

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-19464-8 - Goethe's Faust: Theatre of Modernity  
Edited by Hans Schulte, John Noyes and Pia Kleber  
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## *Introduction*

*Hans Schulte*

*People today should tremble before the relevance of this text.*  
*Giorgio Strehler (quoted from Laura Caretti's motto; see p. 306)*

This book is an echo of the *Faust* renaissance currently sweeping through Germany. The past decade has seen a surge of studies, press coverage, theatre productions (most notably the twenty-three-hour uncut version by Peter Stein), and public discussions. In the summer of 2000, while Stein's production was in full swing, I took part in such discussions of *Faust* and found that the participants were mostly exploring their own contemporary experience. To me, as a literary man, such a collective excitement about a full and faithful performance of the classical work was exhilarating. It was an excitement which decades of directorial experiments had failed to provoke.

One of the consequences of these discussions was the *Faust Festival* in Toronto, a week-long extravaganza of lectures, theatre workshops, performances, concerts and exhibitions from which this book emerged. It contains the latest interpretive insights by leading Faust scholars, as well as younger authors with new and productive ideas. Most of them had presented papers at the symposium which were then thoroughly revised and expanded for publication. Albrecht Schöne, Eberhard Lämmert, Jane Brown and Dieter Borchmeyer were brought on board, and a wide-ranging interview with Peter Stein was conducted, translated and edited for the volume.

The need for a book that presents the latest significant Faust research to the English-speaking world is obvious enough. This legendary figure had matured in Goethe's monumental work to become, according to J. B. Russell in his *Mephistopheles*, 'after Christ, Mary, and the Devil . . . the single most popular character' in Christian culture. It became a fundamental icon of Western modernity. Even so, Goethe's *opus magnum* has been rather neglected by English-speaking scholars over the past decades.

The present book, entitled *Goethe's Faust: Theatre of Modernity*, explores the phenomenology of modernity presented by Goethe as 'theatre', i.e.,

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mystery, pageant, Baroque world stage, opera, spectaculum, panopticum, plays within plays, roles within roles. It is obvious that a work of such daunting complexity must be approached from new and multiple angles. Some essays investigate the modern implications of its mythology. Gisela Brude-Firnau, for example, gains new insights into the Helena 'antecedents' by placing them in a modern, mytho-poetic tradition. She compares the centaurs in *Faust* and *Harry Potter* (Chiron and Firenze), revealing their 'discourses' with each other over the centuries. In the same 'Classical Walpurgis Night', another 'monster of antiquity' (according to Goethe) comes Faust's way: the Medusa. Ernst Osterkamp analyses the symbolic image of the incessantly growing Medusa as part of Goethe's turn to archaic-classical, non-idealized Greek mythos. Through Goethe's poetic contextualization, though, the ancient myth becomes charged with a highly modern force of destruction, eliminating 'not just the individual but any concept of the individual'.

Another focus of scholarship is the symbolism and provenance of certain intriguing scenes and motifs. Wilhelm Blum explores the significance and historicity of the fortress where the medieval Faust meets the Greek Helena. This 'Arcadian' fortress is revealed as the Frankenburg of Mistra near Sparta, built in 1249 by Wilhelm de Villehardouin – in the drama, Faust becomes a Frankish prince, and conceivably an embodiment of Friedrich II of Hohenstaufen. We can witness here, in the centre of his phantasmagoria, the acute historical conscience of Goethe's constructive imagination. Angela Borchert focuses on the *grotesque* in the 'Classical Walpurgis Night', where classical education is rendered absurd in a way that frightens even Mephisto. And Daniel Wilson finds new access to the play by way of a close examination of Mephisto's homosexuality, especially in the last act. The devil's lust and the angels' love are both part of the 'economy of desire' in God's all-embracing plan.

These are essentially new perspectives and examples of the diversity of modern interpretive approaches. But all contributions are tied together by the general themes of *modernity* and *theatre*. Dividing the essays under these two titles, which are not meant to be exclusive, was an easy choice. All interpretations in the first part are focused on the modern significance of *Faust* without ignoring its theatricality. The reverse is true in the second. Here 'theatre' is discussed in its two dimensions: as structure and as performance. In a progressive book on *Faust* as theatre, performance critique must not be excluded, in spite of its quotidian nature.

What is, in essence, this sixteenth-century alchemist's 'modernity'? Goethe creates a typological synthesis of the crisis of early modernity

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(the time of Faustus, Paracelsus, Machiavelli) and that of his own revolutionary era (Romanticism, early industrialism). The first crisis becomes the mirror of the second, because Goethe makes them transparent towards the recurrent 'ultimate formulae' of human history. That way, *Faust* becomes prophetic for a third dimension of modernity: our own. The reader or spectator sees the present reflected in the mutually enlightening aspects of the two modern crises – from the reformation to 1830.

What are the principles of this 'modern' phenomenology of *Faust*, in this comprehensive sense? Faust embodies the human spirit residing solely in itself and claiming unconditional autonomy; the need for universal knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) as deification of the self; a moral indifference – that ancient principle (in Mephisto's cosmogony) of a highly modern devil; the limitless availability of the world, of its natural, human and cultural resources – even its history – to human activism; the futile striving (*Streben*) for absolute joy, the joy of the absolute; the principle of impatience, which forces itself on the world with 'magic' strategies, short-cuts and technology; the 'velociferous' dynamics of eternal dissatisfaction (*veloziferisch* was Goethe's clever coinage which fuses 'speed' and Lucifer) which will spare no human pains and sacrifices on the way to the elusive 'schöne Augenblick' (beautiful moment); and an 'overleaping' spiritual quest (line 1859), which keeps pressing forward towards its utopia and never looks back in sorrow.

This sounds like a harsh verdict, on Goethe's part, against both Faust and modernity, but we have to beware of imbalance and misjudgement. Faust as a whole is not a satire. Goethe himself never put a Faustian theodicy in question. In the eyes of the Lord, Faust is 'der gute Mensch', which can only make sense if we do not understand Goethe to be making narrowly moral judgements. From early on, Goethe had established a Faust figure of extraordinary standards and strengths, whose immortality is never in doubt. This Faust had enough positive energy ('entelechy') to carry the burden that the later Goethe, who became increasingly sceptical of his times, kept heaping on him. Goethe himself seemed to sense this imposition. In a letter to K. E. Schubarth (3 September 1820), his remarks concerning all those modern, 'phantastischen Irrtümer' (fantastic errors) which he forces 'the poor man' to struggle through almost sound like an apology for Faust. At the same time, Goethe does not acquit him of moral responsibility. There is a school of scholars who claim that Faust cannot be blamed for 'experiencing', with ever-changing identities, the shady spheres of modern politics, society and commerce. This is part of the character problem which we must deal with later. Here we should simply weigh Act 5 of Part II – with the old autocrat at his morally lowest but at the height

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of his worldly power – against the redeeming forces, throughout the drama, of love, *Bildung* and creative imagination, of nature, science and the better half of his *Streben*.

Goethe's prescience of our modern world is near-miraculous. Albrecht Schöne, in our first essay, puts it to a simple test with the question: what did the *Faust* text actually 'know' about these last 200 years of Western society? '*Faust* – today', therefore, is not aiming at a new interpretation of what *Faust* means to us today (Schöne has dealt with that in much of his previous research), but at something more concrete and surprising: Goethe's actual anticipation of present-day discourses and discoveries, including genetic science, economics, politics and our encroachment on nature. Schöne shows us specifically how Goethe's 'ultimate formulae', which make the world and its history conceivable to him, have not only caught up with present-day insights but opened windows to our future.

It is obvious that the modernity discussion likes to focus on the Mephisto figure. Rolf-Peter Janz writes on 'Mephisto and the modernization of evil', meaning the secularization of the devil, whose phenomenology becomes inexhaustible in the process. Good and evil become inextricably intertwined, to such an extent that Mephisto himself can often play the part of good reason and fairness. More often, of course, Mephisto is the agent of modern expediency (invention of paper money, victory through violence and deceit etc.): he is the moral price the protagonist, as the man of the future, has to pay. Peter Huber ('Mephisto is the devil – or is he?') takes this understanding of a morally indifferent Mephisto a step further. He explains why Goethe always uses the word 'devil' ironically: it is a Christian concept which the play renders absurd. Huber's mythological analysis finds the key in the Earth Spirit to whom Mephisto belongs: as a pre-Christian god and nature daemon. He enables 'polarity' as the agent of darkness which, together with light, produces the spectrum of life.

But let us now turn to the protagonist himself. When the traditional *Faust* cult had run its course, the beginnings of the modernity discussion of *Faust* (long after the Second World War) brought a backlash: a hero who is seen as deeply problematic and defective. Four of the essays in the first part of this book deal with this character problem. Ulrich Gaier and Wolf-Daniel Hartwich attempt to deflect these accusations – Gaier by way of a formal analysis which relieves Faust of the onus of a unified and therefore responsible 'character' altogether, and Hartwich through his understanding of a productive amnesia, which allows Faust to salvage his transcendental identity in spite of a constantly changing persona. Gaier's contribution ("Schwankende Gestalten": virtuality in Goethe's *Faust*) is as thought-provoking as it is

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challenging for a production of the play. In his interpretation, Faust – like Mephisto – is one of the ‘waving shapes’ intoned by Goethe’s ‘Dedication’ (‘Zueignung’).

*Schwankend* means ‘ungraspable’ and ‘always changing’. Post-medieval European history and culture are poured into the ‘shape’ of Faust, where they attain a ‘virtual’ oneness which, however, always remains intangible. Gaier contradicts Hartwich in this understanding of Faust’s fundamental lack of identity, or rather, of his multiple identities and allegorical roles. Understanding *Faust* as ‘the text with the highest calculated variability in all literature’ is a radical, but clearly productive position which should influence all future discussions.

The theatre-goers, though, will insist that ‘we are Faust’, a statement which the Stuttgart production reviewed in this volume (see Chapter 19) was based on – a *persona* they can react to with empathy (fear and pity in the Aristotelian tradition), with admiration and disapproval. The allegorical as well as the glorified Faust precludes such a balanced experience – as does the third alternative: the negative Faust. Hans-Jürgen Schings and Eberhard Lämmert, two of our most eminent contributors, make Faust fully accountable for the trail of destruction he leaves behind. They see this destructiveness as central to his identity. No tragedy, no allegory, no divine scheme, no redeeming qualities or diabolical machinations are allowed as mitigating factors.

There is a history behind this stance. One hundred and fifty years of German Faust idolatry (including the East German *Erbe* (socialist heritage) ideology) lie behind us, and a new understanding of Faust as a social and political liability rather than a heroic incarnation of nationhood – and, in its wake, of Western culture – became overdue. Gottlieb C. L. Schuchard was a courageous but isolated early voice in 1935. He showed for the first time how the 80-year-old author, in the last two acts, made his protagonist a leading participant in the latest political and social experiments which he despised (especially the July revolution of 1830 and the rise of Saint-Simonism). Long after the war, the German theatre slowly began to topple the national monument as well, and so did a small but growing faction named ‘anti-perfectibilists’ (after the pietist Wilhelm Böhme): writers and thinkers who call the perceived perfectibility of the Faustian world a dangerous chimera. This faction is impressive enough, as Albrecht Schöne, Heinz Schlaffer, Nicholas Boyle, Jochen Schmidt and – in this volume – Hans-Jürgen Schings and Eberhard Lämmert can testify.

For Hans-Jürgen Schings (‘Cagliostro and Saint-Simon in Goethe’s *Faust II*’), Goethe places the Faust of Part II next to to the magician and

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swindler Cagliostro. Goethe was indeed fascinated by this famous seducer of minds, who single-handedly launched a conspiracy against the Enlightenment. To him, this self-serving trendsetter was one of the 'modernist' post-Enlightenment figures of which the Romantic *va-banque* player Euphorien was only a slightly less dubious version. Similarly, the social idealism of the Saint-Simonists (precursors of later and even more explosive social utopians) provided a model for the final night scenes of the colonization project. Like those 'inspired ones', Faust resorts to his 'inner light' to set the stage for his project, having been blinded to its reality – both in a physical and metaphorical sense. Eberhard Lämmert ('The blind Faust') begins where Schings ends in applying this blindness to all of Faust's life and career. As in Oedipus' case, his blindness is a metaphor for a character who can only look inward, unable to consider the world outside. And in that, of course, he has Mephisto's vigorous support. The other characters are misled, according to Lämmert, by his unconditional striving. It is their tragedy to have paved his way and paid the price.

Clearly the hero's negativity is splendidly argued in these two essays, and such thrust was undoubtedly needed to counter traditional bias and myth-making. But the fact remains that the other contributors do not follow this path. A truly negative Faust would not be able to counter-balance the devil, let alone carry the whole play. A void would be left which no abstraction like 'modern society' could fill. Brecht's 'epic theatre' attempted exactly that: reducing the traditional hero of Shakespeare's and Goethe's plays (*Coriolanus* and *Urfaust*) to deadly threats to society. Both adaptations were briefly famous in the post-war context, but they never really worked, and neither did the numerous directorial experiments which followed Brecht's example. Radical deconstructions of the Faust figure, quite often exposing it to ridicule, became an unfortunate, state-subsidized fashion (see the interview with Peter Stein below). Lessing's dramaturgy considered a certain measure of 'admiration' for the tragic protagonist essential, and with good reason.

But how would we, after Schings, Lämmert and others, fill the void and restore 'admiration'? Jane Brown (in the second part of this book) suggests that ultimately we cannot pass judgement on moral grounds. Many of us would agree. Jaspers saw the 'greatness' of the tragic character in his choice to 'take the human possibilities to their extremes, and to be knowingly ruined by them.' Tragedy, he says, 'shows man in his greatness beyond good and evil'.<sup>1</sup> After Brecht, of course, and after Hegel and Nietzsche's separation of greatness and goodness ('great' historical figures being free from socio-ethical concerns – with fascist consequences), we have much

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sympathy with Hans-Jürgen Schings, who distances himself from any 'monumental interpretation of Faust, beyond all morality'. Goethe, however, saw no problem yet in calling Napoleon 'great', and Faust the great entelechy ensuring immortality. He clearly accorded his hero a positive worldly as well as spiritual power – to such a man, he tells Eckermann, he owed a higher, brighter, more dignified world in Part II, after having him toil through the small world of Part I. Faust is implicitly numbered by Panthalis (at the end of the Helena scenes) among the immortals who made a name for themselves and searched for noble truths, while all others 'belong to the elements'. And since we are weighing his achievements: Gisela Brude-Firnaeu argues convincingly here that Goethe raised Faust to the status of his poetic alter ego in Acts 2 and 3 of Part II. Faust dreams up the most beautiful story and moment (*Augenblick*) of his time, fleeting and transitory though it may be – the marriage of modern Europe with Greek antiquity. Magic, otherwise a 'radical evil' in the Kantian sense, becomes a high and redeeming achievement in the poetic phantasmagoria. In short, we have to grant him, as Goethe does, the *gravitas* of a powerful, astonishing and engaging theatrical presence. There is no strong performance without this strength of Faust's personal presence, as Peter Stein has emphasized once again in the interview below. As he points out, any stage production will have to make Faust the commanding figure throughout, and Gustav Gründgens' self-serving replacement of the protagonist Faust with Mephisto has done much damage in the history of *Faust* production and criticism. The interpretive tradition that finds its greatest interest in Mephisto is still echoed, on occasion, in the present book (see Chapters 3 and 12).

It is our difficult task, therefore, to see the old chapbook's 'gute und böse' Faust fused into one. We have to take into account that Faust is indeed a Renaissance man of universal activity, who is abnormally at risk because he goes out on all possible limbs. He falls deeper because he reaches higher, to reveal the often comical tragedy (Mephisto's cicada image in the 'Prologue!') of the human condition. Finally, it must not be forgotten that Faust – as opposed to Mephisto – wanted the good where he achieves the bad. Both Schings and Lämmert observe his noble enthusiasm, which almost invariably goes awry where it turns to action. Faust's spirit 'overleaps' the world. Hegel talked about the self-estrangement of the spirit, when the purity of the idea first gets mired in the material, historical world – the prime source of tragic guilt. Faust rejects Hegel's 'synthesis' of reconciliation. He remains in the 'error', 'twilight' and 'confusion' of human activity. Hegel's analysis did not have modernity in mind. Goethe's does: Faust 'loses himself' in the 'phantastic errors' of modern society. Mephisto has come to throw him

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right into it, and Faust can hardly wait. 'Stürzen wir uns in das Rauschen der Zeit' (1754, Let's plunge into time's turbulence) without looking back!

There is another good reason for us to withhold any final judgement for or against the protagonist. It is very Goethean and very theatrical to keep things in suspense and maintain the force of contradiction in the leading character. Schiller had Goethe's example in mind when he created his *Wallenstein*. The Faustian *Streben* itself is the most intriguing balancing act, and any attempt to judge it one way or another is doomed to failure. Even Faust's utopia, the 'paradise for millions', is kept in such a suspense, in spite of its resulting from piracy, slavery and environmental havoc. We cannot simply take Mephistopheles at his word when he predicts that the sea will reclaim it all. Whether we side for or against, it is equally easy to find quotations and arguments. Schings quotes Goethe's remark, in *Wilhelm Meister*, that 'unconditional activity . . . will end in bankruptcy'. This will have to be weighed against the flawless credit of the seer Manto in Act 2 of Part II who embraces the orphic enthusiast who desires the impossible. Goethe's Ancient Greece giving the nod to this icon of Christian modernity should count for something. But then again, such impossible desires foster the demonic sub-currents of that same modernity. How far allegorical interpretations can go in acquitting him of complicity (he is, after all, Mephisto's knowing accomplice!) will be explored, no doubt, in many future discussions.

The second part of this book is devoted to an understanding of *Faust* as *theatre* – which includes opera, but also performance in the widest sense. Goethe supervised, as producer, director or dramaturge, over 600 plays and operas in twenty-six years, and this massive drama, which he deemed unperformable (see Chapter 4, p. 54), is in fact designed – to the minutest detail of stagecraft – for the eyes and ears of an audience. Albrecht Schöne has shown, in 'Der Theatermann als Stückeschreiber' (*Programmbuch* for Peter Stein's *Faust*), how Goethe uses the theatre to present the world and its history *as* theatre, including the audience and on-stage audiences. The playful complexity of 'self-confident illusion', of theatre-within-theatre up to 'the seventh power' (Schöne), far exceeds any Brechtian experiment. The theatrical structures of *Faust* must inform any valid interpretation.

Martin Swales ('Goethe's *Faust*: theatre, meta-theatre, tragedy') sees Mephisto in the role, within the mystery frame, of diabolical salesman: he offers life as a theatrical extravaganza, and the radical individualist and disillusioned secular spirit cannot refuse – the illusion. Theatre becomes the key metaphor for human existence, two millennia of European history



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and above all modernity. Mephisto is the agent of modernity ('to say nothing of postmodern nihilism and virtual reality') driving Faust to dire consequences. The chapter attempts a *Faust* in a nutshell, and is very accessible and engaging for a non-specialist reader. Most importantly, Swales recognizes this theatre as *tragedy* and Faust as a tragic character. This is normally disputed nowadays. Tragedy lurks in Faustian discontent, in the will to act and in the 'impossible' struggle between the two souls of man (echoed in the polarities of the Earth Spirit). Dieter Borchmeyer ('*Faust* beyond tragedy: hidden comedy, covert opera') contradicts this position emphatically, arguing that there is no objectifiable self (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 15) and no suffering, and therefore no tragedy. Faust only *causes* suffering. In the case of *Faust II*, where the hero seems to disappear in the spheres of his action, many agreed in our symposium discussions. But not so as regards *Faust I*, where his despair and suffering surge to near-suicide. More significantly, though, Borchmeyer reveals the genres 'hidden' behind the so-called 'tragedy': a *Divina Commedia* (complete with mystery frame) and – *opera*. The operatic-musical quality of *Faust* has often been observed. But never has it been tested so thoroughly, scene by scene in both parts, to provide such surprising results. Theoretically, we recall, the classical Goethe shared this love of opera with Schiller: it guaranteed a 'pure' dramatic poetry, a symbolism unmarred by distracting illusions of reality.

Jane Brown ('Theatricality and experiment: identity in *Faust*') agrees with Borchmeyer as far as the absence of tragedy is concerned. She also agrees with his and Gaier's claim that Faust lacks an identifiable self. But her reasoning is different. While Gaier finds the multiplicity of character identities 'ungraspable' and unplayable, because they are *simultaneous*, Brown sees both protagonists as ideally crafted theatre figures who play their various roles on the world stage *successively* – Faust from lover to wise man, to poet, to imperial treasurer, to medieval prince, to Renaissance knight, to elderly landowner etc. Helmut Schanze ('Rhetorical action: *Faust* between rhetoric, poetics and music') confirms Gaier's and Brown's analysis of Faustian roles from a rhetorical point of view. Faust displays a multiplicity of 'rhetorical actions', even within one scene, such as the very first ('Night'). Exploring Goethe's construction of rhetorical climax, he distinguishes the rhetorics of Love, Evil, Nature, Power and Redemption, and shows us how such (normally) lyrical evocations tend to break into music. Goethe marks the musical parts (chorus and arias/madrigals/*Lieder*) typographically with indented text. In the Helena act, for instance, 800 out of 1,352 lines are indented. The essay complements Dieter Borchmeyer's examination of *Faust* as opera. To me, it was especially interesting how

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Schanze introduced the rhetorical concept of 'performance' as the 'persuasive staging' of action and music, and referred to its rising prominence in the 'performative turn' of the discourse and theatrical experimentation of recent decades. It 'announces a "performative crisis" . . . in the "production" of Goethe's masterpiece'. The scope of his chapter did not allow the author to argue this out, but the *performative crisis* plays such an important role in the *praxis* section concluding this book that a brief excursion seems in order.

Performance as persuasive staging is obviously built into Goethe's text, while the 'performative turn' of the 1960s and early 1970s (part of the leftist youth movement) required the text to be dismantled. A decade or so later, 'performatism' became part of postmodern discourse and blossomed into astonishing theories complete with new 'metaphysics' (a confusing paradox, given its deconstructivist provenance). The 'performative turn' simply means the turn from 'text culture' to 'performance culture', from theatre studies to performance studies, from elitist, literary or 'reactionary' theatre to communal ritual.<sup>2</sup> 'Dismemberment' as 'sacrifice' of the literary text makes an ever-changing, ever-present performance possible. Only 'bits and pieces' of historical texts can be productively incorporated in the performance of present culture – an excellent strategy would be the 'parodic re-using, dismantling, and recombining of classic texts, traditions and other "found" performance idioms'.<sup>3</sup> Interspersed political quotations and ad-lib emoting would make the dish even more palatable. The performers or their directors are the real authors, who freely weave such bits and pieces, their material, into the patchwork of an ever-new 'event', a communal ritual that takes place between them and the audience. Modern semiotics of theatre, directorial productions and popular performance art keep feeding on such theories.

As a result, a *directorial* performance theatre went mainstream – especially in Germany, where it had once received world-wide acclaim for its creative renewals of classical texts. Backed by trend and theory, it turned deconstructive with a competitive and systematic force which young directors seeking success could not and cannot escape. It despises 'literary theatre' (see the Stein interview, Chapter 17) and installs the auctorial director over the dramatist. Critics have often exposed, through comparisons with the original texts, the loss of relevance, structure and memory culture, which may lead to the demise of such 'emancipated' theatre one day. There has been a reaction already: conscientious, text-based productions like Strehler's and Stein's turned out to be vastly more engaging, mysterious, complex and revealing than the eleven Fausts of Einar Schleaf, or nihilistic reductions like the recent Berlin production by Thalheimer.