

GOETHE'S  
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A SYMBOLIC  
INTERPRETATION



Faust: A Symbolic Interpretation

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English 232 1

December 12, 1965



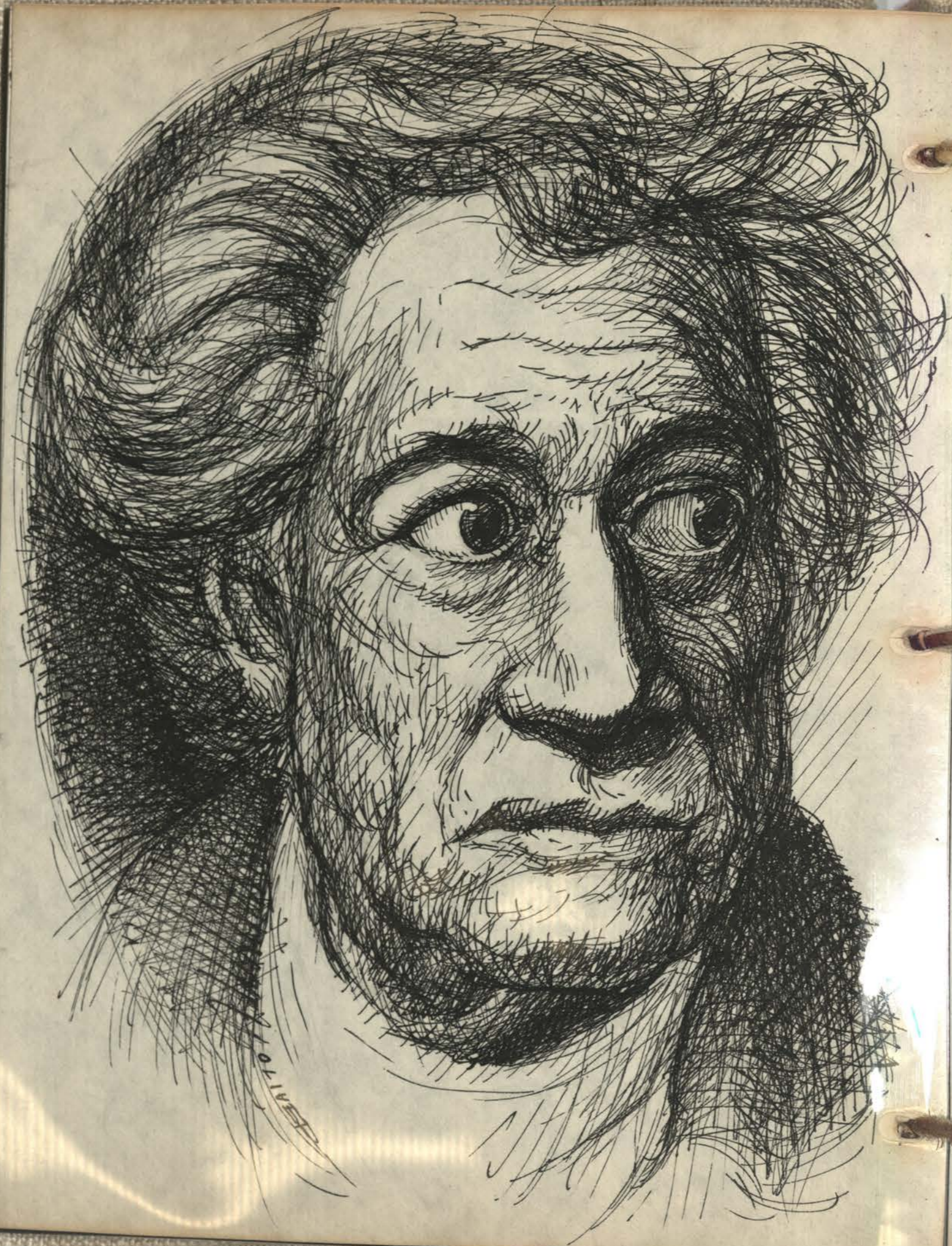
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Goethe was born at Frankfurt- am- Main. His father, who had become a lawyer and had risen to a position of civic importance, was reserved, austere, strict, opinionated, and pedantic. His mother, only eighteen years older than her son, was of a cheery, equable, serene disposition. Young Wolfgang went to school first in Frankfurt and later in Leipzig, where he studied law. Illness forced him to return home in 1768, but two years later he was able to finish his legal studies at the University of Strassburg. There he met Herder, who "unloosed all the Storm and Stress elements which were slumbering in the young poet, by teaching him that his own heart is each man's most precious possession and its expression his first duty."<sup>1</sup>

In 1770 Goethe formed a liason with Friederike Brion, the unspoiled daughter of a pastor of Sesenheim. This liason lasted almost a year and inspired a great deal of Goethe's poetry; it was broken off in 1771, with great remorse on the part of the poet.

Again in Frankfurt, he spent most of the next four years practicing law and writing. In 1773 he achieved literary fame by writing the drama, Gotz von Berlichingen, and the following year The Sorrows of Young Werther caused a still greater sensation.

<sup>1</sup>. George M. Priest, A Brief History of German Literature ( Boston, 1949), II, 7.



In 1775 Karl August, the eighteen-year-old Duke of Saxe-Weimar, invited Goethe to visit in the capital Weimar. The invitation was accepted, and from that date till his death in 1832 (except for a visit to Italy) Goethe made Weimar his home. Between 1778 and 1786 he held various positions under the Duke, including that of Prime minister. In 1782 he was made a nobleman.

Burdened by official duties and distressed by a hopeless passion for a married woman, Charlotte von Stein, Goethe fled to Italy in September, 1786. There he eagerly drank in Italian art, culture, and scenery for about a year and a half.

Goethe's relations with three people require comment. The first of these is Charlotte von Stein, wife of one of the Duke's officials. This pure and high-minded woman had a salutary effect on Goethe's character and poetry from 1775 till 1786. Then, becoming aware that he could no longer be satisfied with mere friendship, Goethe made his Italian journey.

The second person to be mentioned is Christiane Vulpius, the pretty but uneducated daughter of a minor Weimar official. In July, 1788, she became Goethe's mistress and housekeeper, and she bore him a son. Goethe married her in 1806.

The third acquaintance, and the most influential on Goethe's poetry, is Friedrich Schiller. The two poets



met in 1788, but it was not until 1794 that they became intimate. From that date till Schiller's death in 1805 each was the inspirer and critic of the other's works. Goethe, whose creative ability seemed to be drying up from 1790 to 1794, received new inspiration from the younger man and confessed to him: "You have given me a second youth and have again made me a poet, which I had virtually ceased to be."<sup>2</sup>

Opinions about Goethe's character differ. Some thought that he was straightforward and kind, sincere and warm-hearted; a person most earnest in his search and admiration for truth and beauty. Others, on the other hand, doubted Goethe's sincerity and accused him of egoism, egotism, and a shockingly selfish disregard of others. Whatever the truth may be, it is certain that Goethe was handsome, personable, spirited, witty, ambitious, and industrious. His greatest aim in life was self-culture. He wanted to act like the greatest men. He wished in nothing to act like the merely greater. This desire, to make the Pyramid of his being, to soar as high as can be in air, outweighed all else and permitted hardly a momentary forgetting.

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Vietor, Goethe: The Poet (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), p. 108.



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe stands in almost an alien attitude to the philosophy of the deepened rationalism as he does to that of the ordinary rationalism of the so called ethical and optimistic convictions. Goethe had reverence for nature. Nature was for him something in herself, not something merely existing for the sake of mankind. Goethe lived in her as a human being who looked at existence with wonder and knew not how to bring her relation to the world- spirit within any formula.

Descartes and the ethical belief- in- progress agreed in a common neglect of nature. Both alike overlooked the fact that she was living, and that she existed for her own sake. It was because he could not join them in this that Goethe dared to confess that he understood nothing about philosophy. His greatness was this: that in a time of abstract and speculative thought he had the courage to remain elemental.

Overwhelmed by a mysterious individual life in nature, he adhered to a magnificently unfinished world- view. With the spirit of an investigator he looked within into everything: in that of an inquirer he looked around upon everything. He wanted to think optimistically. He strived to reach an ethical conception of the universe,



but admitted to himself that he could not succeed. So he did not venture to attribute a meaning to nature. To life, however, he desired to attribute a meaning. He sought in it a serviceable activity. To give the world-view of activity a place in nature- philosophy was for him an inner necessity. To the conviction that activity provided the only real satisfaction in life, and that therein lay the mysterious meaning of existence, he gave expression in Faust as something which he had laboriously gained during his pilgrimage through existence and to which he would hold fast, without being able to explain it completely.

Goethe struggled to arrive at a conception of ethical activity, but could not reach such a conception because nature- philosophy was unable to provide him with any criterion of what was ethical.

The range of this world- view of Goethe's, conditioned as it was by reality, remained hidden from his contemporaries. Its incompleteness alienated their sympathies and irritated them. For knowledge of the world and of life which could not be reduced to a system, but stuck fast in facts, they had no understanding. They held to their optimism and their ethics.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>. Albert Schwegler, The Philosophy of Civilization ( N.Y., 1951), pp. 208- 210.



Nearly all Goethe's works are autobiographical in greater or lesser degree. From his most intimate lyrics to his dramas one can detect some incident, some love affair, or some phase of his development.

Goethe was exceptionally versatile and prolific. From his teens till a few months before his death at the age of eighty-two, he wrote almost continually; the results fill 120 volumes. The types of literature for which he is most famous are the lyric, the epic, the novel, and the drama; in addition he wrote ballads, operettas, scientific articles, literary criticism, and an autobiography.

The steady development of Goethe's genius can be traced in his short poems. The earliest lyrics are full of passion and show clearly the effects of the Storm and Stress. Those written at Weimar between 1775 and 1786 are somewhat calmer and more objective, but they are still filled with an intense yearning for spiritual and intellectual tranquility. The lyrics written soon after the poet's return from Italy are sensuous and humanistic. And those of his old age are pensive, aphoristic, and philosophical. Among the number of his ballads and lyrics are "The Heather Rose", "Found", "Springtime All Year", "The Erlking", "Wanderer's Night Song", "Welcome and Departure", "The Godlike", "Mignon", "Harper's Song", and "Song of the Spirit over the Waters".

Goethe's An Epic: Hermann and Dorthea (1797), was writ-



ten in an attempt to bring back the spirit of Homer into the modern epic. With the exception of Faust, the epic is Goethe's most popular long work.

Goethe's novels include The Sorrows of Young Werther, a sentimental epistolary novel modeled on Rousseau's New Heloise, and Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship and its sequel Wilhelm Meister's Travels, novels on the education and the maturing of a merchant's son, reflects Goethe's own life, errors, and growth.

Goethe's Dramas include Gotz von Berlichingen(1773), an excellent expression of the spirit of the Storm and Stress, Egmont(1787), another semihistorical drama, Iphigenia at Tauris(1787), an adaptation of Euripides' play of the same name, Torquato Tasso(1790), a romanticised version of the last years of the great Italian poet, and Faust(1832), an allegory of man's search for truth, knowledge, and pleasure through good and evil.

A few commentators have refused to concede Goethe a place among the giants of literature, because, they contend, his works are too autobiographical and do not reflect any greatness of soul in the author (one of Longinus' requirements for literary excellence). The majority of critics, however, disagree. Of these, Goethe is considered a sage, the greatest poet of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the most gifted of men of letters, and the greatest poet of all nations and all times. Regardless of these estimates, for more than a



century most men have agreed that Goethe is one of the  
world's four or five greatest literary figures.



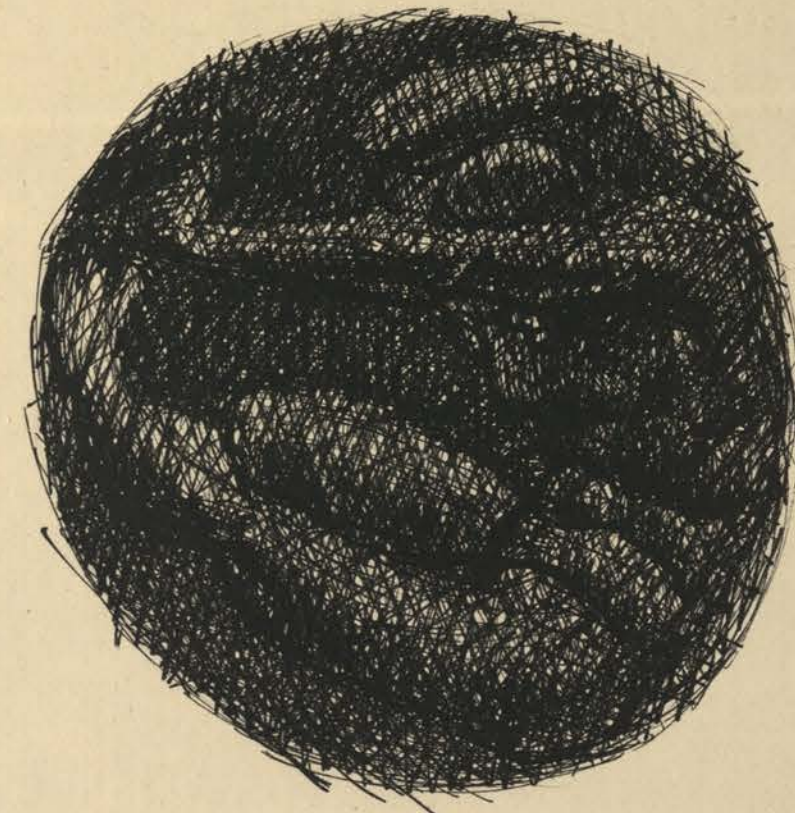
Man and Mind

Man, caught up in a circle,  
One of his own design.  
A sphere of his own mind,  
Bound only by himself.

Man, caught up in a shell,  
One whose dimensions are  
The nut or the Heavens far,  
There to descend or scale.

Man caught up in a struggle,  
One with his greater- self,  
Striving to free himself;  
Good and evil, his to juggle.

Yet, himself, he must free  
From sin or forever dead must he be.





Faust, A Tragedy

Like the biblical book of Job, Part I of Faust opens with a prologue in heaven, in which God gives the devil Mephistopheles permission to tempt Faust. Mephistopheles then goes to Faust and offers him wealth, women, honor... anything he wishes; in return Faust must surrender his soul to the devil when Mephistopheles has succeeded in blotting out Faust's ambition and his yearning for higher things; whenever Faust finds one moment so fair that he asks it to linger. Faust agrees to the terms, and they sign the pact in blood. Mephistopheles first tries Faust with the sensual pleasures of drinking and carousing. This failing, he decides to tempt Faust with love and so takes him to the Witches' Kitchen and gives him a potion which restores Faust's youth. Then follows the famous Margret( or Gretchen) episode. With Mephistopheles' help, Faust seduces the young girl. Her brother Valentin is killed in a duel with Faust, who is forced to flee the city. Gretchen gives birth to a child, which she kills in a frenzy of despair, and then she is thrown in prison to await execution. Faust and Mephistopheles tries to rescue her, but she refuses to escape because she has repented her sins and wishes to atone with her death. As she dies, Mephistopheles cries out that she is damned, but heavenly voices



proclaim her saved. So ends Part I.

In Part II Faust and Mephistopheles go to the court of the German emperor, whom they aid in his financial difficulties by introducing paper money, and they are told to call up Helen, but she disappears at his touch; the allegorical expression of Goethe's belief that perfection can not be obtained suddenly and without real striving. Next Faust is transported to Greece, where with Mephistopheles' aid he succeeds in winning Helen. Their Marriage symbolizes Goethe's own poetic ambition; the union of Northern art and poetry with the Greek ideal of beauty<sup>4</sup>. The offspring of the pair, Euphorion, soars too high in the air and falls dead; this is Goethe's representation of Byron. Helen again vanishes. After aiding the emperor in battle, Faust settles down to the governing of a land, where he devotes himself to the welfare of others. Anticipating the accomplishment of his aims, he experiences a moment of bliss to which he might say, "Tarry!" Then he dies. Mephistopheles, believing that the contract has been fulfilled, claims Faust's soul, but angels maintain that the "moment" has been attained not through the devil's help but

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<sup>4</sup>. John G. Robertson, A History of German Literature, (Edinburg, 1949), p. 289.



through Faust's own spiritual growth; in spite of Me-  
phistopheles. They bear Faust's soul to heaven, where  
it is welcomed by Gretchen and Mary.



Faust: A Symbolic Interpretation

Theme statement: There is a woven pattern of inherent symbolism throughout the fabric of Goethe's drama. Each interweaving of the life of Faust completes a whole symbolic thought. Each whole unit encompasses the entire design; that man's existence engulfs the search for his soul and the summation of that search; that this continuum of his life experiences, good and evil, becomes the thread by which this search is woven with and the weaver, his inner-self, becomes manifested in the cloth of his redeemed soul.

I. Goethe believed that man possessed in his nature everything necessary to gain valid perceptions in his search for truth. Faust symbolically communicates this thought.

A. Faust is an epic of man's life thrust in his search for truth and knowledge.

B. The beginning of the drama and the dialogue between Mephistopheles and the Lord heralds the opening of Faust's experiences with good and evil.

C. Another major germ of the story rest in the intervention of the Chorus of Spirits.

II. Evil can only act upon man by temptation; thus making one man the instrument by which he can perform his evil upon another.





A. Margret's and Toper's fall is an example of the work of evil, indirectly.

B. Mephistopheles' attempts to bring about Faust's fall through the failings of Faust himself.

III. The second part of Faust becomes the more symbolic, the more reflective, and the more figurative of the two- part drama.

A. In Part I, Faust is an evolvment of Faust's involvement with the microcosm followed by his disillusionment with Mephistopheles.

B. Beginning with Part II of the drama, Mephistopheles introduces Faust to the all- encompassing macrocosm; thus Faust's insatiable desire for truth and knowledge is revived and reactivated.

IV.. Again figuration emerges through the advent of the Mothers, who represent the creative powers of the imagination. To Faust, they become the yearning spirits, making him the striver after the ideal.

A. To find this ideal Faust must go back to the past; to the originator of the ideal; to Greece.

B. On his imaginative and surrealistic voyage he passes through successive phases of his ultimate goal which is culminated in his union with Helen, the Ideal of Beauty.

C. The offspring of their union, Euphorion, personifies Poetry.



V. Faust again becomes disillusioned and dissatisfied with his human existence and his experiences with his environment.

A. His military assistance to the king becomes meaningless.

B. His fear of sloth and pessimism makes him reflective.

VI. Faust becomes reincarnated as Good by combating evil with his own personal weapons and he overcomes pessimism with action.

A. Faust's search for knowledge and truth is rewarded by his redemption.

B. Redemption and inspiration is unattainable if it is alien to one's own nature. Faust possesses this innate quality; therefore he is purged and redeemed.

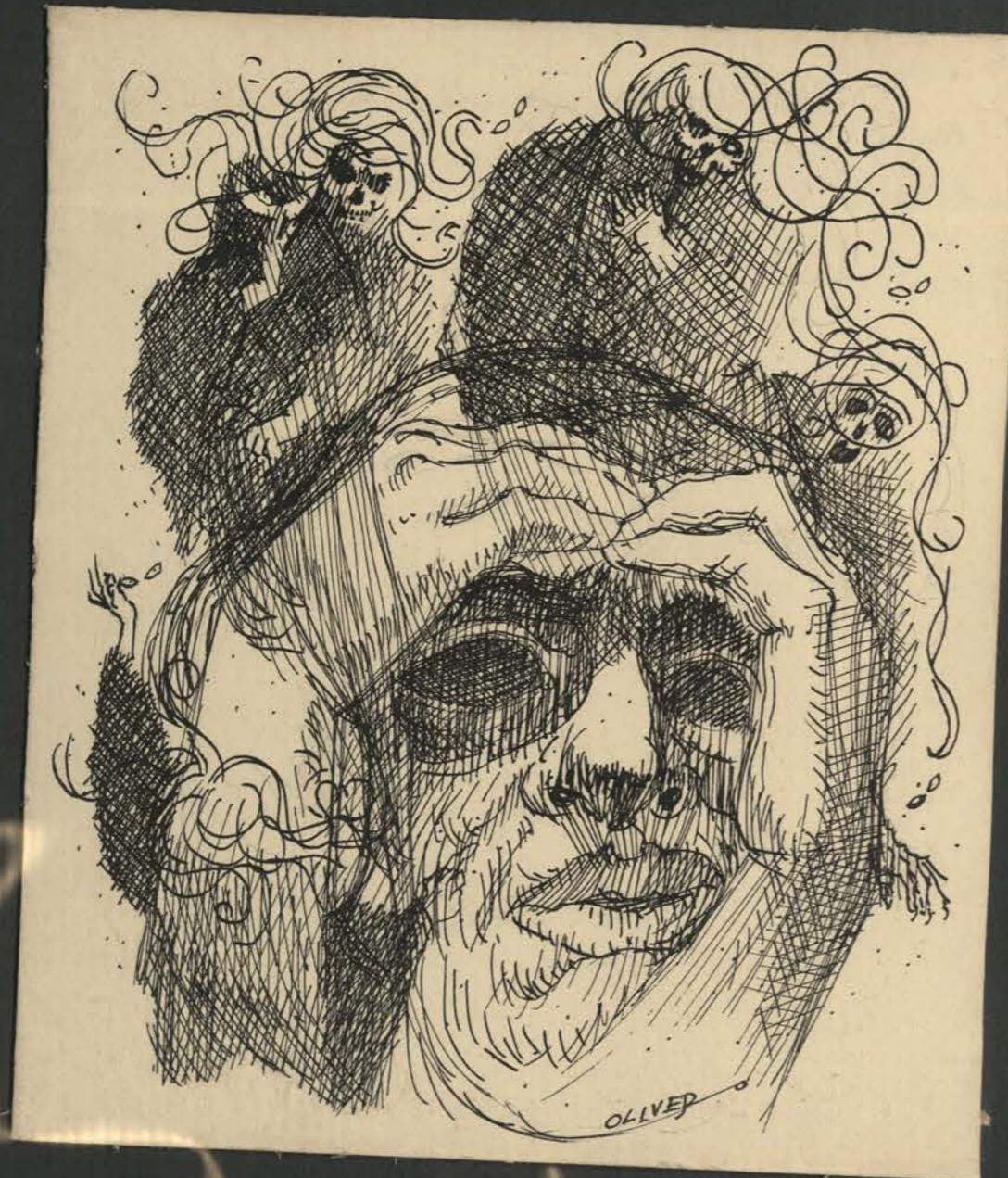
C. Faust's deliverance arrives at the moment of his death and thus ends a vast Commedia of Modern Man.



Faust: A Symbolic Interpretation

Inventiveness of a plot was literally unnecessary for Goethe's Faust; for it transcribed the whole from his own experiences. Writing was for him a kind of "Psychic Purging", and the Faust, though intended as an allegory of every man, is also a symbolic picture of Goethe's own life - sphere. This extension of the writer's own life in relationship to the story of Doctor Faust is symbolic in itself; but the truly intrinsic values of his symbolism lie in the idea of a continuum of man's existence encompassing the search for his soul and the summation of that search. From this digested precis' of the writer's approach and intention, I will merely attempt to exemplify and illuminate the germ of Goethe's theme: that the abyss of error and the struggle of man to cross that chasm is accomplished by and through one's inner-self; that course is attainable by a bridge, a gossamer thing, symbolic for its fragility; that fragile ground separating good and evil.

One must seek Goethe's wisdom of good and evil primarily in the imagies and symbols of his lyrics and the figures of his dramas and narrative works.







Goethe believed that man possesses in his nature everything he needs to gain valid perceptions and awarenesses, and the deep satisfaction which he finds in the unceasing contemplation and reflection of world and life; and the ceaseless inquiry into these secrets will be sufficient in his search for truth. The epitome of this thought can be found in the passage, "... and at the bottom it is pure silliness (to inquire) whether a man have something from himself or from others..."; the point stressed is that the chief thing is to have a great ambition, and possess the skill and persistence to carry it out.<sup>5</sup>

The story of Faust is an epic of man's life thrust whose momentum is supplied by his insatiable desire and ambition for knowledge and truth, sought through means of good and evil. Faust has a figurative significance; whether we call it allegory or symbolism; whether we regard it as abstract idea clothed in concrete form, or as a concrete form shadowing an abstract idea.

In the beginning of the drama, we are confronted with the lines:

<sup>5</sup> Karl Vietor, Goethe the Thinker (Mass., 1950), p. 59.



Whilst still he sees the earthly day,  
 So long it shall not be forbidden,  
 Whilst still man strives, still must  
 He stray.<sup>6</sup>

This is the opening of Faust's experiences with good and evil and the key to the ending of his life. Here it is made clear why Faust, in spite of his relapses into sin is worthy of the divine intervention at the last moment; Therefore, sin is, in imperfect man, the necessary accompaniment of effort. It can only be avoided by stagnation. Even in the portrayal of the Earth-Spirit, Goethe personifies it as the active, vital forces of nature, the principle of change and growth within the universe; as such, he is the giver of all gifts to man, both good and evil. For God's living garment is living, visible nature, in which God clothes himself for our perception.<sup>7</sup>

This also becomes a philosophical explanation of the origin of all being, which is the real search undertaken by Faust. Another major key to the allegory is the intervention of the Chorus of Spirits.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>. Buckner B. Trawick, World Literature: Vol. II (N.Y., 1963), p. 218.

<sup>7</sup>. A. G. Latham, Goethe's Faust ( N.Y., 1930), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup>. Ibid., p. 133.



These spirits become commentators of either good or evil consequences or both. They mourn the wreck of the world Faust has ruined by his curse. They urge him to build it up again in his own heart; here an antithesis is present: is it repentance, a return to harmony with the moral order of things, or is it mere sensual experience and enjoyment of life, which he has cursed without having tasted it. Just as in the *Witches Kitchen*,<sup>9</sup> Goethe has often given an allegorical turn to the fantastic scenes of the *Witches Revel*,<sup>10</sup> in his *Walpurgis-Night*; or, he has made it a vehicle of satire upon contemporary men and movement.<sup>11</sup> Thus it is very probable that the climb up the mountain is an allegory of the struggle for life; the effort to save oneself at the cost of ones neighbors. It is a picture of confusion of worldly aims; a kind of Vanity Fair.

At the end of the this chaos, order and redemption is at hand. A conception is made that the devil is restrained, by a higher hand, from inflicting direct harm upon man or interfering with the course of human

<sup>9</sup>. Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>10</sup>. G. K. Anderson and R. Warnock, *The World in Literature*: Vol. II. (N.J., 1951), p.498.

<sup>11</sup>. A. G. Latham, *Goethe's Faust* ( N.Y., 1930), p.48.





nature and this is carried out consistently. He can only act upon man by temptation; thus making one man the instrument by which he can execute his evil upon another. Therefore, over innocent Margret, he has no power. Faust must be the tool by which she falls. It is not Mephistopheles' sword that pierces Valentine, but the sword of Faust at his prompting. Even the Toppers who are "sing'd by purgatorial fire" give themselves into his hands by their drunkenness. And so, though he can smooth Faust's way to the dungeon, Faust himself must be the actual agent by whom Margret is set free.

I have undertaken to treat the Faust drama in two parts merely because it was conceived in two parts; because it is mostly literature in the first part and artful symbolism in the second; and because Part I was a literary revival of an original ancient story by a young writer, while Part II is a mellowed, reflective allegory of man. Here the Faust story becomes a mere medium for an abstract expression.

In the first part of the Faust story, as Faust is on the verge of quitting his new mentor, Mephistopheles, the latter announces his program in the following words:

" First the little world, and then  
The great we'll see."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>. Ibid., p. 423.



From the little world, obscurity, to the great world, the brilliant frivolity of the court, Faust takes on a slow emergence of healing by time. It is a figurative portrayal divided into four watches of one night. They are personified by tiny elves who, as powers of nature, are non-moral, and administers indifferently to the good and evil. The completion of this healing is manifested with the dawn of the new day. symbolically the new life of Faust.

The Carnival Masquerade becomes an allegory of moral, civil, and political life. Literally it becomes a means by which Faust and Mephistopheles gain foothold in court; However, Faust's visit to the Mothers, on the urging of the court, returns one to the symbolism of the drama. The Mothers are the creative powers of the imagination and the ideas embodied in the domain of the mind. To Faust, they become the yearning spirit that finds no resting place; no abiding satisfaction in the world of phenomena; for the ideal, abstract world is the only real one.

With their help Faust, the striver of the ideal, is able to begin his search. Here follows the union of Faust with Helen. Goethe binds them together and impart to that union a symbolic significance. Faust symbolises medieval Europe, groping blindly after higher ideals. Such an ideal, that of beauty, typified in Helen, it finds in Greek art. From its





first glimpses of the ideal, its essence provides an invocation of the powers of the imagination. Europe cannot rest until she has entered into full possession of it. She is paralysed; her material life is in the present, her intellectual life in the past. But the soul of the past, classical antiquity, can only be revived and wedded to the present, the medieval spirit, through the result of patient research; and not by any single, impassionate act of the imagination. Creative genius, the idealistic Faust, is the only one who can bring life into the dead past; but not without the labor of energetic scholarship. Here Faust becomes the character Homunculus who, for Goethe, is the symbolic representation for the soul of Faust in its striving after the highest ideal of beauty and knowledge. Others, such as Schroder, feel he is the humanistic movement, the revived interest in Greek art; however, he is considered the pure abstract human mind, without sense organs, and anterior to all experiences.

To win Helen, to attain the ideal of beauty, the crowning achievement of the Greek spirit, Faust must pass, step by step, through the successive phases of which this is the ultimate goal; he must relive the evolution of Greek art. To translate this mental process into sensible symbols, Faust is carried on a visit to the phatom Greek world; the legions of Hellenic



myth. This also becomes a linkage with the Walpurgis night sequence which is regarded as a "fantasia" upon the theme of evolution in a three-fold variation: the evolution of the artistic sense of beauty; portrayed in the course of Greek art, the evolution of the surface of the habitual earth; portrayed in the controversy between the Vulcanists and the Neptunists, and the evolution of man; portrayed in Homunculus' striving after corporeal existence. The action of the Classical Walpurgis night falls into three parts: Faust's quest of the ideal of beauty, which terminates at the end of his descent into Hades through the Temple of Apollo; Mephistopheles' quest of the ideal of ugliness, which terminates with his assumption of the form of a Phorkyad; and Homunculus' quest of existence, which terminates with the shattering of his bottle at the feet of Galatea, and his entrance upon a course of evolution.<sup>13</sup>

Again an antithesis appear in the drama: here Mephistopheles' pursuit of the Lamiae and the pursuit of Faust for Helen becomes a comparison of bestial lust in contrast to that of ideal love. Then follows

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G.K. Anderson and R. Warnock, The World in Literature, Vol. II ( N. J. 1951), p. 534.





the episode of the Kabiri. A symbolic interpretation of these deities, "everé burning for the unattainable", is of successive religions in which the aspirations of man after the unknowable have from time to time been embodied: the three which are brought to the feast of the Indian, Egyptian, and Pelasgian faiths; the fourth, claiming to be the only true one, is the faith of the ancient Hebrew, the cult of Jehovah; and the three that are not forthcoming are Buddhism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism, all unknown in the Greek world; while the eighth, "whom none hath thought hereto", is the all embracing religion of the future.<sup>14</sup>

As it has been stated, the union of Faust and Helen symbolises the union of medieval with Greek culture effected by the Renaissance. Medieval Europe came into actual contact with the Greek world, on Greek soil, by advent of the crusades. But this was merely the planted and fertilizes seed; the actual growth did not began till two centuries later. This is represented by the union of Faust and Helen.

"As I gaze there springs an urchin,  
From the woman's lap he leapeth  
To the man, from sire to mother,"<sup>15</sup>

This urchin is the offspring of the union of Faust and Helen, Euphorion. Goethe himself says that he is

14. A. G. Latham, Goethe's Faust (N.Y., 1930), p. 446.

15. Ibid., p. 341.



not a human, but only an allegorical being. In him is personified Poetry, which is tied to no time, to no place, and to no person. He becomes then the genius of Poetry. In a later passage, however, he is momentarily identified with Byron; and yet, he is also symbolizing the culture of modern times; the child of classical antiquity and romantic medievalism. Personalities again become a point of symbolic reference with the Three Mighty Men. Here Goethe personifies the brutal elements of warfare in three allegorical forms who are the leaders of Mephistopheles' phantom army. From this point and with the aid of the phantom army, Faust gains increasing popularity with the king. Despite the help of Faust and his own good intentions, the king is still unable to better himself or his empire. After all of his earnestness and hard work, Faust is still confronted with human frailties. The tragedy of Faust began with Faust's discontent with the human lot. He called magic to his aid and covered the fields of human experience: selfish love- indulgence, court favor, art, and at last creative activity; Even before his compact with the devil he had an inkling of the truth that the fittest goal of mankind is in creativity. Thus at the end of his career he comes back upon the truth divinely perceived at the beginning; and putting from himself, voluntarily, the more than human power which hampers



the individuality of his actions, accepts the limitations of men and fights with purely human weapons his battle with his old enemy care, brooding discontent, who first drove him into the armhold of magic. Care may be paraphrased as Pessimism which is to be combated by action.

Far from lolling contented "on a bed of sloth", Faust is seized by death in the midst of strenuous effort. Mephistopheles has not drawn Faust down with him. Faust, in spite of serious lapses of evil, has gone his own way and dragged Mephistopheles after him, and in the long run has ever shaken himself from him; except as a mere human servitor. The words spoken by the Lord in the beginning of the drama, should have made it apparent and clear that Faust's blind strivings were not destined to end in his perdition. Faust's redemption by divine love is exemplified by the chorus of angels "strewing roses". The roses strewn by the heavenly chorus are emblematic of heavenly love which is wholly unselfish and unsensual; devilish love is wholly and bestially sensual. The flowers glow with a heat foreign to the atmosphere of hell and stings the devils with flames. Mephistopheles alone withstands them, but they are unable to inspire in him a feeling alien to his nature; they only provoke him to a passion of impotent lust and when he recovers his self-





possession the prize, Faust, has been wrested from his grasp.

" That the unworthy all pass, with  
The unearthy all, shine the endless  
Star above, Core of immortal Love."<sup>16</sup>

Here the endless star is the soul, the core of immortal love which shines out when all the earthy covering has been purged away by persecution or ascetic discipline.

" 'Tis not all free from stain were it  
Asbestos."<sup>17</sup>

Again fire is symbolically interwoven in the cloth of this drama. For as fire is par excellence the cleansing element, so asbestos, which resists fire, is taken as a type of the highest attainable earthly purity. With the immortal part of Faust there is still blended something of earth which not even fire can purge it of; thus the spiritual angels find it burdensome to carry. With the death of Faust terminates the drama of Faust. But as a dynamic and symbolic example of human existence, there can be no end. For Faust, in its allegory and symbolism, is the summation of man's search for his soul. The germ of Goethe's thesis of man, his inner-

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<sup>16.</sup> Ibid., p. 416.

<sup>17.</sup> Ibid., p. 418.



self, and his environment seems to premeate, comparably in these prosiac lines:

" And one of the elders of the city said,  
Speak to us of Good and Evil.  
And he answered:  
Of the good in you I can speak, but not  
Of the evil.  
For what is evil but good tortured by its  
Own hunger and thirst?  
Verily when good is hungry it seeks food  
Even in dark caves, and when it thirsts it  
Drinks even of dead waters.

You are good when you are one with yourself.  
Yet when you are not one with yourself you  
Are not evil.  
For a divided house is not a den of thieves;  
It is only a divided house.  
And a ship without rudder may wander aim-  
lessly among perilous isles yet sink not to  
The bottom.

You are good when you strive to give of  
Yourself.  
Yet you are not evil when you seek gain for  
Forself.  
For when you strive for gain you are but a  
Root that clings to the earth and sucks at  
Her breast.  
Surely the fruit cannot say to the root,  
"Be like me, ripe and full and ever giving  
Of your abundance."  
For to the fruit giving is a need, as re-  
ceiving is a need to the root.

You are good when you are fully awake in  
your speech,  
Yet you are not evil when you sleep while  
Your tongue staggers without purpose.  
And even stumbling speech may strengthen  
A weak tongue.

You are good when you walk to your goal  
Firmly and with bold steps.  
Yet you are not evil when you go thither  
Limping.  
Even those who limp go not backward.  
But you who are strong and swift, see that  
You do not limp before the lame, deeming it  
Kindness.







You are good in countless ways, and you  
are not evil when you are not good,  
You are only loitering and sluggard,  
Pity that the stags cannot teach swiftness  
to the turtles.

In your longing for your giant self lies  
Your goodness: and that longing is in all of  
You.

But in some of you that longing is a  
Torrent rushing with might to the sea,  
Carrying the secrets of the hillsides and the  
Songs of the forest.

And in others it is a flat stream that loses  
Itself in angles and bends and lingers before  
It reaches the shore.

But let not him who longs much say to him  
who longs little, "wherefore are you slow  
And halting?"

For the truly good ask not the naked,  
"Where is your garment?" nor the houseless,  
"What has befallen your house?"<sup>18</sup>

Goethe's Faust is more than an allegory of man's sell-  
ing his soul for power, pleasure, knowledge, and wealth;  
it is a study of the struggle against the impulses of  
negation and evil which resides in every normal man; it  
is a lesson of promise that so long as man strives to-  
ward a worthy goal, he is deserving and sure of redemp-  
tion, and that road itself is the goal and life is its  
own end and must justify itself from within. Perfection  
is beyond our reach; thus our highest achievement is a  
noble striving, a tireless creative living. For in its  
greatness Faust becomes a vast commedia of modern man.

<sup>18</sup>.

Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet ( N. Y., 1963), pp. 64- 63.



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