of part one. In *Faust II,* each act is dated as well—you will remember Lord Byron's death in 1824 in act 3 or the big dyke project in act 5 referring to the construction of Bremerhaven in 1827.[7]

Many lines could be followed through this period, such as the history of religious concepts, or the history of magic as Goethe observed those processes until his death. In this paper, I propose to deal with the principle of beauty called Helena which Faust insatiably searches for and deconstructs until the end of act 3 in part two. Goethe can well be trusted when he says: "Helena ist eine meiner ältesten Konzeptionen, gleichzeitig mit Faust."[8] Indeed, already the *Historia von D. Johann Fausten* of 1587 makes Faust conjure Helena at the request of his students, fall in love with her and keep her as his concubine with whom he has a son, just as Goethe's Faust and Helena have. But if Helena was conceived about 1769 like Faust, why doesn't she appear in part one? Evidently, Goethe speaks of a concept of Helena—just to conjure her from Hades, as Faust the old magician does, does not amount to a "concept." When, in act 1 of part two, the emperor urges Faust to conjure Helena for him, Mephistopheles refuses to help because the Christian devil has no jurisdiction in the Hades of the old Greeks: the most beautiful woman of antique mythology, the Greek idea of beauty is not at the disposal of a Christian mythological power. But the Helena concept is present in *Faust I,* represented by the word "schön," beautiful, which Goethe uses in a conscious and nearly terminological manner to introduce Faust's and the recipient's mind and senses to an original, non-Christian experience of beauty that, according to Winckelmann, Herder, Schiller, and Hölderlin, the Greeks from Homer onward embodied in Helena, and that Plato and his followers Plotinus, Proklos, and Ficino saw as the common goal of all forms and levels of erotic search.

Now, "schön" appears first in Faust's use (and Goethe inserts it only in the final version where he was concerned about consistency) when he terms "schönstes Glück," most beautiful blessing, his experience of the visions he had of the harmonious cosmos and the energetic earth spirit. "Schön" here is like "blessing, luck, happiness" a term for the highest exaltation of Faust's

whole being because his spiritual magic produced a bodily and mental apotheosis which he cannot sustain, magical greenhorn that he proves to be. But we see that, with this tradition of magic from antiquity, the experience of human totality, body and spirit, sensual and mental energies in vivid interplay is suddenly achieved and produces a god-like feeling (614–22). Faust, as we know, must learn that he is not a god nor a super-man, but human like all those townspeople who enjoy the advent of spring on Easter Sunday. And here, he uses "schön" for a second time. Unhappy about the helplessness of traditional medicine, he breaks off the learned dialogue with his assistant Wagner and says:

> Doch laß uns dieser Stunde schönes Gut
> Durch solchen Trübsinn nicht verkümmern!
> Betrachte wie in Abendsonne-Glut
> Die grünumgebnen Hütten schimmern.[9]

Here, we have the first appearance of Goethe's theory of colors according to which green and purple are complementary colors and postulate each other so that the eye automatically produces the missing complement when only one of them is observed. The purple sun on the shacks either makes the eye produce the missing green as a sort of halo, or makes the eye intensify the green color of vegetation around the shacks.[10] The effect of this operation is that the shacks glimmer, that is, produce the impression of white light to which, according to Goethe, the complementary colors are united or, more precisely, reduced. Pure light is the origin of all colors which are produced by turbid media through which the light has to go, like here when the sun is low. This sight, to Faust, is "schönes Gut," a beautiful good that has to be considered, looked at and meditated upon, because the eye, by creating the missing complementary color, becomes an organic function not of Faust but of the total organism of the cosmos of which Faust and his eye are systemic parts. By its automatic complementary production of a green color that does not exist for a physical instrument, the eye proves its sun-like nature of which Goethe wrote in his *Theory of Colors* in 1810:

> Wär nicht das Auge sonnenhaft,
> Wie könnten wir das Licht erblicken?
> Lebt nicht in uns des Gottes eigne Kraft,
> Wie könnt uns Göttliches entzücken?[11]

And Plotinus, to whom Goethe refers with these verses, continues: "nor could the soul behold beauty if it were not beautiful in itself."[12] So, if Faust's eye completes the color circle with the green halo complementing the purple of the shacks, it produces the totality of pure light that is the form in which divinity manifests itself—the divine, here, being constituted by organic cooperation of Faust and the sun, subject and object suspended in one organism. This is where "schönes Gut," beautiful good emerges, and it is certainly Goethe's purpose to use "beautiful" and "good" in his expression because it reminds of καλοκαγαθία, the Greek formula for a beautiful and good body and soul, physical and mental perfection and totality. This is also Herder's and Goethe's key example for their systems approach to nature, and for Goethe's

systematological definition of complete and original beauty which Faust will strive for under the name of Helena. The construction of sensual reality which the eye performs in adding the complementary color, can be observed in selective constructions of the ear when, in the scene *Dome,* Gretchen perceives from the "Dies irae" sequence sung by the choir only what she is afraid to hear (and what the recipient is restricted to, as well), and when, in another instance, Faust hears a non-Christian version of the Easter Play at the end of the first scene "Night."

I took rather long to unfold this seemingly unimportant passage of four lines, but it is the starting point of a bundle of threads that lead through *Faust.* First, Faust focuses his erotic search on the pure light of the sun which he wants to follow permanently; he desires bodily wings and, in order to make his erotic flight real, he calls for the demons whereupon Mephistopheles the technician offers himself for a companion. Second, this erotic search proves to be the search for beauty, that is, finally for Helena. Third, the occasion when Goethe lets Faust experience beauty in natural simplicity and body-spirit totality, is the spring morning when the townspeople, celebrating Christ's resurrection in open nature, celebrate their own resurrection from the Middle Ages, from the oppressive and repressive narrowness of a way of life full of restrictions and a way of thinking full of taboos on senses and body. Fourth, the chronotextual markers locate this emancipation into nature and natural humanity in the seventeenth century—the markers are Faust's dissatisfaction with traditional alchemy and the development of a natural science on an empirical basis, observation of nature and attempts to make technical use of natural powers even if the devil is in them, finally two songs which can be dated stylistically to the seventeenth century. All this is the historical context for a new experience of sensual beauty—think of Rubens—and for the discovery of a new image of man exempted from the strictures and sanctions of state and church.

Goethe inserted this scene of emancipation and resurrection, of the rediscovery and renaissance—even at the risk of calling upon the devil—of empirical reality, sensual beauty, nature and humanity into his *Faust* project between 1798 and 1801, and with all the aspects we touched upon he proved his interest in a complete picture of social, mental, scientific, aesthetic, and literary developments of which Faust is the exponent or, as Goethe termed it since 1797, a symbolic and eminent case.[13] This is his method, too, in the following scenes where I can only hint at the development regarding beauty. In "Study I," Faust is lulled to sleep by Mephistopheles' demons who, in an anacreontic song, feed him with the illusion of the fulfilment of all the wishes and longings we heard from him so far. It is especially the wish for beauty that the demons cater to, but now we observe that they divide it into "die schönen Bilder," beautiful pictures that appeal to all senses and a sexually aroused body (1440–44), and into "Himmlischer Söhne Geistige Schöne," the spiritual beauty of celestial descendants (1457–58) referring to the angels he heard singing in the first scene. Angry about the devil's escape while he was dreaming of sensual and spiritual beauty, Faust crushes the beautiful world, as the demons sing, by his curse, and bans all satisfaction with beauty by his pact condition with Mephistopheles:

Werd' ich zum Augenblicke sagen:
Verweile doch! du bist so schön!
Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen,
Dann will ich gern zu Grunde gehn.[14]

The German "Augenblick" indicates a moment in time and therefore means a complete satisfaction with the situation in which the speaker is; this corresponds exactly to the source of this quotation, Rousseau's *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* where he defines complete happiness by the wish: "Je voudrais que cet instant durât toujours!"—might this moment last forever![15] But the German "Augenblick" for "instant" exceeds the temporal connotation by the verbatim significance of "glimpse, look, or glance." Faust, with his translation of Rousseau's formula, expressly includes sensual beauty into all things that he will never be satisfied with. It is not that he condemns beauty, but Mephistopheles may kill him if he is satiated with a beautiful object and gives up his search for ever higher and ideal beauty. This is the program for Margarete's death and the search for Helena.

In the scene "Witch's Kitchen," the separation of bodily and spiritual beauty which we observed is perfect. Faust looks into a magic mirror and is ravished:

Das schönste Bild von einem Weibe!
Ist's möglich, ist das Weib so schön?
Muß ich an diesem hingestreckten Leibe
Den Inbegriff von allen Himmeln sehn?
So etwas findet sich auf Erden?[16]

Mephistopheles explains: when a God works for six days and congratulates himself in the end, the result must be reasonably good (2441–43). Now God did not take six days to create a woman, but the world—what Faust sees is not Helena nor Eve, but, conforming to the medieval witch's kitchen, Dame World, the medieval representation of the world by a dangerously alluring woman. So, when he speaks of "the epitome of all heavens," the German "Inbegriff von allen Himmeln" allows also the translation: "what is surrounded by all skies," that is, the sensual beauty of the world. But this promise of a perfect spiritual and sensual beauty which arouses Faust's rapture is marred by two facts: Mephistopheles will not procure the woman Faust sees in the mirror, but just "so ein Schätzchen," such a darling, that is, just any similar girl. Moreover, Faust is rejuvenated by a potion that the witch produces to reduce his outward appearance by thirty years and to boost his sexual desire to a degree which Mephistopheles describes with the following words: "Du siehst, mit diesem Trank im Leibe, Bald Helenen in jedem Weibe."[17] So, the ignited sexual drive deceives Faust's sense of beauty which we have seen as a veneration of the beauty of the world and which now, under the guise of adoration of Helena, is nothing more than simple greed, the license to use and exploit Margarete, analogous to the license of the Europeans not to adore the beauty of the world, but to use and exploit nature and its enslaved inhabitants in their colonies and trading companies. Bad omen for Margarete or, with her second stage name, Gretchen! In addition to Faust's erotic

adventures with the world through mirror and potion, "Witch's Kitchen" is an allegory of the developments leading up to the French Revolution, and the flame which pops up when Faust drinks the potion, marks the outbreak of an event that toppled the traditional order of European societies. Goethe, who had foreseen this since 1785 and was nearly driven mad by the prospect, uses the double magic of mirror and potion also to satirize the drifting apart of idealism and materialism, of the heavenly beauty of the propaganda for liberty, equality, and fraternity, and the indiscriminate drive for the biggest possible chunk of wealth taken away from the classes overthrown by the revolution.

Again, bad omen for Margarete/Gretchen. The double stage name used in different scenes indicates that Faust projects his split eros and sense for beauty on this girl who is not much older than 14 years, that he wants her to be an angel and a whore. His second word when he addresses her in the street is "schön," my beautiful young lady. And when she makes off he repeats to himself: "Beim Himmel, dieses Kind ist schön!"[18] So, Margarete is, according to Mephisto's prophesy, Helena for Faust in this moment of sexual desire, and this is what he unmistakably signals to Mephistopheles: he must have this girl immediately. But in her room, the angel prevails again in Faust's religious adoration of her belongings. This double projection, evidently, must overcharge and kill Margarete. She is only a Proto-Helena, a stepping-stone cracked in two for a Faust who now begins to search for Helena, that is, for an illusion of the poets, a mythological figure that never existed in the real world and cannot exist in Faust's world. As we saw, the end of part one is dated 1800 by a chronotextual marker: so it is the tendency of transcendental idealistic philosophy, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, later Hegel, that Goethe satirizes as far as it forgets the real world, looses it out of sight or declares that it is but a mental construct, while at the same time Walpurgisnacht, the epitome of the real world, is being celebrated and nearly lures the dumbfounded Faust into forgetting himself and the pact for unhappiness and restlessness that ties him to Mephistopheles.

Napoleon: Systems Approach to Politics

Goethe's occupation with *Faust* is interrupted after the completion of *Part One* in 1806: If *Faust* is a work of history and had been carried up to the immediate presence at the end of *Part One,* Goethe had to step back for some time in order to gain an overview of the new epoch especially when it was as turbulent as the beginning of the nineteenth century was. What we have discussed so far were, except for "Witch's Kitchen" written in 1790, scenes conceived, or at least finished in the period between 1797 and 1806; in that year, Goethe sent *Faust I* to the publisher Cotta who, due to the Napoleonic wars, printed it only in 1808. We must not forget that the two decades from 1792 to 1812/13 were years of war, first the coalition powers attacked the new French state, then, under the general, consul, finally emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, France struck back. He conquered the European continent and even reached for Egypt in order to contain the British expansion in the Mediterranean sea, not to speak about the ongoing

confrontation in the Americas. Like everybody, Goethe was fascinated by Napoleon, this "höchste Erscheinung, die in der Geschichte möglich war," and comments: "Man verleugnet sich das Ungeheure, so lange man kann, und verwehrt sich die richtige Einsicht des einzelnen, wo es zusammengesetzt ist. Wenn man aber diesen Kaiser und seine Umgebung mit Naivität beschreiben hört, so sieht man freilich, daß nichts dergleichen war und vielleicht auch nicht sein wird."[19] Goethe was evidently flattered when, at Erfurt and Weimar in 1808, this "Kompendium der Weltgeschichte"[20] received him and talked to him for a whole hour. He was flattered when he learned that Napoleon had read *Werthers Leiden* seven times and wanted to discuss one specific inconsistency with him, demonstrating that he, "mit besonderem Zutrauen mich, wenn ich mich des Ausdrucks bedienen darf, gleichsam gelten ließ."[21] He was flattered when, in Weimar, he was decorated with the order of the French Legion of Honour on October 14, 1808, and by the Russian emperor with the St. Anna order a day later. But he kept his distance and was not naively enthusiastic as some historians insinuate.[22] Napoleon wanted him to come to Paris and to write a Caesar tragedy for him; Goethe declined, said it was too "heickelig," delicate,[23] and later on spoke of a Brutus tragedy that he had been asked to write.[24] He was fascinated by a mighty Napoleon who, seeing him for the first time, said: "Voilà un homme," behold, a man;[25] but his distance is evident when he says in 1807 and keeps repeating over the years: "Außergewöhnliche Menschen, wie Napoleon, treten aus der Moralität heraus. Sie wirken zuletzt wie physische Ursachen, wie Feuer und Wasser."[26] According to Falk's report, far from being naïve, Goethe warned others: "Er verfolgt jedesmal einen Zweck, was ihm im Wege steht, wird niedergemacht, oder aus dem Wege geräumt, und wenn es sein leiblicher Sohn wäre."[27] It is evident that Faust, world possessor in act 5, who orders Philemon and Baucis to be removed resulting in their accidental death, is modelled on Napoleon as Goethe saw him. He was certainly proud of the ribbons, stars and crosses that the two emperors fastened on his gala gown or, as Lady Stein put it, of the bit of incense that was burnt for him,[28] but he was definitely not less perceptive than the Duchess of Weimar who saw nothing but a scheme of cultural propaganda in Napoleon's flattering of Goethe and Wieland. "Er weiß, daß sie in Deutschland großen Einfluß auf die öffentliche Meinung haben und daß nun alle Zeitungen von der Güte und dem Entgegenkommen Napoleons reden werden."[29] Goethe knew well that he was being used for propaganda purposes, and he copied the emperor, cleverly using his influence for the common weal of the dukedom of Sachsen-Weimar and especially for the duke himself, as Talleyrand notes in his report.[30] As Napoleon did with him, so Goethe the politician made use of Napoleon as long as he was in power. This is a systemic approach, too, like the eye's adaptation to light and the selection of certain qualities of light for human purposes. The relation was, on both sides, based on the cool analysts' amazement at an absolutely extraordinary phenomenon: Napoleon's for the poetic genius and wise man whom he used to ask: "Qu'en dit Mr. Göt?" what does Mr. Goethe say to that?[31] Goethe's for the man who could assert: "Was will man jetzt mit dem Schicksal? Politik ist das Schicksal!"[32] Napoleon's politics, of course.

Patriotism

Goethe was a politician, too, and so he carefully concealed his doubts about the duration and value of Napoleon's enterprise. But he engaged in a project that clearly counteracted Napoleon's intentions and counterpoised French nationalism: German cultural patriotism. This again is a systemic approach: If Napoleon appears to Goethe as the epitome of national egoism,[33] he can be counterbalanced only by cultural patriotism and trans-nationalism. The pupil of Herder who had devoted his work to an emancipation from biblical, Greek, Roman, French cultural dominance and to all-sided humanity as the national characteristic of the Germans, had begun to write the *Faust* that Lessing had recommended as the dearest myth of the Germans, had written *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Von deutscher Baukunst.* Goethe had ended *Herrmann und Dorothea* in 1797, in the middle of the coalition wars against France and the revolutionary propaganda of the French, with an appeal to the Germans to hold steadfastly their position and mental disposition without swaying here and there. Speaking to Dorothea, Herrmann concludes, at that time, with a concept of power against power:

> Und drohen diesmal die Feinde
> Oder künftig, so rüste mich selbst und reiche die Waffen.
> Weiß ich durch dich nur versorgt das Haus und die liebenden Eltern,
> O so stellt sich die Brust dem Feinde sicher entgegen.
> Und gedächte jeder wie ich, so stünde die Macht auf
> Gegen die Macht, und wir erfreuten uns alle des Friedens."[34]

The systemic idea of the balance of powers in Europe as the condition for peace is one of the main arguments of Friedrich Gentz against the dominant role of France in Europe. Gentz, friend of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Adam Müller, and Heinrich von Kleist in Berlin, was one of the most influential political writers in Germany. He fought against the ideas of the French Revolution with translations of the main antirevolutionary texts, e.g. Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* and by intensive journalistic work as a Prussian official from 1793–1802; from 1803 onward in Vienna, he continued in the same propagandistic work, became one of the most influential collaborators of Metternich, the political architect of Europe in the nineteenth century. Gentz sent to Goethe his *Fragments about the Recent History of the Balance of Powers in Europe* in April 1806, which Goethe studied. This was the year of the battle of Jena and Auerstedt in which Napoleon conquered Prussia. It was also the time when the ideas of a thorough reformation and renovation of the German states and societies became stronger with the reforms of Freiherr von Stein, Fichte's lectures on *Grundzüge des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters* (*Outlines of the Present Epoch*) given in Berlin, Erlangen, Königsberg, and most important Fichte's *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (*Speeches made to the German Nation*) of 1806/07. Goethe asked his friend Zelter in Berlin about those lectures and studied his extensive answer, but now he returned to the position that he had formulated already in 1795 (*Litterarischer Sansculottismus*) that Germany as a whole and a power did not and needed not to exist because it had no

political, social, spiritual centre. In multiple statements from 1806 onward, we see him less interested in the political unity of the Germans but in a culture of mutual recognition and patriotic cooperation. So, in 1807, he writes: "Wenn aber die Menschen über ein Ganzes jammern, das verloren sein soll, das denn doch in Deutschland kein Mensch sein Lebtag gesehen, noch viel weniger sich darum bekümmert hat; so muß ich meine Ungeduld verbergen, um nicht unhöflich zu werden."[35] But he supports everything that appears to work towards cultural and mental integration of the Germans, the "Kulturnation" which, for three quarters of the nineteenth century, proved to be a potent alternative to the nation states in Europe and which is, in itself an organic system, a political counterbalance to the "hell" of those national egoisms which Goethe foresaw: He speaks in high terms about Arnim's and Brentano's edition of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* and even writes a favourable critique because here his joint enterprise of the 1770s with Herder of collecting folk songs is revived. He supports, from 1808 onward, Sulpiz Boisserée's propaganda for a restoration and completion of the Cathedral of Cologne because he himself had, with his essay on the Strasbourg Cathedral of 1770, done much to initiate the understanding for medieval architecture.To be sure, now, in 1808, he sees this Gothic style only as an offspring of Arabian art and is astonished about a German patriotism which would like to declare it an authentic German product instead of acknowledging its international character. Countering Goethe's initial scepticism, Boisserée succeeds in convincing him of the value of medieval art so thoroughly that he even writes an essay on *Art and Antiquity on the Rhine and Main,* and in 1815 hopes in a letter to Boisserée that "Und so müßte es nicht mit rechten Dingen zugehen, wenn der löbliche Zweck verfehlt würde, wenn unsere patriotischen Feuerchen, die wir auf so vielen Bergen und Hügeln des Rheins und Mains anzünden, nicht auch patriotische Gesinnungen erregen und glücklich fortwirken sollten."[36] Medieval and patriotic studies in literature show Goethe to be an avid reader of the *Nibelungenlied* that the editor von der Hagen, one of the first Germanists, had sent him in 1807, and he even reads it in weekly instalments to the participants of his "Wednesday Societies."[37] Niethammer, the Wilhelm von Humboldt of Bavaria, wins Goethe for a popular anthology of German lyric poetry in 1808; the plan cannot be realized but shows again Goethe's patriotic interest in everything that would give a common cultural consciousness to the Germans.That he is not only following others but willing to actively organize the formation of a German culture and the consciousness of it becomes apparent in his plan for a cultural conference in competition with the political conference of the monarchs in Erfurt, 1808.The historian Woltmann, a good friend of Goethe's, wrote in September, 1808: "Herr von Goethe trägt sich mit der Idee, in dem bevorstehenden Winter einen Kongreß ausgezeichneter deutscher Männer in Weimar zustande zu bringen, damit sie über Gegenstände der deutschen Kultur gemeinschaftlich sich beraten."[38] Naturally, such an enterprise would never have gotten the support, not even the permission of Napoleon who suppressed the individual character of peoples he had conquered. If one takes Goethe's position and even initiative into account, especially from 1808 onward, one can believe the historian Luden who, after Napoleon had been defeated in 1813, held a long discussion

with Goethe on the ideas of patriotism and then tried to dispel all critique about his public silence in all these years:[39] in his exposed position, Goethe the patriot had, in political respects, been restricted to cooperation with the powers in order to prevent as much harm and destruction and to gain as much benefit as possible for Sachsen-Weimar, the Grand-Duke, and the Germans. But, convinced that the mind of the Germans had to be changed before they would be prepared for political unity, he worked indefatigably on two cultural projects: a project of collective memory for the Germans, *Dichtung und Wahrheit,* which he planned in 1808 and began writing in 1809, and a project of mental training for organic or systemic thinking that he had learned from Herder[40] and had, for himself, formulated in his essay *Experiment as a Mediator between Subject and Object,* in 1792.

Systems Theory of History and Nature: Formulae of Helena

As for the project of collective memory, he wrote in 1806: "Seit der großen Lücke, die durch Schillers Tod in mein Dasein gefallen ist, bin ich lebhafter auf das Andenken der Vergangenheit hingewiesen, und empfinde gewissermaßen leidenschaftlich, welche Pflicht es ist, das was für ewig verschwunden scheint, in der Erinnerung aufzubewahren."[41] In this letter, he urges the painter Fritz Hackert to write his autobiography. From 1810 onward, when he wrote a plan for *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and published three volumes from 1811 to 1814, adding *Italienische Reise* and *Campagne in Frankreich,* he worked on this biography of the epoch until 1831. Each book, as he said, was to have a different character and style and should thereby exert a specific effect on the reader. "Bei der Art, wie ich die Sache behandle, mußte notwendig die Wirkung erscheinen, daß jeder der das Büchlein liest, mit Gewalt auf sich und seine jüngern Jahre zurückgeführt wird."[42] Already here, Goethe sees himself as a "collective being," nothing but an eminent case in the history of his time. *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is not just a book of personal recollections, and it is not written just for Goethe's public appearance but, as he confessed: "Aufrichtig zu sagen, ist es der größte Dienst, den ich glaube meinem Vaterlande leisten zu können, wenn ich fortfahre, in meinem biographischen Versuche die Umwandlungen der sittlichen, ästhetischen, philosophischen Kultur, insofern ich Zeuge davon gewesen, mit Billigkeit und Heiterkeit darzustellen, und zu zeigen, wie immer eine Folgezeit die vorhergehende zu verdrängen und aufzuheben suchte, statt ihr für Anregung, Mitteilung und Überlieferung zu danken."[43] From this quote we can see that *Dichtung und Wahrheit* is not just an autobiography but a history of the decades since Goethe's childhood in Frankfurt, seen by a witness, analyzed and interpreted by a cultural historian and deep-thinking contemporary. And by a poet, as the title says, for instance with the artistic arrangement, in the fifth book, of the emperor's election with its painful masquerades and the Gretchen story that opens the view "in die seltsamen Irrgänge . . ., mit welchen die bürgerliche Sozietät unterminiert ist."[44] The systemic constellation of the two events in one book sheds light on both of them.

This method of constellating different but structurally related events or elements, however, is nothing but the historic aspect of the second project that opens up the realm of Goethe's natural philosophy and philosophy of history. Both philosophies are one with Goethe and his teacher Herder. In his *Ideas Concerning the Philosophy of the History of Humanity,* Herder begins with natural history and gradually builds up to human history. The method in both is systemic, that is, Herder looks upon the cosmos, the earth, the life spheres of plants, animals, and man as organic systems in which the elements necessitate each other and where the systems always tend to a maximum, that is, a balance of powers, and attempts to restore that balance after a disturbance. While natural science works under the illusion of objectivity without taking into account that the instruments by which it gets its results are built under the condition of subjective interests and purposes, this systemic approach to nature always includes the study of the relation between the elements and the investigating human who operates as one of these elements. This non-objective approach is already present in the title of the essay on *Experiment as Mediator between Subject and Object* that Goethe wrote in the context of his first publication on colors; the systemic approach guides him in his *Theory of Colors* which is printed between 1805 and 1810. Goethe was convinced that it was a disaster in Newtonian physics to separate the experiment from the human participant who, of course, modifies everything to himself in order to assimilate it.[45] This was already Herder's view in his treatise *On the Origin of Language* of which Goethe was the first reader in 1770. Until today, Goethe has not been able to convince physicists that the instruments they use are specific forms of modification and assimilation to human purposes to which for instance the phenomenon of light is subjected. Beauty, the complementary systemic cooperation between eye and sunlight which we discussed earlier simply does not exist for Newtonian physics or is a "deception of the eye" as Goethe has Faust's assistant Wagner say when they observe a fiery after-image following the black poodle who is in fact Mephistopheles. Systems theory guides Goethe in his theory of light and colors: I quoted already the verse rendering Plotinus' teaching that the eye has sun's nature. Herder, with whom Goethe worked together on the first books of the *Ideas,* extended Plotinus' idea into evolution theory, the systemic-organic thought that light stimulates the body of an animal species to develop a light-sensitive organ if it needs visible orientation in its life-sphere, and that in turn this organ receives light in a form modified according to the organ; an example discovered much later is ultra-violet light that bees are able to see. Like Herder, Goethe keeps the old Persian and hermetic metaphysics of light and darkness as the two contrary powers in cosmos; the colors originate for him when pure invisible light passes through turbid media. When he states that "ich meine Farbenwelt aus Licht und Finsternis zusammensetzte,"[46] he shows that he is well aware of his subjective contribution which the systemic approach necessitates in the theory itself. Goethe's only mistake in this matter was that he tried to convince the Newtonians and to be polemic with them. His passionate zeal, however, may be understood because, to him, they killed Helena, the beauty of the sensual world.

What was most important for him was the confirmation of the "grand formula" in his theory of colors and not only there but also in the theory of music which he urged the musician Zelter to construct according to the same principle. "Wenn [Zelter] ein paar gute Formeln glücken, so muß das alles Eins werden, alles aus Einem entspringen und zu Einem zurückkehren."[47] This is the old neo-Platonic formula of μονή, προοδός, ἐπιστροφή, the One remaining in itself, coming forward into the multitude of the creation, and returning into unification. Spinoza, key philosopher for Herder, Goethe, and Hölderlin, had immobilized this formula with his correlation of substance and modi; Herder dynamized it and restored the traditional triad enriching it by the "systematology" developed by Johann Heinrich Lambert.

The systemic concept of "grand formula" constitutes Goethe's main interest in the decades after 1800, in history with *Dichtung und* Wahrheit, as we have seen, in natural philosophy not only with the theory of light, darkness, and colors or between this theory and music, but also in respect to clouds, climate, geography of plants, mineralogy and morphology of animals. He wrote essays in many of these fields and corresponded with the foremost scientists. There are several reasons for this eagerness: (1) The disciplines and methods of scientific research began to diverge more and more, so that the unity of nature was endangered along with the unity of science. (2) On the other hand, a theory of physical chemistry like Berzelius' thesis of 1812 that chemical combinations are held together by electricity or the detection of metallic elements by electrolysis (Humphrey Davy in 1807) showed (3) the need for a unifying theory or formula. Formula, at that time, designated a schema, an essential form which, once found, would transform into one "collective entity" all the diverse sciences, history, society and man himself. Beside Goethe, Romantic scientists and philosophers like Novalis, Schelling, Baader, Ritter, Oken were working in the same encyclopaedic direction. In his studies on the history of the Theory of Colors, Goethe came across Francis Bacon several times whom he did not cherish for his empiricist method but whom the revered philosopher Hamann had quoted with a maxim that also guided Goethe: "Magic dealt primarily with the observation of natural and civil things as far as they symbolize each other.—And these are not mere similarities (as it may seem to less perspicacious people), but clearly the footsteps and characters of one and the same Nature, impressed into different matters and subjects."[48] This is the theory behind Goethe's novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften,* The Elective Affinities, written in 1808/09, in which he said he had hidden quite a lot of correlations and which he termed "offenbares Geheimnis," patent secret, like a work of nature herself.[49] The tragic novel poses the question whether nature can and should be looked at under an anthropomorphic perspective, whether humans are just nature and whether civil morals disturb the organic processes in human nature. Goethe drew a comparison with the theory of colors several times; both works document the systemic approach and the problem of the grand formula. His historical studies, on the other hand, taught him in connection with the history of color theory and with his autobiography that systems and formulae must be conceived dynamically, so that "Gestaltung, Umgestaltung

/ Des ewigen Sinnes ewige Unterhaltung," (6287) formation, transformation, eternal entertainment of eternal sense, becomes Goethe's maxim. One of the most important changes from antiquity into modernity which he had reflected upon with Herder's *Shakespeare* essay of 1771 and which he took up with his essay *Shakespeare and no ending* of 1813, was decisive in his attitude towards the idealistic philosophy of his time and Romantic literature and art in general which loosened and severed the ties between fairy tale and hard reality. Looking back upon the chaotic years up to the defeat of Napoleon in 1814, he writes: "Der unselige Krieg und die fremde Herrschaft hatten alles verwirrt und zum Starren

gebracht. . . . Zugleich ward eine höhere ideelle Behandlung immer mehr von dem Wirklichen getrennt, durch ein Transzendieren, und Mystizisieren, wo das Hohle vom Gehaltvollen nicht mehr zu unterscheiden ist, und jedes Urbild, das Gott der menschlichen Seele verliehen hat, sich in Traum und Nebel verschweben muß."[50] In particular: "Bei den Alten, in ihrer besten Zeit, entsprang das Heilige aus dem sinnlich faßbaren Schönen. . . . Das Moderne ruht auf dem sittlich Schönen, dem, wenn man will, das sinnliche entgegensteht."[51] Sensual beauty, moral beauty, thus, are two formulae for the collective entities of antique and modern culture. Goethe's quest for the unifying systemic classical-romantic grand formula that, for him, holds together history, politics, natural philosophy, and poetic work, must needs direct his continuation of *Faust* as well.

Faust Part Two

With the formula of beauty, we have come back full circle to *Faust* and Helena, and we can be brief, merely completing the lines we have begun to draw. In 1800, Goethe had begun writing *Helena in the Middle Ages. Satyric Drama, episode to Faust.* When he complained that he had to caricature Helena, Schiller answered that he should not shrink back from "barbarizing" Helena which meant, in Schiller's terminology, to make her dominated by thought, idea, and reason, at the same time taking away her sensual beauty.[52] This is exactly what happens in act 3 of part two where Helena is chased through 3,000 years from the war of Troy to Byron's death in 1824, through fragments of antique tragedy, medieval chivalry drama, and eighteenth-century operetta, losing more and more the sensual-spiritual-divine totality of her beauty. At the end of act 3 we find her rhyming, singing, timorous, a Rococo damsel who describes a family as the relation of one, two, three or mine, yours, his. Here, we have the outcome of this tragic process of barbarization effected by Faust's attempt to pull the ideal of beauty into his life. Act 3 is a stage play on the *Faust* stage. Helena leaves the fragment of a Greek tragedy after Mephistopheles has forced modern consciousness of identity on her. And at the end, she leaves the operetta and follows to Hades her son Euphorion who, escaping from the Romantic fairytale realm of Arcadia wants to meet reality, and meets death. What remains to Faust, at the beginning of act 4, is "Seelenschönheit," moral beauty, and even that leaves him, rises to the ether, and carries off Faust's innermost soul. Then comes Hell.

So, the beginning of the Helena episode, 269 verses that Goethe had written in 1800, implicitly contained the loss of sensual beauty and reality in the world after 1800, implied by the idea of barbarization, and the plan for a stage play on the *Faust* stage conforming to Goethe's insight that idea and experience can never meet but in art and in action, suggested by the idea of a satiric drama.[53] In the final concept of *Faust II* which Goethe planned in a first draft in 1816 and worked out from 1825 onward, Faust has to pay with his biological life for this insight because, in act 1, after seeing the slides of Helena and Paris which he projects, in his erotic madness he wants to establish the double realm of reality and idea (6555) and tries to throw Paris out of the film with his red-hot key. An explosion follows that takes the power to breathe from him as he had vowed to himself if he should fall back from the pure idea of beauty (6493–94) which, even more explicitly systemic than elsewhere in the text, is composed by Helena's visible image and "tief im Sinn Der Schönheit Quelle" (6487). Indeed, he falls back when he wants to possess this idea like a real woman. In act 2, "Classical Walpurgis Night," Faust is a spiritual existence and becomes a mythological demigod who internalizes all the great mythological heroes of antiquity in order to meet Helena on the level of mythology. He develops poetic faculties and, hearing that the poets had used the mythological woman according to their needs, he proposes to use her as a poetess of herself (7428–34) who, in the stage play of act 3, can cooperate with Faust and Mephistopheles as a poetess with two poets, a stage directress with two stage directors, an actress with two actors in order to race through 3000 years of assimilation of Helena to modernity, that is, the barbarization and destruction of the idea of divine sensual beauty.

All these Romantic spiritual adventures take place in the "historical" world of the emperor whom Mephistopheles and Faust, by the invention of paper money, save from bankruptcy. We can observe here that Goethe uses the grand formula in projecting the late medieval sell-off of the German Empire by Charles IV on to the paper money sell-off of the Austrian Empire and French state which had to pay for the endless wars from 1792 to 1814. Moreover, the formula is used for those lifeless Helena slides in act 1, too, that Faust steals from the Mothers: Mephistopheles protests that she cannot be produced as easily as the "Papiergespenst der Gulden" (v. 6197 f.). And just as people take paper money for real value, Faust takes the Helena slides for reality. In each of the acts of *Faust II,* we have such a grand formula as a key for systemic historical constellations; think for instance of the three giants of aggressiveness, avidity, and avarice taken from the Old Testament, fighting a late medieval battle between Charles IV and Günther von Schwarzburg, and the wars between France and Austria between 1792 and 1814.

These giants come directly from Hell which according to Mephistopheles' interpretation of the French Revolution has been turned downside up so that Faust, at the beginning of act 4, lands on the top of a mountain which had previously been the deepest point in Dante's Hell. Climbing down the mountain, Mephistopheles takes with him "Bergvolk," mountain people, masses of condemned inhabitants of hell who coagulate into the giants but dissolve

into masses again when Mephistopheles makes them fight for the emperor or, in act 5, gain the possession of the world for Faust under Mephisto's command by "Krieg, Handel und Piraterie," war, commerce, and piracy, the hellish trinity that they worship (11187 f.) So, after Helena vanishes, after complete and sensual beauty has been barbarized into moral beauty that pulls the innermost out of Faust, this despicable ruin of a person becomes the ruler of a hellish world that is characterized by aggressive, greedy and avaricious masses. Goethe had experienced those masses during the wars and had fled from them geographically and culturally into the poems of the *Western-Eastern Divan,* where he tried to find the grand formula for systems of cultures and their understanding. But there was around him a hellish world characterized by capitalism, imperialism, and exploitation of nature, peoples and cultures that he depicts in the last two acts of *Faust.* In this play, Goethe anticipates the computer and the artificial production of life and human beings (6869–70, 6990–94), and he anticipates future life as the hell which Faust builds up with his demonic helpers and governs with ruthless violence. As Wilhelm Böhm put it, Faust is a super-criminal in the last two acts. That he can save himself is, in complete irony, due to the fact that the astute lawyer has a means to overcome Mephistopheles, and that in heaven the ruling master of the beginning is not to be found any more, his place being taken by a goddess who changed all the rules that the old master had set up. Woman's rule: that is also one of the anticipations of that wise old collective being called Goethe, and evidently he set all his hopes upon the restoration of beauty by this "Höchste Herrscherin der Welt" who not only is "rein im schönsten Sinn" (with the ambivalence of "sense" and "meaning" in "Sinn") but in whose neighborhood man, ravished by this beauty, becomes "schön und groß" again (11987, 12009). If, in the historical development of modernity since Faust's lifetime in the sixteenth century, male striving and pushing has severed Helena's sensual-spiritual beauty, creating a hellish world dominated by aggressive, avaricious, greedy masses and their devilish manipulators, Goethe's hopes are now focused upon a new form of beauty repaired by the systemic love between the ruling principle of female attraction and the principle of male aspiration of which the last lines speak: "Das Ewig-Weibliche Zieht uns hinan" (12111).

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NOTES

1. *Goethes Briefe,* edited by Robert Mandelkow and Bodo Morawe (Hamburg: Beck, 1965) HABr 3:309: "You should start in a significant epoch and from there work backward and forward; what is true can be exalted and conserved only by its history; what is false can be humiliated and dispelled only by its history."

2. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Werke in 10 Bänden,* edited by Günter Arnold et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–2002) 1:432–55.

3. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Werke,* edited by Erich Trunz (Hamburg: Beck, 1956) 12:226.

4. Cf. Goethe's thesis in his doctoral examination: "Man soll kein allgemeines Gesetzbuch herstellen." Discussed in E. Keetmann, "Götz, die Frucht des straßburger juristischen Studiums Goethe," *Juristische Wochenschrift* 61, Heft 12 (1932): 853–54.

5. Johann Heinrich Lambert, *Texte zur Systematologie,* edited by Geo Siegwart (Hamburg: Meiner, 1988); Ulrich Gaier, "Herders Systemtheorie," *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 23 (1988): 4–17; Ulrich Gaier, "Herders systematologische Theologie," *Johann Gottfried Herder: Aspekte seines Lebenswerks,* edited by Martin Kessler and Volker Leppin (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005) 203–18; Stefan Metzger, *Die Konjektur des Organismus. Wahrscheinlichkeitsdenken und Performanz im späten 18. Jahrhundert* (München: Fink, 2002) 65–259 (dealing with Lambert and Herder).

6. Wilhelm Böhm, *Faust der Nichtfaustische* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1933) 29, 64.

7. Ulrich Gaier, *Johann Wolfgang Goethe Faust-Dichtungen,* vol. 3 Kommentar II. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999) 439–55.

8. "Helena is one of my earliest concepts, simultaneous with Faust." To Sulpiz Boisserée, Oct. 22, 1826 (HABr 4:207).

9. "But don't allow such melancholy mood to spoil the beautiful good of this hour. Consider how, surrounded by a green halo, the shacks glimmer in the glowing evening sun" (1068–71).

10. Cf. Albrecht Schöne, *Goethes Farbentheologie* (München: Beck, 1987) 98–100.

11. HA 13:324: "Only through the sun-like nature of the eye are we capable of seeing light. If the proper energy of divinity did not live in us, we could not be delighted by the divine."

12. Plotin, *Enneades* I 6.

13. To Schiller, August 16, 1797; HABr 2:297–98.

14. "When I will ask from the moment: Stay, please, you are so beautiful! Then you may fetter me, then I will gladly die" (1699–1702).

15. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire,* éd. par Jacques Voisine (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964) 101.

16. "The most beautiful image of a woman! Is it possible, is woman as beautiful as that? Must I see in this prostrate body the epitome of all heavens? Is there such a thing on earth?" (2436–40).

17. "You will, with this potion in your body, see a Helena in any woman whatsoever." (2603–4).

18. "By heaven, this child is beautiful!" (2609).

19. "Highest appearance which was possible in history . . . One denies to oneself this monstrosity as long as possible, and one refuses to oneself a correct insight into the details that constitute it. But when one listens to an ingenuous description of this emperor and his entourage one certainly sees that there was never anything like it at any time nor will be likely in the future." To Knebel, Jan. 3, 1807 HABr 3:39–40.

20. "compendium of world history." Quote in Edwin Redslob, *Goethes Begegnung mit Napoleon* (Baden-Baden: Verlag für angewandte Wissenschaft, 1954) 23.

21. "with exquisite confidence, if I may use the expression, in a way, he acknowledged my value." To Cotta, Dec. 2, 1808, HABr 3:92.

22. Wilhelm Mommsen, *Die politischen Anschauungen Goethes* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1948) 132–33: "Goethe, der allen politisch führenden Persönlichkeiten mit einer gewissen Naivität gegenübertrat, hat offensichtlich nicht das Zweckhafte empfunden, das dieser Empfang für Napoleon besaß. Wieland, dessen Gespräch mit

dem Kaiser sehr viel eindringlicher war als das zwischen Goethe und Napoleon in Erfurt, hat wohl stärker empfunden, daß dieser Empfang ein gut Teil Kulturpropaganda des Kaisers war."

23. Redslob (n. 20) 38.

24. To Kirms, June 26, 1810, HABr 3:129.

25. Redslob (n. 20) 20.

26. "Extraordinary men, like Napoleon, step out of morality. After all, they have the effect of physical causes, like fire and water." Friedrich Wilhelm Riemer, *Mitteilungen über Goethe,* Aufgrund der Ausgabe von 1841 und des handschriftlichen Nachlasses hrsg. von Arthur Pollmer (Leipzig: Insel, 1921) 268.

27. "He does nothing without purpose. What is in his way will be cut down or set aside, albeit his own son." Redslob (n. 20) 36.

28. Redslob (n. 20) 41.

29. "He knows that they exert a great influence on public opinion in Germany and that all newspapers will now be full of praise for the grace and courtesy of Napoleon." Redslob (n. 20) 41.

30. Redslob (n. 20) 25.

31. Redslob (n. 20) 47.

32. "Why do people now care about fate? Politics is fate!" Redslob (n. 20) 27.

33. Gaier, *Faust-Dichtungen 3* (n. 7) 855 (to Eckermann, March 21, 1831).

34. "When enemies threaten now or in the future, you arm me and tender me the weapons. As long as I know that the house and the loving parents are cared for by you, my breast bravely encounters the enemy. And if everybody would think as I do, power would rise against power, and we all could enjoy peace" (HA 2:514).

35. "When people complain about the pretended loss of a totality which, in Germany, nobody has seen in his lifetime, much less has cared about it, I have to hide my impatience in order not to appear impolite."To Zelter, July 27, 1807, HABr 3:47.

36. "And so it would be strange if the laudable purpose would be missed and our patriotic little fires which we are lighting on so many mountains and hills of the Rhine and Main would not arouse patriotic convictions and have favourable consequences."To Boisserée, Oct 23, 1815, HABr 3:327.

37. HABr 3:57, 94.

38. "Mr. von Goethe plans to organize a congress of excellent German personalities in Weimar this coming winter for a common consultation on matters of German culture." Redslob (n. 20) 45.

39. Redslob (n. 20) 59.

40. Cf. note 5.

41. "The great gap in my existence caused by Schiller's death makes me recollect the past more vividly, and I feel a kind of passion about preserving in memory what seems bygone forever."To Fritz Hackert, April 4, 1806, HABr 3:20.

42. "The manner in which I treat these things must needs produce the effect that each reader of the booklet is carried by force back to himself and to his early years." To Reinhard, Feb 13, 1812, HABr 3:175.

43. "Frankly speaking, it is to my mind the greatest service I can render to my country if, in my biographical essay, I go on representing with equity and serenity the changes of moral, aesthetic, philosophical culture as far as I witnessed them, and to show how

always a following time sought to suppress and annihilate the preceding one instead of being grateful to it for stimulation, communication, and tradition." To Buchholtz, Feb 14, 1814, HABr 3:257.

44. "Into the strange channels by which bourgeois society is undermined" (HA 9:285).

45. "Und das ist eben das größte Unheil der neuern Physik daß man die Experimente gleichsam vom Menschen abgesondert hat, und bloß in dem was künstliche Instrumente zeigen die Natur erkennen, ja was sie leisten kann dadurch beschränken und beweisen will. . . . Ja, man kann sagen, was sind die elementaren Erscheinungen der Natur selbst gegen den Menschen, der sie alle erst bändigen und modifizieren muß, um sie sich einigermaßen assimilieren zu können?" To Zelter, June 22, 1808, HABr 3:76.

46. To Windischmann, Dec 28, 1812, HABr 3:219.

47. "If he succeeds in finding some grand formulae, then all that [namely nature as a whole, the theory of music, and the theory of colors] must become One, all things originate from One and return to One."To Sartorius, July 19, 1810, HABr 3:130f.

48. MAGIA in eo potissimum versabatur, vt architecturas & fabricas rerum naturalium & ciuilium symbolisantes notaret—Nec similitudines merae sunt (quales hominibus fortasse parum perspicacibus videri possint) sed plane vna eademque naturae vestigia aut signacula diversis materiis & subiectis impressa. Quoted from Bacon *De augmentis scientiarum* [Works, ed. Spedding I 542], in Johann Georg Hamann, *Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten: Aesthetica in nuce,* edited by Sven-Aage Jørgensen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1968) 129.

49. HABr 3:104f.

50. "The fatal war and the foreign rule had messed up and paralyzed everything, [. . .] a higher idealistic treatment had been separated more and more from reality by a tendency to transcend and mystify, where emptiness and plenitude cannot be distinguished any more, and where all prototypes that God has planted into the human soul must vanish in dream and fog."To Schlosser, Nov. 25, 1814, HABr 3:283.

51. "With the Ancients, in their best epoch, the divine originated from beauty that could be grasped sensually. [. . .] Modernity is grounded in moral beauty, if you wish in opposition to sensuality."To Jacobi, March 7, 1808, HABr 3:66.

52. Quotes and discussion in Ulrich Gaier, *Fausts Modernität, Essays* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000) 57–91.

53. "Idee und Erfahrung werden in der Mitte nie zusammentreffen, zu vereinigen sind sie nur durch Kunst und Tat."To Schopenhauer, Jan 28, 1816, HABr 3:340.

BENJAMIN BENNETT

Histrionic Nationality: Implications of the Verse in *Faust*

In my book on *Faust,* twenty-three years ago, I made the point that by leaving, in the finished text, exactly *one* scene in prose, Goethe contrives to draw our attention in a special way to the fact that the work as a whole is in verse. If there were no prose scenes, then verse would simply be the work's stylistic medium, to be questioned (if at all) primarily with respect to the traditions it might inhabit or evoke. If there were a number of prose scenes, then the same sort of questioning would be directed at the "alternation" of verse and prose, and of course the comparison with Shakespeare would arise. But the presence of only one prose scene, one obvious anomaly, draws our attention to the work's verse *as such,* and provokes the question: why is the work in verse to begin with, what role does the verse, as such, have in its meaning?

I attempted an answer to that question on a very general level, starting from the quality of verse "as an imposed artificial order in language," and arguing—on the basis of specific textual features, especially in the Gretchen plot—that "it is only a short step from the idea of verse as an artificial order *in* language to the idea of *language itself* as an artificial order imposed on our presumed immediate perception of reality." The argument thus quickly moved away from the realm of style and rhetoric and toward that of more or less abstract philosophy. In particular, from the hypothesis that "contact with the real" is a central concern in *Faust,* I concluded: "The drawing of our attention to the verse as such reminds us that our inability, as an audience, to make contact with the real is a direct result of the communicative process we are involved in."[1]

I do not intend to retract that argument now. In fact, I think I can add another dimension to it, and to the idea of "the real" that it presupposes, by taking the obvious next step and asking about the significance of the specific *kinds* of verse that are used in *Faust.*

I will begin by suggesting a general theorem about verse drama in the age of Goethe. It is a theorem that many people will be instantly inclined to challenge; and it certainly requires at least a great deal of development before it tells us anything useful about the period as a whole. But I think it is generally valid, and it certainly helps us with *Faust.* I contend, namely, that in German drama of the second half of the eighteenth century, and a bit beyond, the form of verse can be regarded very rarely, if ever, as an organic or integrated

element of the poetic conception. It is always *added* to the work's basic conception; it has in fact practically a *histrionic* quality, comparable to the artistic additions made by actors when a play is performed. And *Faust,* in my view, is a principal instance. The one anomalous prose scene that peeks out from under the large garment of verse shows that verse to be precisely the garment it is—not the work's body, so to speak.

To the extent that the concept of evidence even makes sense in relation to so general an assertion, the first pieces of evidence that come to mind are Goethe's own *Iphigenie auf Taurus* and *Torquato Tasso.* In *Iphigenie auf Taurus* we possess the complete play in prose, to which the form of verse was later added. In the case of *Torquato Tasso* we do not have a complete prose version, but we know that substantial portions of the play were drafted in prose and circulated before the final text in verse was written. Goethe himself, in an entry from the *Italiänische Reise* dated 16 March 1787, parallels *Tasso* to *Iphigenie* with regard to the radical "Operation" that he must now carry out on the play's earlier version (WA 31:54); and in a later entry, from 30 March, he makes it entirely explicit that that operation on *Tasso* included the replacement of "poetic prose" with the "rhythm" of verse (WA 31:82–83).[2]

Perhaps a more interesting case, however, is suggested by Lessing when he writes to his brother, on 17 December 1778, about *Nathan der Weise,* "Meine Prose hat mir von jeher mehr Zeit gekostet, als Verse. Ja, wirst Du sagen, als solche Verse!—Mit Erlaubnis; ich dächte, sie wären viel schlechter, wenn sie viel besser wären." Is it really possible that Lessing, as this letter suggests, has *deliberately* clothed his poetic conception in bad verse, in verse whose quality would be recognized as inferior by critical readers such as Ramler and Mendelssohn, whom he mentions in the same letter?

The supposed blank verse of *Nathan,* in any case, is really quite dreadful. On practically every page one finds instances where it is obvious that the author is pedantically counting syllables in order to make his meter come out right. What Lessing describes to Ramler (with tongue in cheek—one certainly hopes) as the occasional "oriental tone" of his play (letter of 18 December 1778) is in truth only the clumsy and repetitive syntax produced by his versification. And if we ask why Lessing should want to create this effect, at least one answer suggests itself immediately. The verse, in its inadequacy, conflicts violently with the idea of "a dramatic *poem"*—which is what the play calls itself in its subtitle—and so operates constantly to unmask the work's more fundamental *polemical* tendency. The play thus refuses to be dismissed as a mere play. The verse produces—for sensitive readers or hearers—something very close to what Brecht calls alienation, in both its effect and its purpose.

I mention *Nathan* also because there is an important parallel case, if perhaps a less obvious one, in Goethe. I mean *Torquato Tasso,* where the blank verse—although competent, and certainly not clumsy—is also markedly rigid and tedious, with very little rhythmic variation and not much in the way of rhetorical flow to break up its clanking from one line to the next. The comparison with *Iphigenie,* where the verse is generally more fluid and sinewy, makes it obvious—if we needed persuading—that Goethe does what he does in *Tasso* intentionally. Even where the verse does tend to become rigid

in *Iphigenie,* in the long stichomythic passages for example, we shall tend to receive this quality as belonging to the formality or ceremoniousness of the Greek tragic form being parodied—whereas in *Tasso* the world of formality or ceremony is always imagined as clearly separate from the pretended *intimacy* of the actual dialogue, with which the rigidity of the verse simply clashes. Goethe, it seems to me, is doing almost exactly what Lessing does in *Nathan:* clothing his conception in verse that is meant to be recognized as defective, or at least as a source of disharmony in the effect of the whole.

Indeed, there is one point in *Tasso* where the fictional world seems to include a kind of consciousness of the inadequacy of its rendering in verse. We are already inclined to read Antonio's speeches in the last scene of Act 1 with a definite critical suspicion, as soon as we recognize how gross a misrepresentation he gives of the state of Italy under Pope Gregory XIII. Our listening is therefore sharpened when he delivers his scene-ending praise of Ariosto (709–41); and we therefore cannot fail to recognize that a great deal of what he finds in Ariosto is also present in the text we are now reading or hearing. "Zufriedenheit, Erfahrung und Verstand / Und Geisteskraft, Geschmack und reiner Sinn / Für's wahre Gute" are certainly all evident in *Tasso*—at least as themes, if not realities. The "Zauberspiel der Amoretten" is represented by Tasso's habit of pinning love poems to trees, and "Schalkheit" appears in Alphons's bantering with the ladies. There are plenty of "erhabne Sprüche," and of course "Wahnsinn" is always lurking in the background. The only thing missing in *Tasso,* and therefore conspicuous by its absence, is precisely what makes Ariosto Ariosto, the charm and gracefulness of his expression, especially his verse.

And if we reflect for just a moment, it must occur to us that there is no real excuse for this lack. In *Iphigenie* the blank verse is relaxed several times by the introduction of other meters, which reminds us perhaps of the choral odes in Greek tragedy. In *Tasso* nothing would have been easier than to break up the monotony of the blank verse with pieces of Tasso's poetry, either translations or original German poems put into his mouth. Would early audiences not have expected this, and is the disappointment of this expectation not part of the play's intent? Tasso's poetry is not only not heard, it is apparently not even read in the play's fictional Ferrara. No one alludes to a single actual passage; and when the *Gerusalemme Liberata* is turned over to Alphons, he receives it with two very curious lines of verse, which certainly do not express either enthusiasm or appreciation: "So halt' ich's endlich denn in meinen Händen, / Und nenn' es in gewissem Sinne mein!" (393–94). Even in, say, T. S. Eliot, we would be disturbed—would we not?—by a line of poetry containing the phrase "in a certain sense."

Once we have come this far, it is not hard to understand why Goethe writes *Tasso* as he does. The cramped, constrained, often constipated quality of the verse mirrors the qualities of constraint, concealment, suspicion, dissimulation that characterize all of the personal relations among the characters. Does this mean that the verse operates organically in the work's meaning after all? Not unless a way is found to subsume instances of quite radical negativity under the concept of the organic. The verse in *Tasso* operates by creating disturbance, disharmony, disappointed expectations, effects that not

only interfere with our sense of the work's wholeness, but are also strictly contingent—dependent on the sensibilities of an audience—not rooted as necessities in the work's verbal or conceptual structure. The verse, that is, clearly creates the impression of being added to the work, and so, as I have said, receives a *histrionic* function. It operates as a single huge stage direction. All the actors have to do is speak the lines as written in order to create exactly the impression of hidden personal tensions that the plot requires.

The path from *Tasso* to *Faust* is an easy one. If even as simple and compact a structure as *Tasso* has room in it for a histrionic addition in its verse-form, then surely the much more open structure of *Faust*—which at times seems as much a publicistic or theoretical endeavor as a work of art—does not exclude a similar use of verse. And if, on the hypothesis that verse-form operates histrionically in *Faust,* we now ask exactly what might be performed by the various types of verse employed there, the answer is obvious. Verse in *Faust* performs not personality but *nationality.*

Certainly this is true in the prologues and in part two. The *ottava rima* of the first two prologues and Faust's *terza rima* in the "Anmuthige Gegend" (4679–727) evoke a poetic Italy, the latter specifically Dante. The tendency toward five-beat rhyming verse in the court scenes of act 1 has a British feel to it, perhaps especially a Byronic feel; there are moments where Byron's satirical version of the heroic couplet is heard clearly enough. The ancient Greek trimeter with which Erichtho introduces the "Classische Walpurgisnacht" (7005–39) is picked up by Helen at the beginning of act 3, and is then supplemented, in the rest of the act, by a number of other Hellenic and quasi-Hellenic forms, plus blank verse, rhyming verse, and rhyming stanzas. The blank verse in which Faust first encounters Helen (9192ff.), before he teaches her to rhyme (9377ff.), is perhaps British in the sense of alluding to the widely held opinion (not, strictly speaking, Goethe's own) that Shakespeare, as a "naïve" poet, represents a practically unique bridge between ancient and modern sensibility. In act 4, the whole imperial-military action is articulated by a shift in verse form. Echoes of the five-beat rhyming verse of act 1 culminate, in the scene "Auf dem Vorgebirg," in a long passage of dialogue (10345–502) in quite regular Byronic couplets. The regularity crumbles, however, when the Emperor relinquishes responsibility for the battle and Mephistopheles and Faust produce their mighty men (10503–36). And after the battle is won by unsavory means, the balance of the act (10549–11042) is written in the strict couplet-rhymed Alexandrines of French classical tragedy and comedy. The shift, however one interprets it, is from verse that smells British to verse that smells French. And act 5, finally—which in its wild variety includes yet further doses of Byronic rhyming (11402–19, 437–52, 563–72)[3]—opens with a scene (exactly 100 lines long) in the trochaic meter of Spanish Golden Age drama (11043–142).

These examples are from the prologues and part two. But even in part one, there are a number of instances where verse clearly performs nationality. The most significant piece of unrhymed verse in part one is certainly Faust's blank-verse monologue in "Wald und Höhle" (3217–50), which seems to me to have the same British feel as the five-beat forms in part two, except that here—given the scraps of nocturnal imagery and the sense of an internal

struggle on matters more or less religious—we shall probably be reminded of Young rather than Shakespeare. And the Alexandrines that crop up in the versifying of part one often suggest Frenchness. This is especially noticeable in what one would expect to be the arch-German atmosphere of "Auerbachs Keller in Leipzig." Siebel and Frosch speak in Alexandrines when disagreeing about love-songs (2103–4). Frosch expresses his German patriotism in Alexandrines that obviously undermine it:

> Wahrhaftig du hast Recht! Mein Leipzig lob' ich mir!
> Es ist ein klein Paris, und bildet seine Leute. (2171–72)

And Mephistopheles introduces with an Alexandrine—"Statt eines guten Trunks, den man nicht haben kann" (2186)—the topic of wine, which calls forth a whole series of Alexandrines, culminating in Brander's:

> Ein echter deutscher Mann mag keinen Franzen leiden,
> Doch ihre Weine trinkt er gern. (2272–73)

Lines in which he is mocked by his own verse.

Assuming, then, that my thesis—that verse in *Faust* performs nationality—is worth discussing, at least two obvious questions arise. Even if I were to augment my examples by as many more again, I would still have accounted for only a small part of the work. What about all the verse left over? And I have spoken only of foreign nationalities. What about German?

I think these two questions answer each other. If we consider only dialogue and leave aside the stanzaic passages (songs and aphorisms), the preponderance of verse in *Faust* is an extremely free but recognizable *Knittelvers*—not exactly *Knittelvers* as most people would define the term, but close enough to give that impression. There is a certain amount of controversy about what constitutes true *Knittelvers*—especially true "free" *Knittelvers,* as distinct from the "strict" syllable-counting type. David Chisholm, who has done the best existing work on Goethe's *Knittelvers,* starts out with the basic criteria of the "four-stress line" and rhyming by couplets, but then goes on to develop what turns out to be an important distinction between *Knittelvers* and simple "iambic tetrameter." Yet even he calls our attention to the fact, for example, that "in 'Hans Sachsens Poetische Sendung' . . . over 60% of the lines are iambic tetrameter."[4] My own description of this state of affairs would be that the text simply *is* in *Knittelvers,* that there is enough obvious *Knittelvers* in it to settle the matter for practical purposes. Indeed, I would go even further and assert that even where (as often in *Faust)* there are three- and five- and six-stress lines mixed in, and even where (as in *Faust)* the couplet scheme is often lost, still: as long as there is a reasonable proportion of recognizable *Knittelvers,* a reasonable amount of "bumpy" irregular rhythm, and a reasonable level of vulgarity in diction and content, one is perfectly justified in speaking, as I have, of "extremely free" *Knittelvers,* or at least of a strong gesture in that direction. Goethe himself supports me in this view when he writes in the *Divan:*

> Du blendest mich mit Himmelsklarheit,
> Es sei nun Täuschung oder Wahrheit,

> Genug ich bewundre dich vor allen.
> Um ihre Pflicht nicht zu versäumen,
> Um einem Deutschen zu gefallen,
> Spricht eine Huri in Knittelreimen. (WA 6:259)

These verses remain self-reflexive—they are what they talk about—even though the couplet-rhyming is dropped.

But that little stanza from the "Buch des Paradieses" also alludes to another important fact about *Knittelvers*—that it is regarded as uniquely and characteristically *German.* Certainly Goethe regards it thus. Among the unpublished "Zahme Xenien" there is even one where *Knittelvers* is drolly resented as a kind of German self-imprisonment.

> Ein ewiges Kochen statt fröhlichem Schmaus!
> Was soll denn das Zählen, das Wägen, das Grollen?
> Bei allem dem kommt nichts heraus,
> Als daß wir keine Hexameter machen sollen,
> Und sollen uns patriotisch fügen,
> An Knittelversen uns begnügen. (WA 5.1:144)

And in *Über Kunst und Alterthum,* in 1821, there is a remark (with sample translation) on Byron's *Don Juan,* in which we read, "daß der Deutsche, um drollig zu sein, einige Jahrhunderte zurückschreitet und nur in Knittelreimen eigentlich naiv und anmuthig zu werden das Glück hat" (WA 41.1:248). Surely Goethe must have *Faust* at least in the back of his mind here—not only because of the general association with Byron, but also because the form of *Don Juan,* which he imitates in translating, is the same *ottava rima* he had used in the *Faust* prologues. And surely, therefore—if we agree in general that verse performs nationality in *Faust*—we shall agree that *Knittelvers* is there the principal verse marker of German nationality.

Does it follow now, since at least the idea or impression of *Knittelvers* is so pervasive in *Faust,* that the poem presents itself as *fundamentally* German, while also using verse forms from time to time that gesture in the direction of other nationalities? It is certainly true that the non-German verse forms in *Faust* are not really those forms themselves, but only gestures in their direction. Especially the stress-accented German versions of Greek and French forms, we know, sound nothing like their originals; and even blank verse is prevented—mainly by German syntax—from developing in German the same predominantly four-beat rhythms that characterize it in English.[5] But is the situation of German verse in *Faust* any different? The characteristic German verse form is identifiable as *Knittelvers,* yet there is not a great deal of true or actual *Knittelvers* in *Faust—Knittelvers* as Goethe had written it in the *Jahrmarktsfest zu Plundersweilern,* in "Pater Brey" or "Satyros" or "Hanswursts Hochzeit." What we have in *Faust,* rather, is a constant gesturing in the direction of *Knittelvers,* comparable to the gesturing at foreign verse forms. Native and foreign verse forms in *Faust,* considered as national markers, are thus treated in exactly the same way, reduced to the status of gestures, with no sense of their somehow being filled with the authentic national life in question.

What are the larger implications of Goethe's procedure here? The most obvious one is the idea that all nationality, including one's "own" nationality, is fundamentally gestural or histrionic, not an inborn or ingrained determinant of one's being. Nationality is always ultimately an affectation, never an element of one's unalterable character. Nor should it be surprising to hear this view attributed to Goethe. For if the contrary were postulated, then very serious problems would attach themselves to the idea of inter-cultural communication. The notion of a Walpurgis Night for the denizens of classical antiquity would then be not witty, but merely preposterous, as would the project of a "West-östlicher Divan" or the even broader project of "Weltliteratur." And the very relaxed attitude toward vast historical separations that is expressed in the essay "Antik und Modern," or in the letter to Wilhelm von Humboldt of 22 October 1826 about "Helena," would be unthinkable.

But we must be careful not to burden this reasoning with conclusions that it cannot actually bear. One thing, for instance, that is *not* implied by the use of verse in *Faust* is any doubt concerning the existence or operation of *national identity.* Goethe expresses his views on this matter with perfect clarity to Eckermann.

> Und wiederum ist für eine Nation nur das gut, was aus ihrem eigenen Kern und ihrem eigenen allgemeinen Bedürfnis hervorgegangen, ohne Nachäffung einer anderen. Denn was dem einen Volk auf einer gewissen Altersstufe eine wohltätige Nahrung sein kann, erweist sich vielleicht für ein anderes als ein Gift. Alle Versuche, irgendeine ausländische Neuerung einzuführen, wozu das Bedürfnis nicht im tiefen Kern der eigenen Nation wurzelt, sind daher töricht, und alle beabsichtigten Revolutionen solcher Art ohne Erfolg; denn sie sind ohne Gott, der sich von solchen Pfuschereien zurückhält. (part three, 4 January 1824)

National identity not only exists; it maintains itself on a level of self-anchored constancy comparable to that of God.

What is implied by the verse in *Faust,* then, has nothing to do with national identity *as such.* It has to do only with national identity *from the individual's point of view.* In particular, the prosodic performance of nationality in *Faust* shows that however powerful and inexorable the identity of a nation may be in itself, *it has no determining effect upon the identity of any actual individual.* Nationality, for an individual, is always histrionic, hence a matter of free choice. That I am born in a particular place and time implies only that a particular nationality is available to me as a role or costume, in whatever way I choose to put it on. But my person, my mind, my activity, is in truth never governed by that nationality.

This is a very tricky and far-reaching distinction, and includes, among others, the suggestion that every nation—every "Volk," whether or not organized as a state—has a life of its own that need not have much to do with the lives of individual members. Questions of *language* are obviously central in this problematic area—where shall the life or identity of a nation be more completely manifest than in the peculiarities of its language?—especially the idea of a *mother tongue.* Goethe is in general not at all reluctant to use the expression "Muttersprache." For him, as for most of us, there is one language in which

we are most comfortable, usually the language of our early childhood. What Goethe denies—if the implications of the verse in *Faust* are as I have suggested—is the idea that that language is therefore somehow viscerally involved in us, specifically that it has shaped our character so as to give us a radically deeper understanding of it than is ever available to a "non-native" speaker.[6]

How can we possibly articulate the issue of an individual's relation to the language he or she is most at home in? How can even our initial statement of the question avoid including as an assumption: either that the language belongs to the individual, or vice versa? One way out of this dilemma is to talk about the individual's situation relative to several different languages—which brings us to Goethe's well-known essay on "Übersetzungen" at the end of the *Noten und Abhandlungen zu besserem Verständniß des West-östlichen Divans.*

If I simply deny the language of my childhood—as from time to time a generation of Jews denies Yiddish—my situation does not say much about how that language operates as my mother tongue. But are there different possibilities within the scope of an *affirmative* relation to my language, differences that might mark that relation as basically histrionic? It seems to me that the scheme of three types of poetic translation in Goethe's essay represents exactly such a system of differences. The translator who makes a "simple-prose" version (WA 7:235)—in which "alle Eigenthümlichkeiten einer jeden Dichtkunst" are completely missing, and which is content to evoke a foreign content "mitten in unserer nationellen Häuslichkeit"—is a writer who simply *accepts the limits* of the native language. The "parodistic" translator (WA 7:236), by contrast, "wie er sich fremde Worte mundrecht macht, verfährt auch so mit den Gefühlen, Gedanken, ja den Gegenständen, er fordert durchaus für jede fremde Frucht ein Surrogat das auf seinem eignen Grund und Boden gewachsen sei." Such a translator, in other words, *asserts the inherent poetic spirit* of the native language. And the third and most daring type of translator is the one who attempts to make the translation "identical to the original" (WA 7:237). This translator—who, in insisting on the character of the original text, "gibt mehr oder weniger die Originalität seiner Nation auf"—can therefore be said *to undermine and transform the very nature* of the native language. This is the type of effect that Goethe ascribes to the Homer translations of Voß: "welche Versatilität unter die Deutschen gekommen, welche rhetorische, rhythmische, metrische Vortheile dem geistreich-talentvollen Jüngling zur Hand sind" (WA 7:237).

There is plenty of room for discussion about how good a theory of translation this essay develops. But it is hard to deny that the three basic types, along with whatever mixtures one might postulate, constitute a veritable palette of histrionic possibilities for any individual with respect to his or her supposed mother tongue and so support the idea of a basically histrionic relation to the trappings of one's nationality. We can perhaps go even a bit further in this direction if we look at the last paragraph of the essay.

> Warum wir aber die dritte Epoche auch zugleich die letzte genannt, erklären wir noch mit wenigem. Eine Übersetzung, die sich mit dem Original zu identificiren strebt, nähert sich zuletzt der Interlinear-Version und erleichtert höchlich das

> Verständniß des Originals, hiedurch werden wir an den Grundtext hinangeführt, ja getrieben, und so ist denn zuletzt der ganze Cirkel abgeschlossen, in welchem sich die Annäherung des Fremden und Einheimischen, des Bekannten und Unbekannten bewegt. (WA 7:239)

Clearly suggested here, though not quite explicit, is the idea that all understanding is a form of translation, hence that when understanding avails itself of only the one language in which the original text is written, it merely denies itself thereby the scope and perspective that another language might offer. Whence it follows that there are no grounds whatever for denying non-native speakers the possibility of an equal, if not a better understanding, than native speakers, of the "mother tongue."

This argument of course does not demonstrate my basic point about the verse in *Faust.* But it does remove some of the discomfort attaching to the consequences of that point. And especially by way of the third type of translation, it does suggest the possibility of what I have called "contact with the real," in the sense of experience beyond the predetermination of language.

Am I suggesting, finally, that the use of verse forms to show nationality as mere gesture belongs to the basic conception of *Faust?* Of course not. There is no basic conception of *Faust.* The work was reconceived over and over again in its long genesis. What I am suggesting is that at a certain point in that process—perhaps in the mid-1790s, alongside the critical view of nationality in texts like "Literarischer Sansculottismus"—Goethe recognized certain fortunate possibilities in the work already done (perhaps especially the treatment of *Knittelvers)* which then grew together with possibilities for future work to produce the formal aspect of the whole text that I have spoken of, along with its implications.

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NOTES

1. Benjamin Bennett, *Goethe's Theory of Poetry:* Faust *and the Regeneration of Language* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1986) 171.

2. We know from diaries and letters that in 1780 and 1781 Goethe showed parts of at least two acts of *Tasso* to a number of people, including Charlotte von Stein, Barbara Schultheß, Lavater, and Knebel. As far as I can tell, however, documents from this early period give no information about the work's form. Only later (from Italy) do we learn that it had been in prose.

3. Byron's ubiquity in Part Two should not surprise us. From 1816 on, he had, in Goethe's view, more or less appropriated *Faust,* especially with his *Manfred.* See e.g. Goethe's letters to Eichstädt (4 June 1816), to Knebel (13 October 1817), to Boisserée (1 May 1818). And when Goethe writes to Wilhelm von Humboldt (22 October 1826) that the 3,000-year historical scope of *Faust* ends with the fall of Missolunghi, surely he is thinking more of Byron's death than of the Greek-Turkish conflict.

4. David Chisholm, *Goethe's Knittelvers: A Prosodic Analysis* (Bonn, Grundmann, 1975) 25.

5. See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (New York: Atheneum, 1966; orig. 1957), pp. 251–52.

6. The question of the mother tongue in the whole historical period is taken up in my *The Dark Side of Literacy: Literature and Learning Not to Read* (New York: Fordham UP, 2008) 74–75.

GERRIT BRÜNING

Die Wette in Goethes *Faust*

Schon einer der ersten Interpreten, Karl Ernst Schubarth, bezeichnete 1820 die Wette zwischen Faust und Mephistopheles als den dramatischen "Knoten."[1] Hermann August Korff vertrat diese Auffassung noch nachdrücklicher, als er im ersten Band seines monumentalen Werks *Der Geist der Goethezeit* von 1923 die Wette als einen "unvergleichlich genialen dramatischen Knoten" pries.[2] Noch heute haftet der Wette der Ruf des Genialen an.[3] Sie gilt als das "dramaturgische Herzstück."[4] Über die Bedeutung (Wichtigkeit) der Wette scheint also seit langem Einigkeit zu herrschen. Anders verhält es sich mit ihrer Bedeutung (Sinn): Noch immer scheint unklar zu sein, was die Wette im *Faust* bedeutet und wie sie mit den übrigen Teilen des Dramas zusammenhängt.[5] Etwas zynisch ist über diesen Zwiespalt bemerkt worden: "Die Goetheforschung ist sich einig über die große Bedeutung der Wette im *Faust,* weiß aber kaum anzugeben, worin sie bestehen soll."[6] Hans-Jürgen Schings hat resigniert von einem "Grübeln über Pakt und Wette" gesprochen (einem ergebnislosen Denken also), das anstelle einer Lösung "viele Schwierigkeiten" hervorgebracht habe.[7]

In seinem hilfreichen Kommentar scheint Albrecht Schöne sich damit anzufreunden, dass die Wette mehrdeutig und widersprüchlich sei. Ihm zufolge ermöglichen die daraus entstehenden "Undeutlichkeiten" erst, dass trotz gegensätzlicher Absichten ein Vertrag zustande komme.[8] Anders als die bloße Undeutlichkeit setzt Mehrdeutigkeit jedoch mehrere distinkte Bedeutungen voraus. Es gilt, diese zu benennen und zu prüfen, ob eine davon bei genauerem Hinsehen den Vorzug verdient. Die Widersprüche müssen zutage gebracht werden, damit über ihre Auflösbarkeit entschieden werden kann. Auf einer solchen Grundlage werden wir womöglich zumindest verstehen, worin das Verständnisproblem besteht und woher es rührt. Die Art, wie Alexander Rudolph Hohlfeld (Madison, Wisconsin) 1921 an das Thema heranging, scheint mir immer noch vielversprechend: Er zerlegte die große Frage nach der Wette in klar formulierte Einzelfragen, die er Schritt für Schritt beantwortete.[9]

Gemäß diesem Ansatz möchte ich noch kleinschrittiger vorgehen. Insbesondere im ersten Abschnitt entferne ich mich dabei ziemlich weit von der Art und Weise, in der literarische Texte für gewöhnlich und zu Recht rezipiert werden. Aus zwei Gründen halte ich dies für unumgänglich. Erstens: Obwohl Goethe den geplanten "Disputationsactus" nicht ausführte, wird sowohl in der ersten als auch in der zweiten "Studirzimmer"-Szene, in welcher die Wette zustande kommt, intensiv disputiert.[10] Schon die Lektüre und

erst recht die Interpretation beider Szenen ist daher mit erheblichem gedanklichen Aufwand verbunden. Zweitens kommt die allgemeine Ratlosigkeit ja nicht von ungefähr. Es ist nun einmal schwer, etwas Präzises, Konsistentes und Zutreffendes über die Wette zu sagen. Wie ich in den Endnoten dokumentiere, gehen die Meinungen an praktisch allen wichtigen Punkten auseinander. "Vieles wäre einfacher zu erklären gewesen in der langen Debatte über die Frage, wie die 'Wette' . . . zu verstehen ist," glaubt Hucke im Nachhinein, wenn die von ihm aufgeworfene Frage früher gestellt worden wäre.[11] Wenn man den von ihm beschriebenen Aspekt wahrnehme, meint Schings, "dann erledigen sich viele Schwierigkeiten."[12] Offen bleibt jedoch, *was* einfacher gewesen wäre und *welche* Schwierigkeiten sich erledigen, mit anderen Worten: ob die Verheißung auch wirklich eintritt. Wir müssen also nach wie vor "in Worten kramen" (385).[13]

Zunächst möchte ich das Thema eingrenzen. Aus Gründen, die ich noch erläutern werde, verstehe ich unter "der Wette" *nur* den Dialog zwischen Faust und Mephistopheles in der zweiten "Studirzimmer"-Szene (1692–706). Es geht also darum, was die jeweilige Figurenrede bedeutet. Viele Figurenreden können als Äußerungen aufgefasst werden, die sich auf die fiktive Welt des Dramas beziehen und bloß etwas über sie aussagen, demgemäß wahr oder falsch sein können. Für Fausts "Die Wette biet' ich!" (1698) gilt das nicht; man kann nicht sinnvoll sagen, das sei wahr oder falsch. Faust vollzieht einen anders gearteten illokutionären Akt. (Besser bekannt ist der illokutionäre Akt, den John R. Searle im Anschluss an John L. Austin analysierte, unter der Bezeichnung des Sprechakts im engeren Sinne.)[14] Die Frage nach der Bedeutung (dem Sinn) der Wette zielt also unmittelbar darauf, *was* die Figuren tun, *warum* sie es tun und welche *Folgen* dies für den Fortgang der Geschehnisse hat.

Diese Fragen zu stellen, ist keineswegs selbstverständlich. Es wird dabei nämlich vorausgesetzt, dass Faust und Mephistopheles jeweils eine Art von Person darstellen, die aus zuvor festgelegten Beweggründen handelt und deren Handlung wiederum die weitere Entwicklung bedingt. Mit anderen Worten: Innerhalb der Handlung des Dramas existiert Kausalität.[15] Stattdessen könnten wir die Figurenreden jedoch auch als selbständige Gebilde und das Drama insgesamt als eine poetische Kollage betrachten, ohne nach einem kausalen Zusammenhang der einzelnen Handlungen zu fragen. Im Fall der Wette könnten wir eine solche Betrachtungsweise mit der Entstehungsgeschichte des Textes rechtfertigen.[16] Zusammen mit dem "Prolog im Himmel" gehört die Wette zu den Teilen von *Faust I,* die zuletzt entstanden. Im *Fragment* von 1790 klaffte noch eine "große Lücke" zwischen dem Gespräch mit Wagner, das auf die "Erdgeist-Szene" folgt (bis 605), und dem Gespräch mit Mephistopheles, das die Weltfahrt einleitet (ab 1770).[17]

Bestimmte Ungereimtheiten könnte man also auf entstehungsgeschichtlich bedingte Naht- und Bruchstellen zurückführen. Allerdings wüssten wir lediglich, *dass* Goethe es unterließ, die "große Lücke" auszufüllen und mithilfe des "Prologs" zu rahmen, sodass der 1808 erschienene *Erste Theil* der *Tragödie* die älteren Textmassen zu einer durchgehenden Handlung verknüpft. Wir wüssten jedoch nicht, *warum* er es unterließ, ob aus einem durchdachten Wandel des dramatischen Plans oder aus poetischer