

# THE RESTLESS SPIRIT



## A SCENE BY SCENE STUDY OF GOETHE'S FAUST

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*With Selected Illustrations by*  
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**POETRY IN TRANSLATION**

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## ABOUT THIS WORK

The Restless Spirit is a scene by scene commentary on, and a detailed analysis of, Goethe's Faust Parts I and II, which considers the Romantic background of Part I, the move towards Classicism in Part II, and the moral and spiritual issues which Goethe raises throughout the work. In grappling with the complexity of the emerging Romantic Movement with its restless intellectual urge, and later in attempting a resolution of the Romantic situation, Goethe was handling many of the deepest problems of his age, and it is not surprising that he was forced to leave many issues unresolved. The reader who wishes to progress beyond a simple contemplation of the tragedy of Gretchen in Part I is presented here with a detailed discussion of Faust's Romantic beginnings and later progress towards potential fulfilment, through his intricate pact with Mephistopheles and its dramatic outcome. While encouraging a positive view of the richness, poetic validity and complex treatment Goethe provides, this analysis does not shirk the more problematic moral, spiritual and social aspects of Goethe's treatment of the subject, and leaves the reader to make his or her own judgement as to the success with which Goethe justifies Faust's ultimate 'redemption'.

Line number references in the main text correspond to the author's complete translation of Goethe's Faust, Parts I and II, available in both print (ISBN-13: 978-1507547267, ISBN-10: 1507547269) and digital editions ([www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/German/Fausthome.htm](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/German/Fausthome.htm)).

## JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was born in Frankfurt am Main in 1749. In 1774 he published his first major work, the self-revelatory novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, in which he created the prototype of the Romantic hero, and instigated a European fashion. He consequently became a leading figure in the Sturm und Drang movement, which celebrated a Promethean restlessness of spirit as opposed to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Later, in the service of Duke Karl August at Weimar, Goethe took on a wide variety of social and cultural roles and, with his journey to Italy in 1786-88, turned extensively to Classical art and thought as a means of achieving greater personal balance and perspective. He also developed a range of scientific interests, for example plant biology and the theory of colour. His later literary achievements include the drama of *Faust*, and a wealth of shorter poems and lyrics embodying his mature philosophy. Goethe died in Weimar in 1832.

*‘Inferna tetigit possit ut supera assequi:  
I touched the depths, to reach the heights.’*

SENECA





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## INTRODUCTION: ROMANTICISM AND GOETHE'S RESPONSE

Romanticism is the apotheosis of the Individual. And the Romantic Movement in all its ramifications, with all its wealth of creation, with its vast range of artistic expression, is an identifiable movement precisely because it rests on and returns to a single unifying theme. That theme is the Individual Mind, the supremacy of that Mind, in particular its powers of Imagination and Creation, and the conflicts between the passions and aspirations of that Mind and the reality into which it is born. Romanticism as a way of being in the world, and as an ethos for creative art, changed the balance of thought, and the focus of perception. It ultimately completed the reverse Copernican revolution, from a world centred on society and the divine, to a world centred on humanity and the individual. Where the Classical world saw human beings in society, where the Medieval world conceived of them in their respective positions on the ladder of God, and as parts of the Divine plan, Romanticism, fuelled by the Enlightenment, starts from the Individual and goes on from there to question the meaning of being. Its premise is therefore Existentialist, and its outcome is Modernity.

Its roots go deep, beginning in the Middle Ages with the intellectual analysis carried out by scholastic thought, and with radical literary assertions of Individual life, particularly secular love. It is the heir of the Renaissance (Shakespeare anticipates many of the emotional aspects of Romanticism in the tensions between head and heart within his plays, for example in *Hamlet*), the heir too of the new Science, and of Cartesian Sceptical philosophy, and of the vast expansion of geographical horizons. It takes energy from, and feeds energy to, social and intellectual revolution. It spawns Modernity, and sets up a dualism, a tension with Classicism that is with us still. Its force is not spent, and cannot be spent as long as Individuality itself has life, and as long as there is a fundamental tension between the Individual life and the Human condition.



Jerusalem - The Emanation of the Giant Albion, Plate 27  
William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

## The Restless Spirit

At its extremes Romanticism celebrated a power of Individual vision that claimed access to the ultimate truths behind sensory phenomena. It attempted to grasp them through creative striving, through sensual and occult excess, through re-interpretation of human social, religious, mystical and anthropological history, and above all through the expression of intense feelings and emotions. The Individual creator was its supreme adornment, and Nature, the external creation, was a human counterpart, of which humanity was both part and not part. Isolated from his or her contemporaries through sensitivity and intensity of perceptions, in conflict with the limitations and boundaries of existence, in rebellion against social structures and conventions, he or she sought solutions that were exceptional, beyond the accepted modes of being in the world. The Romantics questioned the human relationship to, and ultimately the existence of, a deity. They questioned the basis of the social order. They questioned every frustration and every barrier that appeared to thwart personal fulfilment, and disappointed by the failure of society to evolve rapidly enough, and by the intellectual and emotional failure to fully grasp the world, directly and intuitively, they questioned the very possibility of fulfilment itself.

Some, often the Romantics of the first wave, like Chateaubriand, Wordsworth, Coleridge, resolve or partially resolve their issues within conventional religion and end in a resolution outside the Romantic Movement proper. Others like Blake, or much later Kierkegaard, reinterpret religion and their relationship to the divine in radical, personal ways. Their concept of the immediate communication with the divine, paves the way to the fully-fledged religious existentialist Moment, of Humanity alone in Eternity face to face with the Divine. And it anticipates Baudelaire and Rimbaud's agonised poetry of difficult and individualistic belief. Religious Existentialism is the heir of Romanticism.

Others, are profound agnostics or atheists, like Shelley. A key figure in atheistic Romanticism, inheriting the strain of English radical thought that stretches back to Marlowe, yet recognising the deeper frustrations of a new social and intellectual sceptical reality, Shelley struggles ceaselessly to resolve the problems of extreme self-consciousness face to face with brute existence, of the wars of the heart and the head, of a materialism inadequate to human aspirations and an idealism that is beyond attainment, relationship torn apart by incompatibility between individuals, and

imagination doomed to plunge after every fiery flight into exhausted darkness. Shelley's desperate position is paralleled by De Sade's destructive sensual materialism, and by the inexorable logic of the Sceptical philosophy as it worked its way through Descartes, Hume and Kant, and it anticipates Nietzsche's ironic questioning of all values.

Some Romantics worked all their lives within the self-conscious artistic expression of feeling, communicating sensitivity, stress, and pathos, from Beethoven and Schubert to Chopin, Tchaikovsky and Elgar in music, from Goya and Delacroix to the post-impressionists Van Gogh and Gauguin in painting, from Heine and Lermontov to Ibsen and Chekhov in Literature. They focused on the human within the individual, and the individual within humanity in a fruitful tension. They exhibit many of the key traits of the Movement.

And there is another group, of whom Goethe is one of the most significant, a group which includes Mozart and Brahms, Pushkin, Leopardi, and Byron, who experience Romanticism, are in sympathy with it when young, and yet who work to find a resolution beyond it in a Classical or Stoic poise, in a balanced and broad human sympathy, and in creative activity.

Romanticism is nothing if not a Movement that concerns itself with the Individual. And it is not surprising to find that each of its protagonists finds Individual solutions to the fundamental dilemmas and problems of the Romantic situation, and that the Movement itself can therefore seem fragmentary, united only in its disunity. But the key theme of the Individual is there at its root, and the whole of Romanticism is a woven carpet, of complex design, with overlapping areas and common strands.

I shall maintain here that Goethe crucially experienced and anticipated Romanticism and countered it with a Classical middle-way that he felt himself towards over a long lifetime, and expressed most successfully in *Faust*. In his youth as part of the pre-Romantic 'Sturm and Drang' (Storm and Stress) Movement he explored the dimensions of sensitivity, intensity, extreme self-consciousness. Then through a Classical revaluation, inspired by his Italian Journey, and coupled to his scientific interests, he corrected that Romanticism by a Classical poise, and a worldly 'wisdom' which like Byron's in *Don Juan* created detachment from himself and his creations, added humour to his verse, and moved away from extremism towards a

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positive world-view based on restraint, tolerance and human creativity. While understanding Romantic excess, the painful scepticism of a Shelley, the obsessive qualities of a Hölderlin, the ironies and self-mockery of a Baudelaire, Heine or Rimbaud, he evades their positions, and takes his own stand based on Nature, Classical sanity, and the ultimate beauty and richness of existence. This sanity, this broad-based empathy evokes comparisons with Homer, Shakespeare and Dante.

Goethe grappled with an even more complex situation than those three writers, who inherited beliefs and social structures that though changing provided temporarily a solid ground on which to create. Homer took over a mythological and semi-historical value framework, Dante expressed a fusion of conventional and radical medieval Christian and secular thought, while Shakespeare inherited the humanist Renaissance developments of Italy and France already deeply imbued with Classicism. Goethe had a more difficult task given the rate of change of the society around him and the intellectual climate. He was forced back towards Classicism to achieve stability, and to the study of Nature to provide an external counterbalance to his internal sensitivities. He anticipated the power both of sceptical philosophy and of the sciences, seeing their destructive as well as their creative potential, saw perhaps more than many that both might triumph intellectually and yet that the victory might be a Pyrrhic one.

Romanticism was driven by an immense intellectual curiosity and a corresponding sense of frustration: a vast drive towards Truth, even at the expense of relationship and fulfilment, love and beauty. Its chief means was through the Individual sensibility and its freedom to think and create. *Cogito ergo sum*, the Cartesian ‘I think therefore I am’, was its rallying cry, liberty from society and its constraints was its *modus operandum*. If the Individual is the new centre of the human universe, then the burden falls on the Individual to generate, from within, the whole set of values, the whole content of human truth. Given the extent to which our own personal culture and development also reflects humanity’s culture and development, that mission is doomed to failure, and Romanticism is therefore more notable for its exploratory, analytic, and ultimately destructive capabilities than for its resolutions of the human problem. Shelley, Rimbaud and Nietzsche are potent examples of this.



Jerusalem - The Emanation of the Giant Albion, Plate 1  
William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

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Romanticism is an adolescent, whose intellectual capabilities exceed experience, and it is not surprising that it exhibits the desire for freedom, the destructiveness of accepted values, an emotional wildness, and an incapacity for lasting relationship that intellectually precocious adolescents may exhibit. Equally it often possesses the strengths of that state, a refusal to be bound by tired and cynical social systems, and inhuman moral codes: a glorious intensity of feeling and expression: and a deep creative energy. The failures of social revolutions to fulfil their most radical agendas, the sceptical and scientific erosion of religious and mystical beliefs, the inability to sustain emotional flight above the mundane, disappointed and marred the romantic impulse. Somehow the divine restlessness, the search for ultimate truth and value, the yearning for perfect relationship, failed to find fulfilment. And Romanticism moves into Modernity, wiser, sadder, smaller and (eventually!) humbler. I would argue that, in *Faust Part I* Goethe anticipated a great deal of that arc, and tried in *Part II* to offer an alternative way forward. ‘Romanticism’, he once said, ‘is a disease’.

*Faust*, the dramatic character, was ready-made for Goethe as a vehicle through which to express the new situation of the Individual attempting to pierce single-handedly the fabric of the Universe. Based on a vaguely historical character, Dr *Faust of Bamberg* (1520), recorded also in *Ingolstadt* (1528), and *Nuremberg* (1532), astrologer, and probably charlatan, who likely died at *Staufen near Frieburg* in the early 1540’s, *Faust* is nevertheless essentially a literary character from the beginning. His story was told in anonymous chapbooks (*The History of Dr Johann Faust*, published by Spies, Frankfurt, 1587, was followed by Widmann’s version in 1599, edited in 1674 by Pfitzer) that introduced the restless scholar dissatisfied with the limits of human knowledge, making a pact with the devil, journeying through possible human experience, and reaching a dismal end. The moralising tale was quickly translated into English, and Kit Marlowe’s play *Dr Faustus*, which elevated the artistic presentation while keeping much of the content, was exported back into Germany and Austria. There, much imitation followed, including the somewhat debased eighteenth century puppet-play versions that Goethe knew.

The theme was a gift. *Faust* traditionally was the isolated scholar-magician, dabbling with arcane knowledge, therefore the lone Individual. The character’s restless intellectual curiosity and desire for truth was in embryo that of the more-developed Renaissance and Enlightenment-driven

eighteenth century. Goethe's challenge was to take the conventional Christian framework of the story, and its accompanying moral values, and make it carry the weight of pre-Romantic and ultimately Romantic angst, while also achieving a more modern resolution. Our judgement of Faust as a work of art partly involves an assessment of the degree to which he succeeded in absorbing, transforming and resolving the heterogeneous mass of material he used.

A brief account of Goethe's work on Faust is necessary. He created a first version, the *Ur-Faust* in his twenties in the 1770's. These were sketches in prose and verse for what became Part I, including the Gretchen tragedy, and remained unpublished until a revised but cut-down version with a few new scenes appeared in 1790. Part I was then completed between 1797 and 1806 and published in his late fifties, in 1808. Part II was created in his seventies and published after Goethe's death in 1832. Part I is therefore a mature man's revision of his youthful ideas. Part II is an older man's development of and resolution of that work. Goethe put into Faust not only his early pre-Romantic emotion, in all its depth, but also his later understanding of that state, and his attempt to resolve the problems for the Individual that it represented, through creative activity, and the acceptance of limitation.

If Faust does embody the Romantic paradigm in Part I, then we should expect to find him a restless spirit, dissatisfied with the inadequacy of the world and society, seeking inside himself the powers of the Individual soul to penetrate to a deeper or higher level of knowledge, emotionally frustrated, yearning, suffering from claustrophobia and intellectual doubt. His energy will be powerful but undirected. He will be attracted by power, and the possibilities of manipulation, but find relationship difficult. He will be self-centred, isolated, easily bored, outwardly harsh, but also capable of deep feeling for anything that offers an alternative to accepted constraint, and a possibility of purer and truer knowledge: therefore for Nature, innocence, beauty, freedom, fresh experience, and arcane knowledge.

Goethe's task will be to show Faust's search, highlight his failings, and track his evolution as a human being towards a nobler resolution. Goethe's concept of Faust's failings and of what constitutes a better outcome for him, are problematic and intriguing. If this Faust version is like its



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predecessors a morality play, we will have to consider the moral values it embodies. If Faust here is ultimately rescued from destruction and despair, we will have to consider whether that rescue is justified, and whether Goethe has successfully resolved the moral issues he has raised.

## PART I: DEDICATION

Goethe is at pains to make clear that what he is presenting is a work of art, removed at some distance from reality, an imaginative creation. He therefore provides both this Dedication, and the succeeding Prelude on Stage, to emphasise the layers of reality between the author and Faust's personal drama. Here, in the Dedication, Goethe, the Author, speaks. He is the creative originating reality out of which comes the play. The Dedication stresses that this work is the result of a lifetime's effort, and positions it as a work of the age of sentiment. We are therefore conditioned to anticipate an ongoing development from the previously published Part I during Part II, reflecting Goethe's own personal development that we may already be aware of through his poetry. But we are to place the whole work firmly within the value system of Goethe's blend of Classicism and Romanticism, and to approach it through poetry and feeling.

The Dedication is a beautiful piece of writing, and within it the tender, humane Goethe is clearly evident. The atmosphere of illusion, of time passing, of re-awakened memories, reminds us that this is art and not reality, but an art intimately connected to the author's life. Pushkin's Dedication at the start of *Eugene Onegin* springs irresistibly to mind, as a comparable though more explicit statement of intent written from a similar standpoint, slightly distancing the author from the work while conceding it as still intimately related to the author's own life.

## PART I: PRELUDE ON STAGE

We shift straight to the next level of reality, with the Prelude written for the Theatre Director, the Dramatist who is Goethe but not Goethe, and the Comedian who represents the Actors. Goethe is now starting to manipulate his puppets, and though we are entering the theatre we are made to think about the level of reality that presents a previously written drama, employing actors and not real people, in an environment created for commercial gain.

The Director sets out his objectives for the play, that it should be ‘weighty, but entertaining’ and we remember the phrase Goethe himself used about Part II, ‘very serious jokes’. And Goethe now enjoys himself portraying the sensitive Poet-Dramatist charged with pandering to the masses. Here is the embryonic Romantic, wishing to isolate himself from crudities, and write only for the depths, and for ‘posterity’. The Comedian presents an amusing worldly counterbalance. By now we are smiling.

Goethe uses the Director again to make a point that will be made hereafter in the play, that it does consist of many bits and pieces. Goethe was clearly conscious of the somewhat patchwork-quilt nature of his creation, and he makes a little fun of it, but with a serious point, that there is more to Faust than merely Faust’s ‘story’, and in fact much of its enduring charm lies in Goethe’s digressions, his poetry, his humour and his meld of Greek and Gothic backcloths, of Classical and Romantic elements.

The Poet condemns this populist *modus operandum*, but the Director strikes an important though humorous note by stressing social reality, as a corrective to Romantic illusion, only to be countered by the Poet again with a fine speech claiming the priority of the poet, and hinting at the core of the Romantic assertion of the inspired Individual. Fine, the Comedian replies, then use it, turn inspiration into activity. And here Goethe is sounding his deeper theme of creative activity rather than merely imagination as the key to the successful life. And, moreover, the Comedian says, make it a Love story, a Love play, throwing in as he does so a passing reference to

Goethe's semi-autobiographical letter-novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*! Once more Goethe stresses the multifarious nature of what he is offering, it won't appeal to everyone, but he is aiming it at the young, those still in growth, in development. And his serious point is that Faust provides an object lesson. If *Werther* led to copycat suicides he expects Faust to lead to more rounded and balanced human beings. He himself had made Romanticism's great mistake, excessive self-consciousness, and he is offering now a corrective, the fuller interpretation of human life.

Well, to talk to the young I need my youth again, cries the Poet-Dramatist, and it is a beautiful piece of verse he employs, conjuring up the age of sentiment, and the sweetness of the Romantic vision, of 'joy in illusion, and thirst for truth'. Surely, Goethe is implying, this is what youth is about, the Romantic fever, and I Goethe as the Poet-Dramatist am too old for all that to succeed. Not at all, says the Comedian, youth is needed for action, for activity, age will do fine for wisdom and art.

But back to the action we go with the Director. Show me the lot, he says. Make things happen. And Goethe repeats his main theme, that inspiration and feeling are not enough, that activity is essential, and that the broad-based life does not disdain to create first, and worry about the reception of its creation afterwards. Goethe is conscious of his own delay in completing Faust! On then to the next layer of reality, the play itself, with first a prologue to set the overall scene.

## PART I: PROLOGUE IN HEAVEN

**I**s Goethe serious? He now employs imagery of the Angels and the traditional God in Heaven, brings in a sort of devil in Mephistopheles, and presents us with an interesting pact (based on Job's Biblical trials) that presents us with all sorts of moral issues, not to say confusion! Goethe is mocking traditional ideas of a humourless Deity and its trappings. He clearly is having fun with all this as stage scenery, and not with any blasphemous intent: his key message is orthodox enough, that human destiny lies in ceaseless activity, and thus is inevitably linked to error, that activity is threatened by apathy and the devil can be seen as part of the divine plan to goad humanity into activity again. Goethe's use of Christian trappings is not without its problems, as we shall find later. They are best understood in the light of his own unorthodox and fundamentally Pantheistic views of a Divine Creativity at work in the Universe and visible in Nature, which ultimately is free of human concepts like Heaven and Hell, and in which everything human can be absorbed and renewed, regardless of its ethical status. It is certainly questionable whether Goethe believed in sin or evil as forces, rather than states of error into which human beings may fall. If we are expecting Faust therefore to be a clear-cut morality play, with an ethical evaluation of Faust, resulting logically in his redemption, as we find in Marlowe and the earlier versions of the Faust story, we will be disappointed.

In the Prologue, we are presented with the Archangels celebrating Light and Energy, as well as the tranquil Order created by the Divine Being. Clearly the universe is a place of eternal activity too. Then Mephistopheles appears, to report on the state of things on Earth, which allows Goethe some more fun at our expense, and in his dig at Reason a suggestion perhaps that Goethe is questioning the Enlightenment assumption that Mind is enough to solve human problems. If only the heart could follow the head, a true Romantic would reply. Shelley's heart inspired by Rousseau for example, countering his mind informed by Hume. Mephistopheles

hardly needs to provoke human beings to sin: they do it well enough on their own!

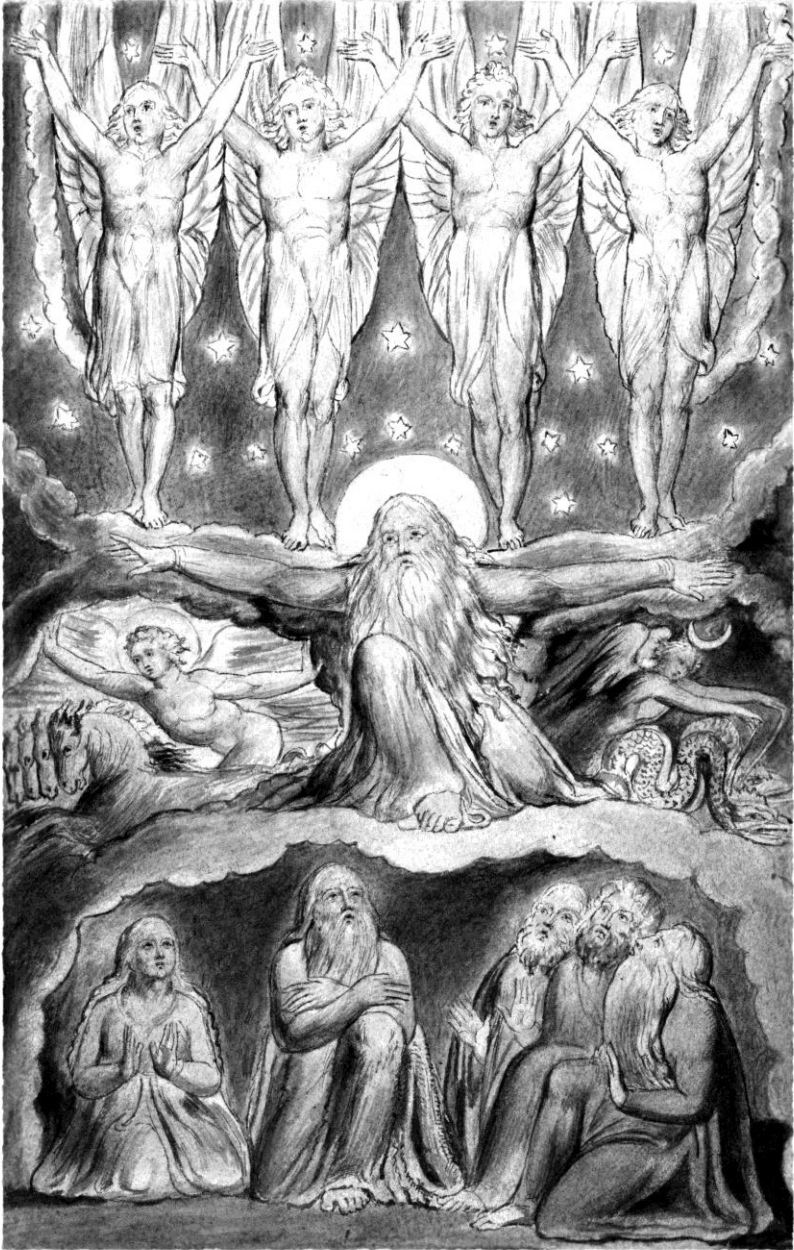
Now God and Mephistopheles give us our first oblique view of Faust. Apparently he is a restless spirit, seeking the highest, but dissatisfied with it all, and troubled by his heart, a condition Shelley well understood. Faust is at first glance the quintessential Romantic Individual, a striving mind bound to a whirlpool of emotions. God nevertheless sees Faust's potential.

Mephistopheles however asserts his claim, his right as devil to test Faust's allegiance to the good. God assents but delivers his moral let-out clause for Faust, that human life involves error. Catholic teaching after all anticipated failure and offered confession and repentance in this life, and, traditionally, Purgatory as a means of expiating sin hereafter. The requirement is to strive towards the right, although not only direct error, but also, as in Buddhism where a doctrine of quietism resulted, the indirect and unforeseen consequences of our actions may well create wrongs. God now offers up Faust to Mephistopheles.

Clearly this is all stage 'business' to show us the wager. Mephistopheles presumably already has every right to tempt Faust or what is the devil about? Mephistopheles, God declares, is a spirit of denial, a jesting spirit he has placed on Earth to goad human beings into action. And Mephistopheles has the last jesting word of the scene.

It has been suggested that the wager is hardly a wager because God cannot lose since error is the nature of human existence, and the devil is there to prod us into activity that leads to error! Faust will make his mistakes, but God already intends him for salvation. That is the case only if we assume that no spirit sins enough on Earth to be damned, an unlikely scenario if Goethe did believe in any of the trappings of conventional religion, though it is likely that he did not, at least not in Hell and damnation. We can of course choose to assume that God already knows through pre-destination what will happen to Faust, and that Faust is anyway intrinsically 'good', and can be abused and seduced but not ultimately corrupted.

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Illustrations of the Book of Job, Plate 15

William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

Goethe was prepared in *Faust* to use the Christian trappings, and to communicate a strong sense of divine grace and redemption at the end of the play, and regardless of his religious beliefs he has, I would contend, to convince us of the moral integrity of his play, and that *Faust* deserves the conventional redemption he prepares for him. It is fine to present a Pantheistic world and suggest that morality is less important than good intentions and creative activity, but even Goethe can't have it both ways, there are values reflected in Christianity, Humanism, and elsewhere, that we have to be convinced are being employed in art before we concede that art the highest place, certainly in the educational role that Goethe suggests his play will have for those still 'in development'. We need to be convinced that *Faust* is on the right path. If Goethe fails to address the moral issues deeply enough then Mephistopheles' role is undermined, and he may as well be an ironic and witty friend with magical powers, or merely an inner seductive voice, rather than an ambassador of the Devil. If we are not satisfied that *Faust* in the end travels the right path then Goethe fails to address the problem of Romanticism in *Faust*, and fails in *Faust* to provide a role model for those who wish to escape from Romanticism into some broader solution to the human condition. Which is not to say that Goethe did not provide such a role model in his own life.

The whole scene in Heaven can be interpreted as a symbolic statement ('everything transitory is only a parable': as the closing lines of *Faust* claim) of the internal conflicts within *Faust*, within Mankind. In that sense Mephistopheles is an aspect of *Faust*'s own spirit, personified: that part of his spirit which follows the worse while his divine part seeks the better, while God is a personification of the creative forces of the Universe, expressed also by the Archangels.

It is worth dwelling on Mephistopheles, a potent character and one of the delights of the play. He is presented as the ironic, cynical, witty spirit of denial for much of the play, and more as an aspect of humanity than a true demonic force. He can provide comedy, be the frustrated devil of popular literature, play *Faust*'s unwilling servant, and occasionally show a demon's teeth and claws. Much of the humour in the play derives from the counterpoint between the serious *Faust* and the mocking and irreverent Mephistopheles. *Faust*'s restless idealism and sentiment, is offset by Mephisto's relentless ridicule and attempts to cut *Faust* down to human



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size. Faust is rhetorical and high-flown, Mephisto down to earth and ruthless.

As the play progresses Mephisto is forced to become more subdued as Faust's activity becomes more mature and less hedonistic, and Mephistopheles is perversely placed in the position by their pact of helping Faust towards the good, and the altruistic, in order to help create the conditions under which he might win the wager.

Finally towards the end Mephistopheles, like Care, seeks to expose the deep theme of the denying spirit. He is that part in us which finds all achievement worthless and all activity soured by its inevitable transience and our mortality. He is the enemy of faith and optimism, the personification of sarcasm and mockery. He is the master of the debunking line, and the sardonic glance. He is the dark questioning within us that may often find the universe hollow, valueless and hostile. Why create at all, if all returns to the void? This is Goethe's fundamental question, the question at the heart of Faust, and one which he answers with his picture of the Creative universe, unfolding in Love and visible in Nature, where by our activity we link ourselves to the greater activity, and by our love to the greater Love. Faust's meaning and the meaning of the play is therefore contained in the Self's answer to its own deepest misgivings about life. Faust is the symbol of creative energy, which alone in Goethe's view gives ultimate purpose to a life, and which can ensure 'salvation' (in a non-conventional sense) even when that life is a journey of error and unintentional harm.

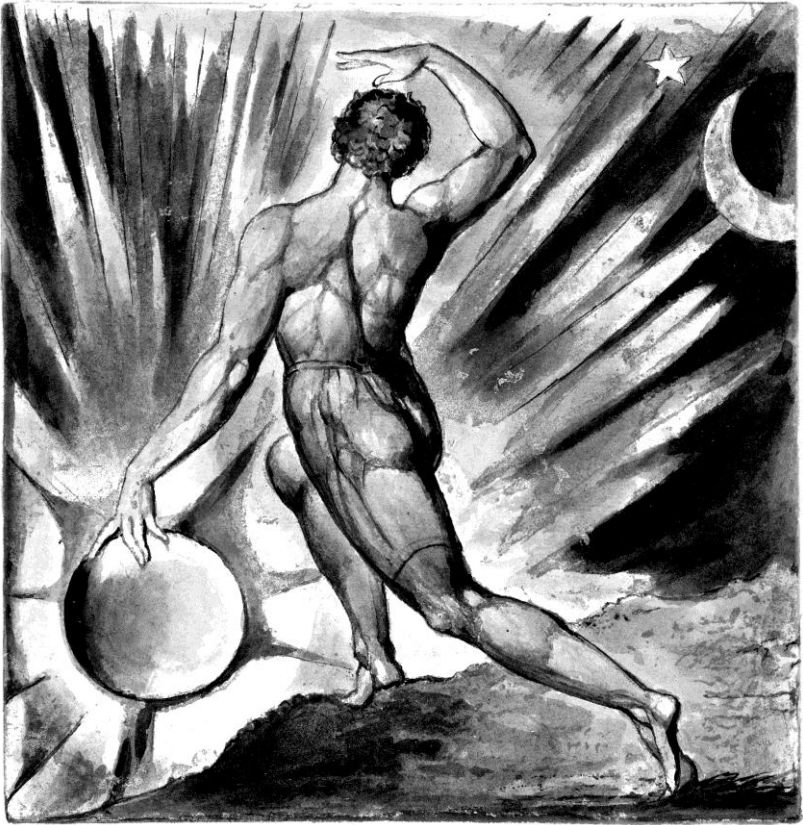
## PART I SCENE I: NIGHT

Now we enter into the play, on Earth, where we find Faust in his study. The stage direction shows him already restless, and he begins with a denial of the value of what he has learnt and what he now teaches. Learning destroys the joy of living but doesn't provide in return worldly honours or great wealth. He is now employing Magic to try and 'understand whatever binds the world's innermost core together'. Clearly he has had no unifying vision of the kind that Dante apprehends in the closing canto of the *Divine Comedy*. And the solution to his questioning and disillusionment does not appear likely to be a religious one, at least not conventionally so. Goethe's own early metaphysical views were developed from a heady mixture of neo-platonic, mystical and alchemical texts (See *Poetry and Truth*, Book VIII). He is after a direct intuition of essential truths, that formal knowledge does not give him. Choked by the dusty cell in which he exists, far from the beauty of moonlit Nature, he suffers, and turns to Magic as a route to a different grasp of reality. Nature has early been introduced as a corrective to the Mind's frustration, and this will not be the first time Goethe suggests that the answers lie beyond Reason alone.

Viewing the symbol of the Macrocosm, the wider Universe, Faust revives his heart and senses, the natural man. What he sees is some sort of cosmic diagram of interpenetrating angelic, or perhaps stellar and planetary energies, and the diagram alone has the power to delude him and calm him, so that he thinks he sees more clearly into universal Nature. Goethe may well be thinking of Dante's neo-platonic explanations in the *Divine Comedy* here, as well as of the diagrams in his own cabbalistic and mystical reading. Nevertheless Faust quickly admits it as a mere picture. Nature itself is otherwise, its fountains of energy flow from some unseen source, and to drink from that source is what the frustrated Faust desires. Goethe plays here to the very real sense most of us have, even those of us well-versed in modern science, of an intuitive gap between our (still inadequate)

## The Restless Spirit

understanding of how energy flows through the universe and what energy is, or rather how it feels to be part of the complex of energies that forms our reality. What we understand is not what we feel. And that gap fuels a strange quasi-belief I think that somehow we might bridge it, by some combination of knowledge and perception that would render us closer in our relationship to Nature and Being. A belief designed to be ultimately thwarted.



Jerusalem - The Emanation of the Giant Albion, Plate 97 [Detail]  
William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

Faust the isolated spirit is here seeking relationship, with Truth, with Nature, with the Cosmos. And that lack of relationship, truly felt relationship is the source of his distress. That same lack and that same distress is at the root of Existentialist thinking. We believe the Universe should be in a deeper relationship to us than that of blind laws. We almost demand empathy from it, that same empathy which our own brain functions have, not just with other human beings but also with physical objects and processes. We expect it to be returned. An unreasonable expectation. Faust's difficult relationship with the Universe is just one of the difficult relationships he has with everything and everyone about him, and we will keep an eye on his relationship problems as we go.

He now (line 460) turns to the symbol of the Earth-Spirit instead. The Earth-Spirit seems to represent Earthly energies, a closer aspect of Nature, the microcosm rather than the macrocosm. Faust invokes the Spirit itself, and calls it the 'Active' Spirit a 'form of fire'. But faced with its real presence, he is unable to endure its intrinsic play of energies, is challenged by it and forced to respond, and in the end as he tries to compare himself with it the Spirit rejects the comparison. Human understanding comprehends its own concepts, not those inherent in Nature. Sceptical Philosophy with a vengeance! Shelley who admired Goethe, and translated scenes from Faust (though Goethe had little knowledge of Shelley) came up against that same barrier to human understanding indicated in the philosophy of Hume and later Kant, which he was too honest a thinker to evade. The Enlightenment forever distanced the world from us, and yet...we are entangled in it.

Much of the scene so far is done for dramatic effect, and I doubt Goethe had any more belief in the Earth-Spirit than he did in the Lord God who appeared in the prologue. But it is there to make a crucial point, that the world itself is sacred energy, and that Faust cannot directly reach that energy, and so cannot achieve direct intuition of Nature, through mysticism or magic.

Note that Faust has now traversed the world of highest knowledge and failed to satisfy his yearning. Neither conventional knowledge nor magic yield him access to universal Truth. His subsequent use of magic will give him access to a far lower, if still fascinating, world. Goethe now has the challenge of all writers utilising the Faust legend, that of making Faust's

## The Restless Spirit

future progress interesting and profound, given that there is now no deeper religious or mystical experience to be encountered, until perhaps the final scenes. It is a fundamental artistic problem of the Faust story as a Christian morality tale that its middle part tends to strike a lower note, because the spiritual energies are most visible at the beginning and end of the work. Marlowe did not avoid the problem either. His beginning and ending elicit his greatest verse.

Faust's pupil Wagner now knocks at the door and breaks the spell (518). Note the stage direction. Wagner is coming from the house of sleep, with a little light of knowledge, while Faust has been bathed in the glow of the Earth-Spirit. Wagner's comment about Greek Tragedy is potent. Faust is here a potentially tragic character, his situation created by the fatal human condition and he himself morally flawed in various ways.

The repartee here allows Goethe a comment on oratory, Faust's speech (534 onwards) being somewhat shadowed by the hysterical though now doubt 'heart-felt' rhetoric of the Third Reich. I would imagine Hitler enjoyed these lines as he may have enjoyed other parts of the play that exhibit Faust's selfish, Utopian dreams realised through quasi-dictatorship. Goethe of course intended no such reading. Faust in such scenes is weak and flawed still, and only on his first faltering way towards the light even towards the end of the play. The lines here are superficially true, but their gleam has dulled to an age that has heard many fine speeches but seen less fine action to go with them. In fact Goethe immediately counteracts his words with a plea for sincerity that is music to our ears (548).

Faust now criticises Wagner's appeal to past wisdom and ancient writings, in a bitter and acerbic stretch of writing, the nearest Goethe gets to a deeper cynicism of the kind we might expect from Baudelaire, Heine, or Rimbaud. But certainly he anticipates Romanticism's full-blown dismissal of second-hand experience: Blake's 'Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead.' (Though note that Blake presumably also means that the dead make good soil for new crops), or Shelley's 'The world is weary of the past.' And at line 590 in making a reference to the Crucifixion, he also strikes the note of Romanticism generally, that of the open-hearted and tender spirit faced with a brutal and unsympathetic world, that became a cliché of the 'artistic genius starving in a garret' mode of Romantic imagery.

It is Easter eve, the night prior to the Resurrection. Faust first must enter the darkness of self-recognition and attempted suicide. He realises that his failure to relate fully to the Earth-Spirit is a sign of his own lack of power (624), his inability to make the Spirit stay, a familiar enough feeling to the poet whose inspiration fades, as to the mystic whose vision dies. He launches on a Shelley-like speech (634-639) of despair, which modifies into one of humility, brings in a memory of Yorick's skull from Hamlet (664) to convey the feeling of mortality and limitation, and suggests (672) that Nature's secrets can't be wrested from her by instruments, that is by Faust's science.

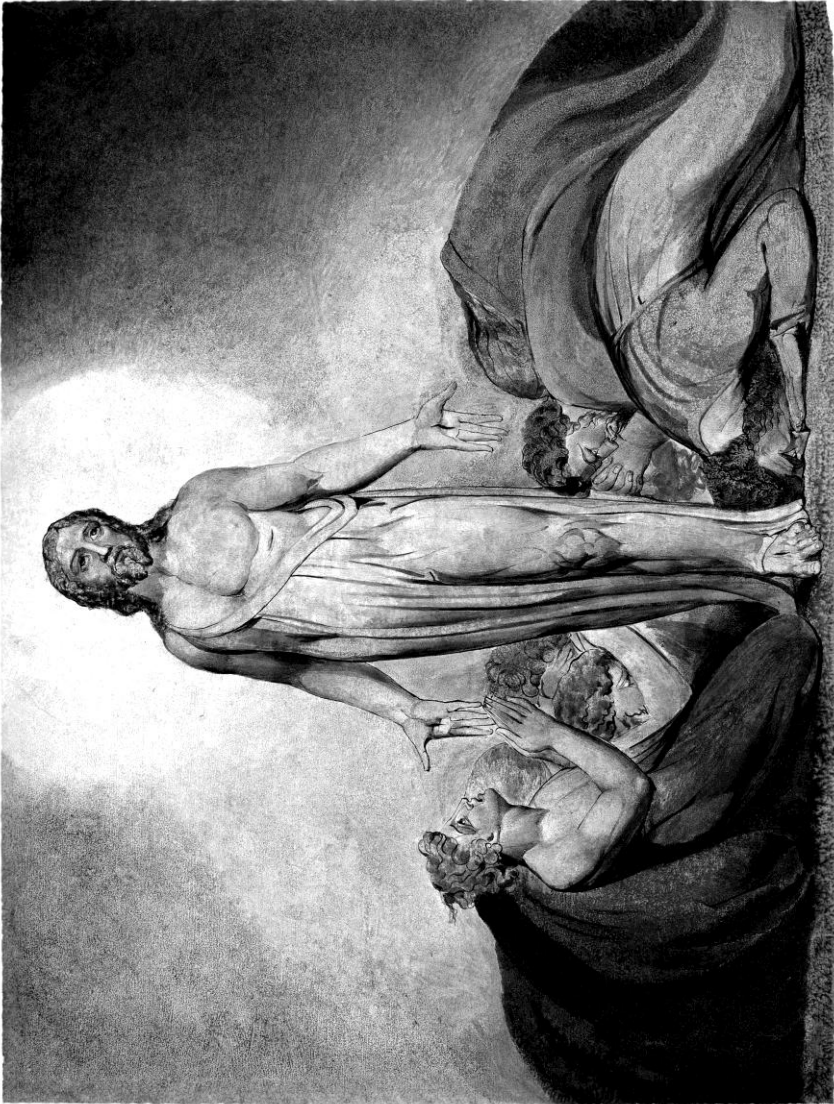
In one sense that shows Goethe's lack of understanding of the scientific reductionist project which has succeeded beyond its own wildest dreams, in physics particularly, though at another level it hints at the possible limitations of such an approach, and we may find Goethe's words ring truer in future. Faust's own attempt though certainly has failed, and in his humiliation he completes a fine passage of soliloquy with his aborted attempt to drink a deadly potion. At that moment he glimpses again a vision of that 'pure activity' he is seeking, and Goethe summons up potent natural imagery to convey the universal energy (701) while orienting our thinking towards 'action', remembering that his underlying theme is ceaseless activity as part of the solution to the Romantic dilemma. In this case it is wrong and potentially fatal action, akin to Chatterton's suicide, Byron's fatalistic plunge into Greek politics, Rimbaud's self-imposed silent exile in Africa, or Gauguin's late-Romantic return to Nature. Faust anticipates the outcome may be Baudelaire's 'Hell or Nothingness', and so becomes, for a moment, part of the reckless and apocalyptic Romantic death wish.

His self-destructive action is fortunately interrupted by the Choir who celebrate the risen Christ as Easter Sunday dawns. And the Christ celebrated is He who atoned for Original Sin. Goethe is, at least here, subscribing to traditional formulae, and we are still in the morality play. It is typical of Goethe, and works beautifully here, that he should stress the Resurrection and not the Crucifixion. He is sensitive to the liberating moment, and the tender effect of the role of the women, with Christ as the Bridegroom. While failing now to subscribe to the faith, Faust is still prompted by childhood feelings to experience that spiritual sense of liberation and tenderness, and it recalls him to life, to emotion, to the age of

## The Restless Spirit

sensibility rather than sense, to the age of pre-Romanticism rather than the age of Enlightenment. Yet it is Earth, not Heaven that claims him.

The Choir of Disciples meanwhile (785) stress the ‘creative bliss’ that Christ enters, close to the heart of Goethe’s own belief in universal creative energy, the lack of which leaves the Disciples yearning, in the Romantic mode. Goethe closes this fine and powerful scene by re-iterating some of his core values, freedom, activity, love, brotherhood, virtuous travel, joyful promise...and we hear there the echoes of the French Revolution, a revolution at variance with Goethe’s politics, but sharing in that same set of values, that same idealism that fed Romanticism, and that certainly at the start of the Revolution (and of other revolutions) does fire the hearts of the revolutionaries. Here they are stressing an alternative world to Faust’s dreams of lone knowledge, Individual feeling, and power, that of Dante’s shared world of the *Paradiso* where the community of energised spirits celebrates its inter-relatedness, and where what is given increases in the giving, and what is shared is not diminished but multiplied.



Christ Appearing to the Apostles after the Resurrection  
William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*



## PART I SCENE II: IN FRONT OF THE CITY-GATE

Faust's temporary reconciliation with the Earth sets up a scene with a threefold purpose. It emphasises Faust's relationship with, and separation from, the crowd of ordinary humanity. It allows Goethe to re-emphasise Nature as a complex value-set. And it serves to introduce Mephistopheles disguised as a black dog!

Goethe firstly enjoys playing with the talk and attitudes of the 'common' people. Nice stage atmosphere here, some good humour and an opportunity for some theatre 'business'. We hear a mention of witchcraft (872-880) that sows the seed for the black dog's appearance at the end of the scene. There is a strong sexual undercurrent in the chatter, and the soldiers' song, that also alerts us to the approaching Gretchen drama.

Faust and Wagner now appear (903) and Faust gives a speech extolling Nature resurrected from winter, and Humanity liberated from work and the city. Wagner counteracts this with the *odi profanum* (hatred of the common crowd: see Horace Odes Book III:i) of the true scholar and Romantic. Goethe is striking a note that he will return to at the end of the play, Faust relating to and identifying with the human race, and being embraced by, enfolded into, the community of human spirits. Nature in spring, the resurrected Christ, and liberated Humanity are here identified as one. The Nature identity stems from Rousseau perhaps, the resurrected Christ as a vegetation God from early comparative mythology studies that Goethe may have read.

The farm-workers under the tree point up Wagner's distaste, with another deliberate piece of sexual innuendo. Goethe though is proclaiming human sexuality as a valid part of experience, and life. He enjoys his descriptions of sexuality throughout Faust, and they reflect his view of sexuality as a generally fruitful and valid part of loving human experience. There is no sexual horror or brooding in Goethe.

Then we have a scene with the Farmer and the crowd that draws Faust into relation with them. It appears he and his father had been involved in saving people from the plague, and Wagner praises him accordingly once the people have moved on. But Faust in a burst of honesty, influenced by the liberating moment, confesses that his father had in reality employed alchemy to produce useless remedies, and that they had killed rather than cured their patients. This is Goethe's first example of the unintentional harm caused by his actions that will dog Faust throughout his life. Wagner gives a wonderful reply, straight from the realms of thoughtless and unfeeling experimental science. It was all good practice, and each generation learns more and gets better at it!

We then have a piece of pure Romantic yearning, as Faust longs for wings of the spirit to lift him above the Earth and let him follow the Light. Wagner in turn dismisses Nature in favour of learning, allowing Faust a speech identifying his dual nature in true Romantic fashion, his earthbound persona and his restless spirit, where he longs for a magic carpet, something that Mephistopheles will eventually provide! Wagner sounds a valid warning here: in talking about the deceitfulness of the airborne spirits he alerts the reader to the potentially deceitful nature of what they will witness next. And yet it is Wagner who calms Faust's suspicions of the black dog. A subtle little point. Wagner will usually fail to put into practice what he has learned. And the scene ends with Wagner unwittingly ridiculing himself. Faust has made the point that there is no 'spirit' in the dog, only training, and Wagner confirms that obedience and rote learning rather than spirit make the true scholar. Rather unfair of Goethe to have Wagner condemn himself out of his own mouth, but that is the author's privilege!

### PART I SCENE III: THE STUDY

With deep irony the opening lines of the scene show us Faust refreshed by Nature, his restless spirit temporarily at peace, and filled with love of Humanity and the Divine. Yet here is Mephistopheles in the form of the dog about to destroy his tranquillity.



The Poems of Thomas Gray, Design 79 [Adaptation, Detail]

William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

Faust soon experiences his usual fall from the heights of emotion to a new feeling of deficiency, but in this quieter, religious mood turns to the Bible and begins to translate. Searching to express the origin of things, he tries first the traditional translation, that of 'the Word', the ancient poet's solution, then 'Mind, the philosopher's approach, then 'Power', and we

think of Nietzsche's attempt to relate all to the Will to Power, and finally, in line with Goethe's own message in *Faust*, of ceaseless activity, he seizes on 'the Act.' This is in embryo Faust's journey in the play, since he will reject the word and the mind in the form of conventional learning and self-centred emotion, power in the form of magic and selfishness, and will seize on creative activity as the road to salvation.

The black dog, irritated no doubt by all this religious thought, amusingly disturbs him, then gives a hint of its infernal Nature. Prompted by the Elemental Spirits (Salamander-fire, Undine-water, Sylph-air, Gnome-earth), Faust carries out the appropriate rituals, equivalent to an exorcism using holy symbols rather than magic, to free whatever is lurking in the dog's form. And Mephistopheles appears, in the form of an itinerant scholar, as Wagner had unwittingly implied!

Questioned, Mephistopheles gives a crucial definition of what he represents to Goethe within the play, 'Part of the Power that would always wish evil, and always works the good' (1335). The implication is that in Goethe's universe the devil is an aspect of the divine that prods Humanity towards the good, and this is in line with the opening Prologue in Heaven where God declares that He put Mephistopheles on earth for precisely that purpose. The concept will cause us, and Goethe, some problems though. It suggests that if there is the possibility of ultimate evil and sin, then Mephistopheles is not the traditional Devil proper, since his activity drives towards the good. Alternatively if there is no Devil proper, and no ultimate possibility of evil, then Mephistopheles is already doomed to failure and Humanity always saved. Goethe has trouble with the Christian trappings of his story, which he inherited from the old morality play, and yet it is all too much fun for him to let it go. We therefore get an awkward mixture of pseudo-Christian morality, and Goethe's own pantheistic, enlightened attitude, where sin is never truly real, and error is correctable, creativity is the prime force, humanity is not radically corrupt, and Nature will effectively 'forgive' and 'absolve' us if only we keep on trying. It is dangerous therefore to try and read *Faust* as some sort of ethical Divine Comedy, which it patently is not, despite the lingering atmosphere of the morality play. It is a 'comedy' of errors, where the hero is never really under threat from demonic forces, only from his own personality and failings, and those are real enough.

## The Restless Spirit

Goethe is circling around the central Romantic, and subsequent modern, issue. If there is no substance to traditional religion, then what is the foundation of morality, other than arbitrary social rules? The Romantics will follow this through to the shifting relativity of values, existentialist despair and ultimately nihilism. Philosophy and Theology will meanwhile attempt a re-valuation of values, or reinterpret the divine relationship. Goethe's position is in many respects more modern still, that is to re-found morality, though he does not do so explicitly, on values that are inherent in our natural humanity, based on sensitivity, empathy, love, creativity and balance. This is both a more limited and a more consistent approach. It acknowledges the human (for us, neo-Darwinian) position as a part of nature, with a biological history, but understands morality as primarily an assertion of our inner selves, rather than a set of rules imposed from outside our nature, society and biology. Mephistopheles goes on to identify himself as the spirit of denial, of destruction, of darkness and of whatever human beings mean by sin and evil. Though, he concedes, his efforts are always frustrated by the creative energies of the world.

Mephistopheles now wishes to leave but is trapped by the unfinished pentagram drawn on the floor, in which the dog-form was accidentally caught. Faust hints at a pact, and Mephistopheles agrees to the possibility. Promising to stay and then lulling Faust to sleep with Spirit-singing, he calls up the insects, rodents etc to complete the pentagram and allow his escape. Faust wakes thinking it all illusion, a dream. So Mephistopheles, the seductive and witty spirit who will continually tempt, lead, serve and seduce Faust has been introduced. He is more than an aspect of Faust's own mind, and yet not quite the Devil of conventional theology, a theatrical devil within a play, and yet a real force, an Enlightenment force of scepticism, negativity, mockery and laughter: reason without a heart, wit without generosity. And Goethe has also set the scene for the pact between Faust and Mephistopheles that will now follow.

## PART I SCENE IV: THE STUDY

Mephistopheles returns, and invites Faust to experience Life with him. Faust indulges in a complaint regarding the claustrophobia, indifference and torment generated by his existence. Mephistopheles (1572) expresses his scepticism at such an extreme position, and counters Faust's Romantic death wish by mocking Faust's failure to carry through with the suicide he had planned (1580). Goethe is here allowing Faust to state the Romantic position, while Mephistopheles undermines it. Faust now launches into a comprehensive curse of everything that he claims deceives the mind and heart: thoughts, sensations, aspirations, possessions, wealth, wine women, faith, hope and patience! Mephistopheles responds through the voices of the seductive spirits, calling Faust back to life, though it is a false life Mephistopheles plans for him not the true life, and offers to serve Faust. Faust in return demands the basis for that service. Mephistopheles replies that it will be a reciprocal arrangement (1656) with Faust returning the services in the afterlife that Mephistopheles provides in this one.

Faust replies with another Romantic dismissal of this world and a willingness to ignore the consequences of the next, and Mephistopheles again pursues the logical outcome. Now Faust condemns in advance whatever Mephistopheles can offer, wealth, love etc as snares, and his bravado leads him to the pact. If Mephistopheles can ensnare him and seduce him until his own self is a joy to him, and the Moment a blessing, then Mephistopheles can have him. Perversely Mephistopheles will agree to this though it places Mephisto in the position of working counter to his own role, that of being a spur to restlessness and fresh activity.



Jerusalem - The Emanation of the Giant Albion, Plate 6 [Detail]  
William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

The agreement is made, but Mephistopheles wants it sealed in writing, and slyly mocks Faust's rhetoric while angling for a pact signed in blood. 'Blood is a quite special fluid' (1740). Faust, in disgust, is now ready to plunge into the whirlpool of experience and into the 'restless activity' that 'proves the man'. He will accept human sensation and experience, become one of the mass, and absorb the whole, despite Mephistopheles scepticism. Mephistopheles suggests that given human inadequacy and the shortness of time, he might like to employ a poet to help! The poet can roam in imagination, and speed up the process! Faust's summation of his limitations (1810) can be addressed by making use of him, Mephistopheles. The scholar is a person after all who is isolated from reality.

And here one comes, or rather a student. Mephistopheles changes roles with Faust, putting off his own wit, he declares (1848), for that of the sterile, witless teacher of others. And, as Faust exits, he declares his programme for Faust (1851) himself, to take one who now despises Man's highest efforts, blind him and drag him through the sensual world, stir his desires endlessly, and ruin him.

The student now enters and Goethe indulges in a witty series of passages where Mephistopheles mocks at traditional learning, science divorced from spirit, metaphysics divorced from natural thought, the reductionist method, law without commonsense or generosity, theology that poisons the mind, the shifting sands of language, and ineffective medical practice with its expert and sensual preying on the patient's illusory ills. Theory is grey, says Mephistopheles, but the tree of life itself is green (2038). Goethe is having great fun establishing Mephistopheles' credentials as a commentator, one following in the footsteps of Voltaire and Beaumarchais. Goethe will make Mephistopheles a true heir of the Enlightenment. After all there is plenty to ridicule in human society, and a satirical note will be a strong theme throughout Faust, fuelling its humour and offsetting Faust's frequently ridiculous gravity. The scene ends with Faust feeling uncomfortable already in his new role (2055), and off they float on a cloak filled with hot air!

Goethe has established the Faust and Mephistopheles pairing now: a Don Quixote, Sancho Pança dual act, with plenty of theatrical potential. We might consider Faust to be influenced by Rousseau, Mephistopheles by Voltaire: Faust as the product of the age of Romanticism or at least the age of Sentiment, Mephistopheles the product of the Enlightenment. Faust is mind deranged by emotion, Mephistopheles is reason distorted by lack of it.

Goethe has also forged their pact, the complement to Mephistopheles wager with God in Heaven. Since Mephistopheles is a facet of God's plan for Faust we again anticipate his ultimate rescue. Mephistopheles is given power over Faust during his life on earth, and the terms of the pact are such that Faust's life will end if he loses his wager with Mephistopheles, but conversely by doing so Faust will win it, since Mephistopheles in turn will lose power over Faust. Win or lose, Faust will be saved.



## The Restless Spirit

There is a deeper question though of what, in Goethe's universe, Faust could do that would result in true damnation, or what such damnation would consist of? Goethe gives us no clues. It remains to be seen how well he can convince us of Faust's intrinsic goodness despite all error, if he is not to invalidate the workings of the deeper 'morality' play, and allow us to accuse Faust and his creator of an immoral or amoral view of life.

Equally Mephistopheles' wager with Faust can only be won (and thereby lost) by him seducing Faust to the blessedness of the Moment, not by him leading Faust into irredeemable sin. A curious wager, since it puts the Devil in the place of one trying to prove the blessedness of life on earth, not one trying to destroy the moral fabric. Mephistopheles is a very strange devil. And we remember that his role is as a goad and spur to Mankind, as one who dabbles with the bad, but inexorably creates the good. Goethe's faith is placed in activity, the activity of the intrinsically decent human being. Mephistopheles will harry and seduce Faust, but ultimately Goethe will not let him deflect Faust from the creative path. Rejecting temporarily the attempt to aspire to the realms of the Spirits, and proclaiming the sterility of knowledge and learning, Faust will now descend into the pleasures and pains of human experience.

## **PART I SCENE V: AUERBACH'S CELLAR IN LEIPZIG**

Goethe next introduces a scene of “common male life”, involving ‘wine, women and song’ that is drinking, sexual innuendo, and verse displaying cynicism about women (2103, 2126), political scepticism and realism (2211), and jokes about nationalities and regions (2256, 2270). Faust’s ‘Grand Tour’ of experience has started and Mephistopheles is parading this (2159) as an example of how men pass the time, unthinkingly, pointlessly, stupidly but relatively happily. Here is the world of ordinary bodily sensuality, the world of the ‘swine’, where the senses rule, and mind follows the lead of the senses.

Mephistopheles himself is unrecognised by the drinkers, despite his limping (disguised) cloven foot, and now conjures up various founts of drink for the tavern regulars, and adds a bit of hellfire for fun. His magical incantations have an Elizabethan quality that Goethe perhaps learnt from Shakespeare (2313). The drinkers now have the illusion of being in a land of vineyards, and as the vision dissolves are left grasping each other by the nose. Goethe is clearly enjoying creating the whole episode and exhibiting his ‘grasp’ of the common people, while Faust is relatively uninvolved and bored or disgusted by Mephistopheles’ tricks. Cheap pursuit of sensuality is unlikely to win his attention for long.

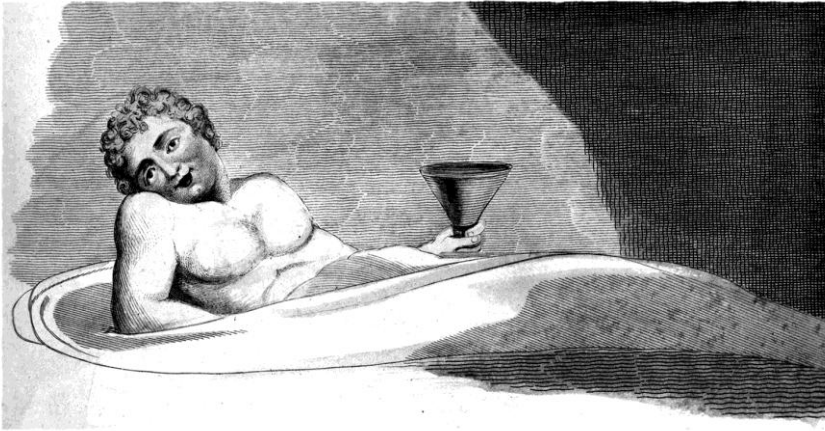
## PART I SCENE VI: THE WITCHES' KITCHEN

Mephistopheles now drags Faust off to the Witch's Kitchen with the promise that he can achieve renewed youth by drinking her magic potion. Faust's irritation with the need for debased magic is countered by Mephistopheles 'natural' solution to the problem, a somewhat Stoic, Epicurean or Taoist one: live a peasant's life, restrict your aims and goals: as the Chinese would say 'Make your heart small.'

Mephistopheles defends the witch's art, that requires more than a devil's patience! Her creatures meanwhile entertain Mephistopheles with fragments of wisdom, limited pieces of human scepticism about life, and silly jests. Faust has found a magic mirror in which he sees the vision of a beautiful woman (Helen) and Mephistopheles holds out a teasing promise of bringing her to Faust. Goethe thereby introduces a major subsequent theme, Faust's pursuit of Beauty as exemplified in Woman, and therefore perfected in Helen the most beautiful woman of the Classical world. Since Truth has failed him so far, Love and Beauty will clearly be areas of experience that a rejuvenated Faust will have to traverse in search of contentment and the exalted Moment.

The Witch now arrives down the chimney, and Mephistopheles mocks her chant and taunts her for not recognising him, though he concedes that modern Northern devils are men about town, gentlemen, and dandies, and so indistinguishable among the rest! The Witch at his instigation prepares the potion for Faust, and Mephistopheles chides the dour Doctor for his inability to enjoy the fun of witchcraft and incantation. Goethe is already distinguishing Mephistopheles light humour and cynical lack of seriousness from Faust's questing nature and serious intent. Mephistopheles is the spirit of Voltaire, Faust that of Rousseau. Mephistopheles is the Enlightenment, Faust the proto-Romantic. Wit, reason and poise are not enough for human beings: Faust demands a deeper goal, a higher aim, a profound activity on which to stake his life.

He drinks the potion and is rejuvenated. Mephistopheles promises the new younger Faust a sexual liaison, and a woman who encapsulates all beauty, since cynically all women will now appear like Helen to the Faust who has drunk the Witch's potion. Goethe neatly contrasts Mephistopheles domain where all sexuality is merely carnality and self-deceit with Faust's apparently purer motives and deeper desire for Beauty and perhaps Love.



Young's Night Thoughts, Page 27 [Detail]

William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

## PART I SCENE VII: A STREET

Faust now meets Margaret (Gretchen) and we are moving into the main tragic content of Part I, a classic seduction of the innocent girl, followed by her downfall engineered unwittingly by Faust and deliberately by Mephistopheles. Where Faust acts for selfish but seemingly genuine motives, and by acting creates ripples in the sea of time that cause damage and destruction, Mephistopheles seeks to twist Faust's actions to cause maximum harm and so divert him from the path of activity. The issue for the Reader or Audience throughout Part I will be how to judge Faust's selfishness born of a real desire for deeper life in a moral context, since it is impossible to read without coming to a moral view of some kind. This is after all originally a morality play, in the versions that Goethe derived his Faust from. Does Faust's lack of moral imperatives, of restraint and care, constitute a fatal harm that condemns him, or is his behaviour that of all of us, struggling in the complex web of existence and experience, seeking the better but sometimes following the worst?

The Gretchen episode is probably based on a real episode in Frankfurt concerning Susanna Margaretha Brandt who was seduced by a jeweller's apprentice, kept her pregnancy a secret, killed her baby and was executed in January 1772. Goethe may have added to it his own memories and guilt over his brief affair with Friederike Brion in October 1770. She was the daughter of the pastor at Sesenheim, twenty miles north of Strasbourg. Their short-lived relationship ended in August 1771, and Goethe apparently felt an acute sense of guilt at betraying and deserting her.

Faust in this scene views Gretchen as prey, she is some 'thing' that he demands Mephistopheles acquire for him. Even Mephistopheles seems momentarily taken aback at his 'innocent' choice, and by Faust's callousness and selfishness. The Devil is caught preaching morality! Faust (2667) shows no regard for the deeper possibility of Love at this stage, and is the pure sexual sensualist, the rake, the seducer Don Juan. Goethe has made no effort at this point to show Faust in anything other than an unacceptable

light. Nevertheless, and despite the tragedy of Gretchen, Faust will eventually be saved. We are here at the heart of the question as to whether Goethe is essentially an immoralist condoning immoral and callous behaviour: an amoralist who believes that we may cause destruction, and that the destruction is unavoidable in some way, while our other motives and actions may offset or redeem the destruction with creation: or a moralist who is making a subtle case for the variability of human conduct and personality, the ability to develop and learn, and the worth despite his flaws of a human being who does not cease to strive for what might be higher.



Jerusalem - The Emanation of the Giant Albion, Plate 96 [Detail]  
William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

## The Restless Spirit

There are issues here which we will pursue later about the nature of consequential loss, and the degree to which collateral damage is the fault of and attributable to the human agent, regardless of their motives. In courts of law our judgement in cases say of manslaughter or accidental harm is often influenced by the degree of remorse, regret and contrition shown by the agent, and by the extent to which there seemed to be deliberate intent, however much confused by passion in the 'heat of the moment', to inflict pain, or to deprave, corrupt, and objectify the victim, or to achieve a selfish goal careless of risks and consequences. We expect the good and decent man to control passion and selfishness, apply foresight, and show a benevolent empathy towards others. Faust clearly reveals none of those things in this small scene. However we do also allow mitigating circumstances, for example the effect of drugs or drink, though those do not fully excuse the consequences. Here Faust is under the influence of the Witch's potion, though Goethe is nowhere explicit that it has any other effects than those of rejuvenating Faust!

## PART I SCENE VIII: EVENING

The cynical Mephistopheles is now contrasted with Faust the sentimentalist. While Mephisto pokes around in the girl's room, Faust rhapsodises on innocence, and allows his desires to modulate towards love. He is one of those incapable of separating sexuality and desire from deeper emotions, a desirable quality but with tragic consequences in this case. Mephistopheles mocks Faust's inability to play lightly with life, his metaphysical heaviness. The Romantic urge is forever seeking to deepen experience and give it weight, a weight that it often seems incapable of carrying, hence the often theatrical quality of Romanticism, and its susceptibility to parody and ironic attack.

Mephistopheles leaves behind a casket of jewels, to tempt the girl. He is the devil of seduction, and so the denier of morality. Gold and jewellery will be symbols of potential or actual corruption throughout the play.

They exit, and Margaret (Gretchen) enters and finds the jewels. She sings the famous verses, "There was a King in Thule" whose theme is loyalty and faithfulness in love, with its symbol of the golden goblet (Note in passing Henry James' use of a related symbol in the 'Golden Bowl'), and whose mood is one of final tragic renunciation. So Goethe subtly sets the scene for what will follow. Gretchen concludes the scene with her thoughts about the transience of youth and the power of wealth.

Gretchen's songs incidentally stress her link with heroines of German folksong, and are justly well-known and appreciated in Germany. They are related to actual folksongs and ballads, and show her progression from fantasising about faithful love, to experiencing love's pain, and finally in her madness to a projection of herself into her dead child.



**PART I SCENE IX: PROMENADE**

The jewels have fallen into the hands of Gretchen's mother, and by her have been handed to the Church! Goethe allows Mephistopheles to poke fun at the greed revealed in organised religion, in the state and in the money-lending class. Mephisto's role is precisely this, the continual undermining of human institutions and motives, as one who denies. The seduction is however still progressing well, and the Faust-Mephistopheles relationship is developing into that of master-servant, with Mephistopheles subtly following his own agenda of luring Faust towards acceptance of the Moment.

## **PART I SCENE X: THE NEIGHBOUR'S HOUSE**

**M**artha is now introduced as the 'common' woman, relatively simple-minded and a suitable foil for Mephistopheles' wit and cunning. She has already assisted in the later seduction, by providing a means for Gretchen to avoid her mother's gaze, and a meeting place. Mephistopheles now enters, and Goethe provides a comic interlude while Mephisto deceives Martha in order to create an opportunity to introduce Faust as his friend and second witness. Goethe stresses infidelity and sexuality in the conversation between Mephisto and Martha, while Gretchen's comments are designed to show her artlessness, genuine sympathies, and depth of feeling. Mephisto successfully sets up a meeting.

**PART I SCENE XI: THE STREET**

**F**aust jibs at the false-witness Mephisto requires of him. To which Mephistopheles replies with a nice piece of sophistry, indicating that many statements are made on less true knowledge than Faust has. And (3050) won't Faust soon be lying to Gretchen in the normal way of all seducers, and will that still represent Faust's eternal truth and love? Faust then responds with a true Romantic's speech indicating that feeling alone, if willed and asserted, becomes a highest value and that through depth of feeling and sensual experience he can forge the link with the eternal force of truth and love. Mephisto sees the sophistry in that! And Faust concedes the inevitability of his sensual desire for Gretchen regardless.

## **PART I SCENE XII: THE GARDEN**

**T**he meeting takes place, and Faust flatters poor Gretchen who expresses her own humility and self-knowledge. Meanwhile Mephistopheles has an amusing knowing conversation with Martha. Faust stresses the beauty of innocence: an innocence he is out to corrupt! Gretchen tells about herself and in so doing reveals her loving and maternal qualities. While Mephistopheles plays his role as ‘man of the world’ and it is Martha who is trying to tempt him towards marriage! Goethe plays out a delicate and amusing little contrast between the two pairs.

Gretchen seeks love, and Faust declares his love for her. Is he genuine? Or is he merely intoxicated by the feeling, able to conjure it up and work himself into the part required? The degree of emotional selfishness involved here is interesting. Is Faust seeking the sensation of love rather than committing himself to another human being, Gretchen being the handy vehicle. Does he feel any care or regard for her as an individual?

Mephisto and Martha put their worldly seal on the inevitable outcome.

### PART I SCENE XIII: AN ARBOUR IN THE GARDEN

Faust and Gretchen now appear as lovers (without yet having achieved full sexual union). As Faust and Mephisto depart, Gretchen voices her doubt and her grasp of the reality. What can Faust find in her (but sensual indulgence)? His conquest of her is merely an exercise of his male status, knowledge and power, and therefore an easy victory. The girl is inevitably doomed, within the society of that time, if the liaison becomes public knowledge and he fails to stand by her.

The contrast in verse styles throughout the Gretchen tragedy should be noted, her simple and artless speech, touched with dialect in the original, against Faust's sentimental and rhetorical manner.



America. A Prophecy, Plate 16 [Detail]

William Blake (British, 1757 – 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

## PART I SCENE XIV: FOREST AND CAVERN

A panegyric to Nature and the Earth Spirit now follows. The Earth-Spirit has given Faust all in the sense of allowing a human being to participate through feeling and sensation in the natural world. Faust feels in an exalted state of empathy and communion with the world, a Romantic state, even though he is aware that the negative Mephisto is also in some way a gift of the deeper reality to him. He perceives that though Mephisto is a spirit of denial, impertinent and chilling, he also holds out the prospect of sensual beauty, beauty of form, to Faust. He keeps Faust's desire inflamed, such that he is caught in the endless oscillation between desire and enjoyment. Mephisto is clearly intended, by Goethe, to represent a dimension of Faust's own mind, as well as a character in his own right within the play.

The banter between Mephistopheles and Faust now intensifies (3251). Mephisto prompts towards restlessness and dissatisfaction, spurring Faust into activity, while Faust frets at being returned from the spiritual state of communion with Nature, in solitude, to the vulgar reality and community with mankind. Faust is once again here the proto-Romantic spirit, seeking the deeper and higher states of being, and disgusted by ordinary experience, while at the same time attracted to the sensual world, with woman as its loveliest expression. The tension is between the mind and the heart, or at least between the spiritual aspects of the mind and its sensual and emotional aspects. It is the unresolved conflict of modernity.

Mephistopheles mocks the pathetic fallacy that leads Faust to identify himself with the superhuman (3282). It is, he suggests, an overflow of mental power and pride, and a self-deceit. Mephistopheles is the aspect of Faust's mind that tempts him towards baser desires, and more deeply the nihilistic aspect within him that seeks to manipulate, belittle, and destroy whatever his higher self holds sacred. You can't do without what you refuse to hear named, says Mephisto. And what about Gretchen? You've started what you are unable or reluctant to finish. He conjures up a picture of the

girl in love to needle Faust, and succeeds. Faust is tortured by the sensual, and even uses a semi-blasphemous expression concerning the transubstantiation (3334) to encapsulate the fusion of the spirit with the flesh that the relationship with Gretchen signifies. Once again Faust is seen to be not without deep human feelings, but wholly self-centred in his perceptions. His selfishness and self-centredness are essential aspects of his Romantic persona, and one can think of many examples in art (Pechorin in Lermontov's 'A Hero of Our Time', Don Juan in the various retellings, including Mozart's opera) or reality (the early Shelley, Rimbaud) of a self-intoxication that destroys communion and community, while not in itself being devoid of both sensibility and charm.

Faust here seeks to spiritualise his carnal relationship with Gretchen, Mephistopheles to de-spiritualise it and reveal the carnality. Mephisto is here the Enlightenment realist (3338) while Faust is the Romantic image maker conjuring up a Byronic portrait of the individual (3345) as a restless wanderer, still seeing it all in terms of self and not other. Throughout the play personal solitude and isolation will reflect aspects of Faust's selfish mind, relationship and community aspects of his deeper humanity.

And faced with the possibility of normal relationship here, conscious of his own failings, Faust prefers an apocalyptic (3356) finale where both she and he are destroyed, than any renunciation of his personal aims. In a modern world that has seen the full working out of the Romantic impulse, through Existentialism and Nihilism, into a reluctant and uncomfortable scientific semi-acceptance, it is easy to dismiss Faust as a caricature of Romantic foolishness and excess. Shelley's life and verse often receive a similar judgement, regardless of our delight in the poetic beauty of his work. While we accept a De Sade or a Byron, both, despite the difference in their excesses, being tied to the carnal world, Shelley's and Faust's spiritual strivings seem stranger to us. In neither case is conventional religion a resolution for them, in Shelley's case because his rational atheism overrode any religious impulse, in Faust's (and Goethe's) because he does not believe in the trappings of religion, but in a greater Pantheistic creative urge, a Daemon.

Your nihilism is just frustration, says Mephisto. Get on with it, follow your aim consistently, and avoid the ridiculous, avoid the situation of being 'a Devil in despair'.

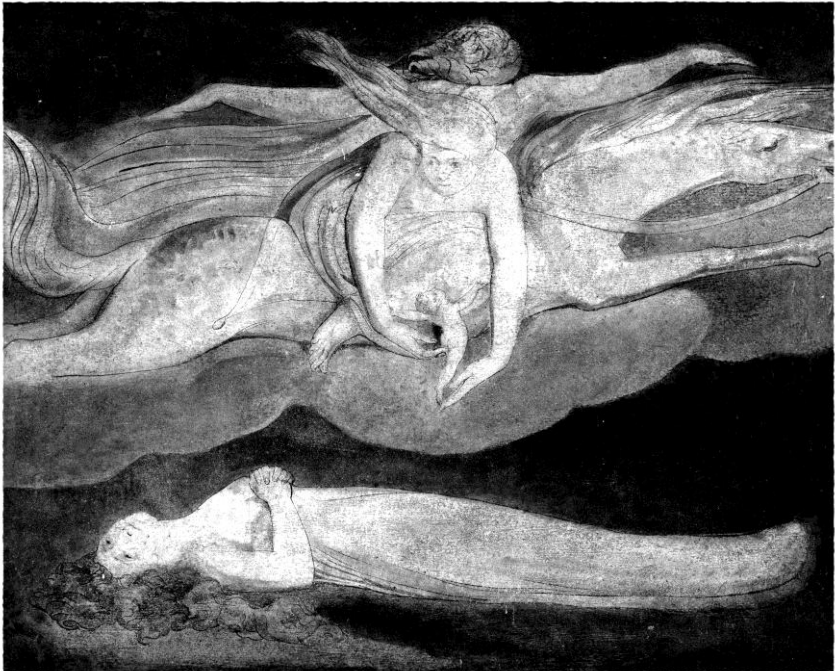


Jerusalem - The Emanation of the Giant Albion, Plate 99 [Detail]  
William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*



## PART I SCENE XV: GRETCHEN'S ROOM

The scene consists of Gretchen's charming song, designed to evoke pity for her, and express her longing for Faust. It is deservedly famous, for its simplicity, economy of effect, and resonance within the context of the play. The incipient tragedy is now obvious, as Goethe contrasts her depth of feeling and innocence, and Faust's more tenuous emotions touched by selfishness in the series of short scenes.



Pity

William Blake (British, 1757 – 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

## PART I SCENE XVI: MARTHA'S GARDEN

Goethe employs this scene in the garden to tackle the issue of Faust's religious feelings. Quizzed by Gretchen he reveals agnosticism towards conventional religion, and asks her to consider his kindness to, and love of, her as sufficient evidence of proper feeling, coupled with his tolerance and respect for others' beliefs.

He then expresses a Pantheistic vision (3431) of the creative, interwoven world, using natural imagery. It is a powerful evocation of a universe where all the parts are in communion with the whole, fundamentally benevolent: inexplicable and nameless. Joy, Heart, Love and God become interchangeable words for an ineffable and fundamental Creative drive. But 'Feeling is all' he cries, and we are therefore in the realm of deliberate mystification and ongoing seduction of the girl, or, being more generous, Romantic self-delusion on Faust's part. He is word spinning in the true Romantic tradition. The question is whether he believes what he is saying or is merely pacifying her, or a combination of both.

Once more Goethe keeps the position ambiguous and fluid, not allowing us to judge Faust too clearly. Faust's motives and true beliefs are often cloaked in sonorous and lovely verse to keep us guessing, while also reflecting Faust's own ability to delude himself, and his own confusion over how he should act and what he should believe.

Gretchen has identified Mephistopheles instinctively as a negative and corrupting force, one with no love within, a force that oppresses her and stifles her own feelings of love. Faust defends him complacently. 'There have to be such odd fellows.' He pursues the seduction through expressions of feeling, and she is ready to submit. Faust now gives her a sleeping draught with which to dose her mother, assuring her that it will do no harm. Goethe is not explicit as to whether the sleeping draught has come from Mephisto or is of his own devising. We remember his confession to Wagner earlier of the fatal effects of his and his father's medical efforts during the plague. We also remember his aborted attempt at suicide by

## The Restless Spirit

means of a potion. Either way the act is reckless, and pushes the responsibility for its consequences on to the girl.

At this crucial moment Mephisto's comment and Faust's response (3521) touch new levels of cynicism. They appear as conspirators. Mephisto mocks the previous conversation between Faust and Gretchen, suggesting that women use conventional morality as a means to power over those they love, within the war of the sexes. Faust replies that Gretchen quizzed him about religion out of loving concern for his salvation, an argument that Mephisto finds ridiculous in a seducer (3534), and encapsulates Gretchen as a Mary Magdalen, that is already a fallen woman (but with religious overtones), and one who has recognised him, as a devil, behind the mask. Mephisto is identified here as a close aspect of Faust, so close that if he cannot share in Faust's sensual pleasure, he can at least take delight in the situation (3543).

## PART I SCENE XVII: AT THE FOUNTAIN

Faust and Gretchen have met at night, and the sexual union is complete. Goethe now makes the social situation clear for us. The fate of the girl who gets pregnant by a lover who won't marry her is a grim one. Gretchen now feels her own fallen status, something she had despised in others previously, but she is still possessed by the sweetness of the fatal attraction that has led her to it. The girl has sinned conventionally by indulging in sex outside marriage, but for the purest of motives, Faust's declared love for her. What would now condemn her socially of course would be his failure to stand by her.



Jerusalem - The Emanation of the Giant Albion, Plate 85 [Detail]  
William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

**PART I SCENE XVIII: A TOWER**

Gretchen now makes her touching prayer to the Virgin, the grieving mother, the Mater Dolorosa. Her words will echo again at the conclusion of the whole drama. Goethe treats her as already ‘afflicted’ though technically Faust has not yet abandoned her. Goethe is willing to use the conventional religious scenario, and at a moment of deep emotion, which leads us inevitably to consider the play or at least these aspects of it in the light of Christian morality. This use of the Christian trappings does lead to tension in the Reader’s mind, and if Goethe was accused of immorality or at least amorality in a conventional sense, and Faust deemed unworthy of salvation by many readers, then Goethe had only himself (and the original morality play structure) to blame.

## PART I SCENE XIX: NIGHT

The tragedy is about to be compounded, as we are introduced to Gretchen's brother Valentine, a soldier, who now bemoans her fallen state.

Faust and Mephistopheles appear, Faust preoccupied with himself as usual, comments on the waning light, while Mephisto enjoys the night like a tom-cat, and sets up our expectation of Walpurgis Night soon to follow. Faust requires a gift for Gretchen, while Mephisto proposes to serenade her. He does so with a moralising song, adapted from Ophelia's second song in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* Act IV Scene V, warning against trusting in false lovers, and thereby losing virtue!

Valentine accosts them, breaking the zither, and is struck down in the fight that follows. Mephistopheles calls on Faust to flee, with a quick jibe at the corrupt police, but in fear of the less corrupt courts! Valentine now gives his dying speech, condemning Gretchen, to her great grief.

Is Faust guilty? Valentine after all attacked the pair, though Faust has seduced Gretchen. The ambiguity Goethe present us with makes us uncertain as to whether Faust might not have stood by the girl, though we are right to be doubtful. The killing of Valentine, not deliberately engineered by Faust, but a fatal unintended consequence of his actions, now forces the rupture from Gretchen. Or does it? It is rather Faust's continual flight from his experience, his refusal to follow through responsibly that causes his deeper moral failure here. Goethe may well have been indicating his own early inability in his pre-Classical years to find fulfilment, and his tendency to flee to the next situation offered. Faust is not prepared to suffer the consequences of his actions at this stage of his development, and that immaturity condemns him morally in Part I. Mephistopheles is the part of himself that is always hurrying on to the next 'adventure', cancelling and denying the past, erasing the memory and conscience without which responsibility is impossible, and repentance unachievable.

## PART I SCENE XX: THE CATHEDRAL

Goethe now uses the Cathedral scene and the singing of the Requiem Mass, to display Gretchen tormented and in pain. The Evil Spirit, an aspect of her own conscience, assails her. Goethe partly employs prose to indicate the lapse from the divine presence. It now appears that Gretchen's mother has died as a result of the sleeping draught she was given. So another unintended consequence (though we don't know whether it was intended by Mephistopheles) has rendered Gretchen a murderer, and Faust an accomplice. He has been involved in the deaths of her brother and her mother, and yet the consequences are even now not fully worked through.

Goethe has deftly posed us a moral problem. Is all this Faust's fault, or is he, in loving Gretchen, merely, as she certainly is, the victim of unintended consequences, the chain of action and reaction? Both of them have broken the conventional moral code, but for reasons of feeling. That is sufficient for a true Romantic! Shelley, and Byron too, early in life, 'ran' from consequences, as has many a poet and artist. But Goethe would argue that 'an error' is not enough to condemn a life prematurely. Even Valentine's death might be considered manslaughter rather than murder, though with the Devil on one's side...!

In one sense Faust and Gretchen are free of intentional guilt, but the outcome that has ensued by this stage is certainly serious, and by seeking to flee the consequences, in a way that Gretchen does not or cannot, Faust is certainly not a shining example of virtue. The unintentional nature of the fatal incidents, so far, does to some extent justify the name of tragedy in the Classical sense of an unwished-for and unsought disaster through adverse circumstances, as well as the later Shakespearean sense of the result of flawed character, but Goethe is certainly stretching the concept.



The Poems of Thomas Gray, Design 32 [Adaptation]

William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*



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Faust must be condemned at this moment for his failure to face the music, or show remorse. His flaws at this stage of his development are his lack of moral foresight, his carelessness of consequences, and his evasion of responsibility for his actions. That does not make him a fundamentally evil or immoral character, merely manipulative, irresponsible and elusive. Not a noble character for sure, but not a total villain. Goethe has attempted to show him as an 'ordinary' man from a moral perspective, neither evil nor virtuous, neither intentionally destructive, nor visibly creative, but driven by desires and circumstances. And Goethe depends upon our going along with his portrait, and not condemning Faust too harshly at this point, if we are to maintain sympathy with him later. However he first shows us Faust on Walpurgis Night, to force us to a full assessment of his character in Part I.

## PART I SCENE XXI: WALPURGIS NIGHT

**W**alpurgis Night is May Eve, the night before the first of May, when witches meet at the Brocken, and elsewhere to hold their revels. (Walpurgis was a female saint of the eighth century whose name was transferred somehow to the festival, no doubt through the normal association of opposites, and the efforts of the Church to take over pagan festivals.) Faust and Mephistopheles have departed hurriedly, leaving Gretchen and her misery and all consequences behind.

Mephistopheles is bored by the journey, while Faust has once again plunged into the raptures of Nature, like a true Romantic. Goethe prepares us for his giant comic interlude (but with a serious purpose, to confirm Faust's degradation) by a humorous encounter with a Will O' The Wisp, as devious as a human being, who acknowledges Mephisto's status, and says that though he is a wayward light he will do his best to stay on the straight and narrow! He corresponds in a sense to Homunculus in the Classical Walpurgis Night of Part II.

The mountain is bewitched, the experience of it disorienting, and Goethe has fun with its magical aspects in some clever and evocative verse. Here is the seat of Mammon, God of Wealth, and a potent symbol of material corruption (3915).

Now the Witches appear in chorus (3956), their song loaded with sexual and physical allusion. Goethe handles this material brilliantly and potently. The reference to the mother and child (3977) should alert us to the Gretchen tragedy again, in passing, and prepare us for the scenes to follow.

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The Poems of Thomas Gray, Design 32 [Adaptation]

William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

Goethe is now scene-painting through the use of multiple voices. The Witches and Wizards vie with each other in claiming the others' superiority in evil (3978). The barren heights are unfruitful (3988), but there is more sexual allusion (4000, 4008). The witches and wizards crowd around. Even Mephistopheles finds it all too much of a good thing, and has to exercise his powers (4026), seeking a quieter corner, while Faust is still yearning after the fount of activity, here evil activity (4040).

Mephisto now leads Faust among the groups of revellers by their fires. Clearly we are in an equivalent of the human social world, for which the Brocken is a metaphor. And we should expect to see here a representative sample of human folly and error.

We begin with social figures, complaining about the state of the world (4076), a General, an ex-Minister, the new Wealth, an Author. Even Mephistopheles is affected by their pessimism! He chides the witch selling ancient relics of evil: what is needed now is variety, novelty! Faust calls it a fair (4115) and it is, Vanity Fair. Faust and Mephistopheles now dance with the two witches, young and old respectively, exchanging verses of sexual innuendo.

Next in this display of human foibles and errors, Goethe shows us the philosophers. First the Enlightenment Rationalist (a parody of his contemporary Nicolai, who in 1799 published an account of how he had suffered from hallucinations and banished them by applying leeches to his backside!) who has demonstrated logically that Spirits can't exist but now is faced with their presence. Faust mocks the rationalist penchant for prying into everything, reasoning in circles, and liking to be admired (4149).

Faust sees here a phantom image of Gretchen, but Mephistopheles claims she is merely a Siren vision, the image of sensual physical beauty that comes to all men to deceive them, and like Medusa, beheaded by Perseus, doomed to turn men to stone. Round the phantom's neck is the circle of red that denotes the executioner's axe: another foreboding of Gretchen's fate. We are reminded here of the French Revolutionary period, when it became fashionable to wear scarlet ribbons around the neck at fashionable parties, while the Revolution's victims were being truncated by the Guillotine. But Mephistopheles deflects Faust from thinking of Gretchen, and leads him on to the little theatre where we will see a performance of a magical Interlude, Oberon and Titania's Golden Wedding.

## The Restless Spirit

We should realise that Gretchen's tragedy is unfolding elsewhere while this action is going on, and the references to her are to alert us to this fact. The title of the Golden Wedding is an ironic comment on the wedding that will not take place for Gretchen. The degree of triviality and sheer play in this episode has the twofold purpose of contrasting with the tragedy that is taking place, and providing an abrupt change to the succeeding prose scene between Faust and Mephistopheles.

## PART I SCENE XXII: A WALPURGIS NIGHT'S DREAM

The dream is a pleasant fantasy of a play within the play, designed to bridge the mood and take us from the madness of Walpurgis Night, to a different kind of madness, that of Gretchen and Faust's tragedy. The intermezzo is a set of vignettes, idle fancies, gentle parody and so on, designed to entertain and no more. It is a procession of characters, each with a few lines to deliver, to make a point or set the scene (Apollinaire imitated this style, cleverly, in his *Bestiary*).

Oberon and Titania for example deliver some advice for married people (4243). The Orthodox condemns all Classical gods and modern fairies, good or bad, as part of the devilish crew (4271). The Northern Artist slips in a reference to Goethe's own *Italian Journey* for which his early work was a sketchy preparation (4275). There is more sexual allusion, and then the Weather-Vane's comments on the marriage market, from one perspective a sweet meeting of pure brides and hopeful lovers, from the other a hellish bartering of possessions and security for sexual favours. These references to marriage clearly counterpoint the unseen Gretchen's failed hopes.

Next Goethe pokes fun at his literary enemy August Von Hennings (4303), who had accused him of immorality in his writings. More literary sniping follows, then Nicolai (4319), Lavater and Goethe himself exchange words about piety. Goethe adds some musical commentary for atmosphere, since the participants in the theatricals are dancing about restlessly, and then the philosophers reappear among the motley throng, faced with this Spirit-world challenge to their world-view, first the Dogmatist (4343), then the Idealist and Realist, the Super-naturalist and the Sceptic. Goethe now shades us off into pure and charming whimsy, with the Skilful (4367) and Maladroit, the Will O' The Wisps, and a Shooting Star.

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Lastly we have the Heavy-Footed (4383), followed by Puck and Ariel the light-footed and winged spirits, and Goethe takes us *pianissimo* into the natural sweetness and brightness of May Morning. The ephemeral festival has vanished. But the contrast has now been ensured between the irresponsibility ('tasteless diversions' according to Faust in the next scene), folly and whimsy, ending in natural beauty, of Walpurgis Night and its following dawn, and the reality of the Gretchen tragedy to follow. Mephistopheles has ensured that the unseen tale has been unfolding while he has been diverting Faust on the mountainside. And the final movement of Gretchen towards disaster has coincided with the Witches' festival itself.

## **PART I SCENE XXIII: GLOOMY DAY**

**P**lain prose takes us into an exchange between Faust and Mephistopheles. For the first time we hear Faust's despair at what has happened to Gretchen. It is not exactly remorse, but it shows intense feeling for her plight. Faust rants away at Mephistopheles, making him the scapegoat for all consequences, though it is ultimately Faust himself who has precipitated the tragedy.

Wait a minute, Mephisto says, why did you enter into the bargain if you can't follow it through? Surely you realised what a pact with the devil meant? A telling point. Faust's lack of foresight and common sense has indeed thrown a stone into the pool of event and the ripples have caused great misery. Faust can only retort by complaining to the Earth Spirit who inflicted Mephisto on him. Accusation and counter-accusation follow. Mephisto plays the cool neutral who was merely obeying the terms of the pact. Faust was the master and he the servant, was that not the case? Faust is in a panic at the consequences of his actions, and wishes to save Gretchen. The sentiment is good and fine, though once more we note the lack of true remorse, the failure to accept personal responsibility, the attempt to lay the blame elsewhere, and the excessive bluster of his speeches. Faust is not exactly a hero. And Goethe is running dangerously close to convincing us that Faust's flawed nature is a permanent and irredeemable aspect of the man.

Mephisto warns Faust of the danger he runs re-entering a town where he is wanted for the murder of Valentine, but agrees to attempt a rescue by use of his magic powers. And so they go on their way.



**PART I SCENE XXIV: NIGHT**

**W**itchcraft is still afoot, at the Ravenstone, as our protagonists fly past on their black horses. Mephistopheles claims not to know what is going on. The scene is pure mood music.



The Poems of Thomas Gray, Design 73 [Adaptation, Detail]

William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

## PART I SCENE XXV: A DUNGEON

Part I ends in Gretchen's prison cell. Faust stands outside and gives another self-centred speech, focused on his own feelings rather than hers. Pure Romanticism. 'All her guilt's illusory', claims Faust. Do we quite accept that? Though seduced she too has been a part to events, even if the consequences have turned out greater than she could have anticipated. Are we free of responsibility for consequences that stem from our own actions? Do we not all have a duty of care, and foresight, and a need to understand the likely outcomes of our actions? Faust meanwhile still shows no clear remorse.

Gretchen is singing a folk ballad, projecting herself into her dead child and denouncing its parents, she the whore, and Faust the rogue. Rather it is her version of a folksong of the day, and as with her other songs earlier in Part I it establishes her link with the women of German tradition, the heroines of earlier tragedies. We gather from this hint that her child has indeed died. She takes Faust, now entering, for the executioner and begs for his pity. Faust is afflicted by her misery, but yet again relates it in his self-centred way to his feelings and not hers (4441). Once more it is the way in which the scene stirs his own emotions that preoccupies him, as though he cannot merely feel but has to be always observing his reactions introspectively. And his Hamlet-like introspection has indeed been a feature of his speeches in Part I.

It now transpires that Gretchen has somehow killed her own child. She has become a character in the old story, the age-old story, of the fallen and doomed woman. Faust falls on his knees as the lover, while she ironically mistakes his gesture for the beginning of prayer. He has made the cult of sensual love his religion, and this is where it has led him. She has betrayed her own Christian morality and this is where it has led her.

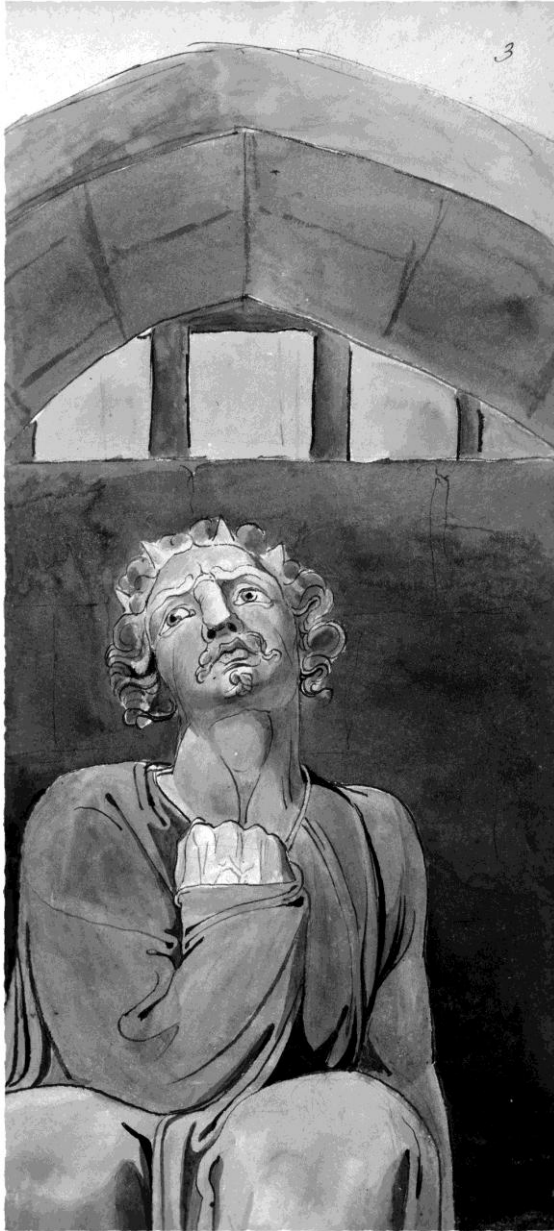
He calls her and she hears his call, but still takes time to recognise him. Suddenly she anticipates rescue. Now we have a piece of dramatic frustration while he tries to take her away, but she seeks to establish him as

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her lover, finds him cold (4493), and is repelled. She relapses rapidly into her knowledge of her own crimes, and his. 'Let past be past!' cries Faust. A fine sentiment again, but expiation is normal first, and remorse. He wishes to break the bonds and be free, but without facing the consequences and responsibilities of freedom. One is reminded of the contrasting figure of Sidney Carton in Dicken's 'Tale of Two Cities', going to his death for another. There is no like situation here. Faust is not there for self-sacrifice.

There is an emotional barrier between the two of them, the result of their joint crimes, and Mephistopheles' presence, and perhaps also the Witches' activity at the Ravenstone. All is conspiring to thwart the rescue. Gretchen cannot convince herself that he still loves her, is still warm towards her. As a murderess of her own mother and now her child, she cannot accept guilt-ridden freedom, and is held back by conscience. What after all would await her outside? It is too late. Faust now makes, at last, his declaration. He will stay with her. That precipitates a mental crisis for her (4551). By not standing by her before he has increased the dimensions of the tragedy. Now, too late, he makes his promise. She meanwhile is preoccupied by the two accusatory deaths, of her child and her mother. Faust is not, as we can see, similarly preoccupied with the death of Valentine and the tragedy he has initiated.

Gretchen is resigned, anticipating, and envisioning her death. She sees Faust momentarily as a hostile physical force. Now Mephistopheles urges flight, as ever. Run from the unacceptable and the tragic, is his message. His appearance is the last straw, since Gretchen believes him the Devil incarnate, and she throws herself on Divine Mercy, while fearing for Faust's soul. Mephistopheles cries out that she is judged, but a voice from above, offering the grace and mercy she seeks, cries out that she is saved. Obeying the Church's message of faith and penitence, she is a candidate for redemption, as a sinner but an unwitting one, a criminal but without murderous intent. Regardless of his own beliefs which were hardly conventional, Goethe brings Part I to a traditional enough close. A sinner is rescued. But Faust and Mephistopheles flee.



The Poems of Thomas Gray, Design 37 [Detail]

William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

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The impression of Faust we are left with is that of an emotional, but selfish and self-centred individual, careless, irresponsible, and ultimately a disaster to those he enters into relationship with. It will be a long road for him to redemption. And Goethe's task in Part II is to convince us that Faust is, as the initial scene in Heaven anticipated, by striving ceaselessly, drawing nearer the light and away from the darkness. Goethe could take an immoralist or amoralist position and show us Faust merely forgetting, and going on to other things. That would make 'Faust' a highly interesting, but not a totally ethical or convincing addition to the few exalted works of western literature. It would leave us with the feelings we get from say contemplating Lermontov's Pechorin in 'A Hero of our Time' or any other of the superfluous men of the Romantic and post-Romantic age, a certain distaste for their selfishness while acknowledging the accuracy of the portrait of a certain kind of failure of character and sensibility.

Great works of Western art are ultimately great moral works, either by revealing our ethical issues and dilemmas as say Homer and Ovid do, using a sensitive narrative style and in a deeply humanist context, or attempting to resolve them head-on as Dante and Tolstoy do by showing the consequences of action and the contrasting paths of selfishness and selflessness. If Goethe is to truly engage our attention and feelings, by taking a moralist position (particularly if he is to end Part II as he does with all the trappings of conventional religion, following through on the concept of the traditional 'Faust' morality play) then he has to demonstrate Faust as a candidate for redemption. That means he must show Faust's character developing over time, and allow us to judge his creative activity and his overall worth, by assessing his whole life, or he must show Faust ending in true remorse and a desperately recovered faith, in a conventional Christian ending. He of course has the alternative of condemning Faust as Marlowe did.

It is useful to take stock of Faust as a character at this point. So far he has emerged as a restless Romantic spirit, dissatisfied with the inadequacy of traditional means of achieving ultimate truth, and fulfilment. He sees the self and the soul, heart or inner spirit as sacrosanct, and the world and society as lacking, particularly social institutions and conventions. Everything for him cloyes and fades. He is possessed of frustrated yearning, and a feeling of claustrophobia. This is indeed the Romantic, and to some extent the Modern position. He follows a path of directed energy or

ceaseless activity to which Mephistopheles, with Divine consent, spurs him, seeking to achieve satisfaction and contentment in achievement. His self-centredness makes him effective at manipulation rather than relationship, solitude rather than engagement, and also means that while not intending to cause harm or pain, he is lacking in foresight and careless of the consequences to others. There is evidence of deep powers of feeling, and an ability to empathise particularly with Nature, but in his selfish mode he is destructive of human values. The pact has established that he does not expect to find lasting fulfilment, and undertakes to strive endlessly. And we have seen him turn away from conventional and unconventional knowledge and learning, and, led by Mephistopheles, pass through the merely sensual world of the common man, and the world of sexual love enhanced by feeling.

We might expect him in future to investigate the worlds of wealth and power, of beauty and of true creative effort. Along the way we might look for evidence of his capacity for true love, and relationship, for community and human empathy.

## PART II ACT I SCENE I: A PLEASANT LANDSCAPE

Part II opens with a still-restless Faust encircled by spirits in the natural landscape. Ariel sings a song of pity and mercy, and instructs the spirits to remove the barbs of terror and remorse from Faust. We are therefore to assume that he has felt a deep regret, and undergone penitence and atonement, following Gretchen's imprisonment and execution, although again Goethe does not show us Faust in a state of contrition. We have to take it on trust.

He is now to be sprinkled with dew from Lethe's stream, which implies forgetfulness of pain, and therefore the dark memory of the Gretchen tragedy is about to be erased from Faust's mind! Faust is to be returned renewed to sacred Nature. The Choir urges him to wake to a new dawn, and to grasp nobly the opportunities presented to him. We await a Faust intent on higher things.

He wakes and his speech does indeed reassert the need for higher purpose, and a striving towards higher being. Goethe gives us restless natural imagery symbolising the creative activity of Nature and the universe. Once more we seem to be in the grip of full-blown Romanticism, a vision in apotheosis of the rising sun of life, which the human mind must turn away from, blinded, by its fierce embrace, one that may reveal love for, or even hatred, of Humanity in its blazing intensity. Shelley's 'Triumph of Life' is a work with which this passage may be usefully compared, with Rousseau as a key figure within the poem, reflecting Shelley's own Romantic pessimism.

But Faust in following the effects of the plunging water and meditating on the rainbow emerges with a Classical rather than a Romantic insight, that the efforts of mankind are like the rainbow's refracted colours, where the light has been mediated. And the note here is positive rather than pessimistic or defeatist. The rainbow is, in Classical literature, the pathway of Iris, who is the divine messenger of Juno. So it forms a bridge symbolically between the divine and the human, the heavens and the earth.

Goethe wrote in 1825 'The True, which is identical with the Divine, can never be seen directly by us, we see it only in reflection, in examples and symbols, in isolated and related phenomena...'



Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion, Plate 14 [Detail]

William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

We are now involved in a Classical renunciation of absolute knowledge, in turning from the sun to a phenomenon of its refracted light, to the finite earth rather than the infinite universe, and to the things of this world rather than ideas and dreams of what might lie beyond it. The Classical path, reflected in the Greek notion of the dangers of *hubris*, excessive pride and ambition, and in the Roman assertion (see Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Books I and II: Phaethon) of the 'middle way' between extremes, is that of harmonious development, of balance and integrity. That was increasingly Goethe's world-view before, and was confirmed after, his Italian Journey that did so much to finalise and enrich his views of the Classical world. Deriving his key ideas from Winckelmann, and later from his own reading of the Classics, and by studying on the spot Roman



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antiquities and Italian attitudes to life, Goethe adopted a view of the Classical world as calm and controlled, passionate and natural, but able to create form through the aesthetic urge, and with a balanced perspective on human impulses. He set as his personal goal the 'wholeness' he had identified in even the humblest Italians he had seen on his travels, and saw that wholeness as a Classical inheritance.

Faust's speech is therefore a key to the journey he will pursue in Part II, in search of Helen, who is ultimate beauty of form, and therefore also a symbol of the Greek experience. He is to travel among the refracted colours of the divine sun, in an earthly reality, from which he hopes to derive a whole view of existence, and become a whole man.

**PART II ACT I SCENE II:**  
**THE EMPEROR'S CASTLE: THE THRONE ROOM**

**T**he re-born Faust will now appear at the Emperor's Court, and Goethe has portrayed for us an Empire (based on the Holy Roman Empire) corroded by its essential frivolity, and in a state of disorder. Following his renunciation of the paths of knowledge and learning, his brief view of common sensual man, and his love affair with Gretchen, Faust is now to concern himself with wealth and power, or rather the abuse of both.

Mephistopheles insinuates himself as the new Fool at Court, and asks the Emperor a riddle whose answer is given by Goethe in the Chancellor's speech, it is Justice that is absent from this place. This is the Court of lies and illusions, and social injustice. It is led by astrology (4764) rather than realism or spirituality, and by a frivolous Emperor intent on carnival fun.

The Chancellor now describes the criminally disturbed state of the realm, but concludes that the problem lies with the populace. The Commander-In-Chief follows with the anarchic power structure, and the Treasurer with the failure of the taxation system and the traditional rights and dues of the Emperor. Even the Steward is in trouble, due to the extravagance of the Lords and the Councillors, and the greed of the moneylenders! Mephisto, as the Fool, when questioned however replies with gross flattery, and only the crowd can detect his intrigue. Gold, he suggests would solve all the problems (4890). Mind and Nature he recommends, both part of Goethe's new Classical vision, are the powers required to discover it. Heresy, the Emperor states. Mind is the source of fatal doubt, and Nature the source of original sin. A thoroughly Northern view! The Saints he suggests are there to counter the one, and the Knights the other.



Europe. A Prophecy, Plate 12 [Detail]

William Blake (British, 1757 – 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

Mephistopheles teases the Emperor (4917) who dismisses his irony impatiently and demands the gold. It's there, buried all over the Empire in times of trouble, says Mephisto, and treasure trove belongs to the Emperor! The Treasurer, Steward and Commander-In-Chief applaud the idea, only the Chancellor smells a rat. Mephisto calls in the Astrologer as ally, much to the crowd's dismay. The Astrologer reads the benevolent state of the heavenly bodies, and hints at an alchemical marriage of sun and moon to produce the desired result (4965).

Mephistopheles makes the crowd his diviners' rods, and they sense the hidden wealth. The Emperor threatens Mephisto with a trip to hell if he should be deluding them, amusingly apt for the devil as Mephistopheles notes, and is soon, with a little urging, ready to set out himself to assist in the treasure hunt. The moralising warning from the Astrologer recommending the Classical middle way, and Greek calm as a means of preparation, falls on deaf ears. Fine says the Emperor, we'll use Ash Wednesday to be serious, meanwhile let's have the Carnival! They exit, leaving Mephisto to comment on their collective foolishness.

**PART II ACT I SCENE III:**  
**A SPACIOUS HALL WITH ADJOINING ROOMS**

What follows is a Carnival parade, a masquerade in lavish Renaissance style, which Goethe makes an allegory of society. Groups representing various social roles and classes are followed by allegorical and mythological figures, building up to a glorification of the Emperor. However Faust will appear as Plutus, the personification of Wealth, to suggest its beneficial uses and warn about its dangers, while Mephisto will represent Envy, and greed will soon cause chaos again.

The Herald begins the action with a cynical description of the Emperor's trip to Rome where he has been crowned, and returned to turn his Court into a Court of frivolous fools. First the flower girls appear (5088) with a delightful song that allows Goethe to hint self-mockingly at the patchwork nature of Faust as a work, commenting quite rightly that parts of it may seem odd but the whole is attractive. Various natural products follow presenting themselves as adornments: olives, wheat, garland and bouquet, and the rosebuds, striking a sweetly sensual note that the Gardeners continue.

Next we have the mother and daughter (5178) with an overtly sexual, marriage-market theme. In the background a relaxed scene of amorous flirtation ensues. Then the woodcutters arrive to stress how the wealthy ride the backs of the labouring man (5199), followed by the mocking street-players extolling the virtues of their carefree existence. Then the social parasites follow (5237) singing their praises of the workers and lusting for fine food, and finally the drunkard. Various poets now pass by (5295), but prevent each other speaking, apart from the satirical poet, while others excuse themselves. A little gentle laughter here at the expense of the literary world.

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Mythology appears next. First the three Graces (5300) with a charming triplet of verses, explaining their roles as being those of Giving, Receiving and Thanking. Goethe shows again how he can make exquisite and profound poetic music from the slightest opportunities of his material. The ideas are often apparently irrelevant to the plot of *Faust*, but Goethe is continually stressing his main theme, inner restlessness and its ultimate sterility, and the need for fruitful activity. Here the concept of exchange and communion in the process of giving is a reflection on *Faust's* activities and points to the reasons behind his previous failure. Goethe will often show his own mature thought through minor elements of the play. The three Fates follow, and the three Furies, both sets of verses reflecting on the swift flow of life, and the restless nature of human beings. *Tisiphone*, the Avenger, in particular sounds a warning for the disloyal and fickle that should ring in *Faust's* ears (5381).

Now a tableau consisting of Fear, and Hope in chains, with Intelligence riding the elephant's neck and steering it, while on its back stands Victory, the goddess of the active life. Goethe implies that fear and hope are the enemies of the active intelligence, since both waylay it from its true purpose. The elephant is followed by the twofold shape of the destructive dwarf who is a spoiler of noble activity (5457), and whom the Herald strikes to reveal him as a malicious mixture of snake and bat.

A Chariot appears drawn by dragons (5520) and driven by a Boy-Charioteer who is Poetry. In the chariot is *Plutus* god of Wealth, who is *Faust* in disguise. Poetry is also a form of riches claims the Charioteer. Poetry's wealth is illusory and elusive, claims the Herald, but the Boy-Charioteer hints at a different interpretation to the vanishing of the wealth that poetry inspires (5606). Goethe explains that financial wealth finds delight in the arts, and can, by patronising them, increase artistic riches. But behind the chariot is the Starveling, *Mephistopheles* in disguise, representing miserly Greed, the negative side of wealth, who criticises the profligacy and spendthrift nature of the present age, women in particular. *Plutus* now unloads a chest of gold from the chariot, and releases Poetry, like a latter-day *Ariel*, to fly back to his true realm of solitary Goodness and Beauty, a Platonic and a Romantic vision, which appealed strongly to Shelley, whose chariot in 'The Triumph Of Life' is an echo of this one, but employed for a very different purpose.

Poetry is a blessed activity, according to the Charioteer, who is free now but still bound in future to obey, and return to, his Prospero, Faust, who represents Plutus, and Plenty (5705). Faust opens the chest to reveal the illusory treasures within, and thereby triggers the crowd's greed, and then at the Herald's instigation drives the greediest Maskers away. Mephistopheles meanwhile shapes an obscene object out of the gold, and the women retreat in disgust, no doubt at their own base desires being revealed.

The attendants of Pan now arrive, the creatures of the wild, and of nature: sensual Fauns, the free and wild Satyr, metal-forging Gnomes who create the tools for men to do evil, and the Giants signifying natural power. Finally the Nymphs surround the great god Pan, who is in fact the Emperor in disguise. They flatter him, while the Gnomes offer him the hidden wealth they have found underground. The Dwarves lead the procession onwards to the fiery fountain which inadvertently sets the Emperor's beard alight, and the Herald is given the opportunity to moralise about the misuse of youth and power (5958). Faust, as Plutus, however quickly rescues the situation. He has enacted his own morality play within a play in order to highlight the dangers of greed, unsuccessfully as we shall see. Goethe now dispels the fantasy, charmingly, with magic.

**PART II ACT I SCENE IV:**  
**A PLEASURE GARDEN IN THE MORNING SUN**

**F**aust asks the Emperor's forgiveness for the previous incident. Mephistopheles piles on the flattery (6003). The Steward, Commander-In-Chief, and Treasurer now arrive to applaud the Emperor's sudden solvency. The miracle has been achieved by issuing banknotes against the security of the yet-to-be unearthed buried treasure of the Empire. The Emperor smells a rat, but finds out that he himself signed the order for the new currency, which the Court have used to pay their debts, grant wages to the army etc, and which has stimulated the local economy (and no doubt created rampant inflation!). Having persuaded the Emperor of the wisdom of their monetary scheme, Faust and Mephistopheles are rewarded by being made masters of the buried treasure that will be needed to back the paper money.

The Emperor immediately turns to doling out presents to the Court, though slightly disappointed by the shallowness of their requests. The Fool knows what's what though, and Goethe concludes the scene with Mephistopheles and the Fool in witty repartee.

So far Faust's efforts in Part II have not brought about much moral and personal progress on his part, though he has tried to point out the proper uses of wealth. Goethe though is about to increase the tempo.

## PART II ACT I SCENE V: A GLOOMY GALLERY

Faust has drawn Mephistopheles aside to make a request. He needs Mephisto's assistance to make Helen and Paris appear before the Emperor. Faust suggests that it is Mephisto rather than himself who has brought the Emperor to make this demand, by creating wealth and demonstrating his and Faust's power. Now the Emperor wants to be entertained. Mephistopheles is uncomfortable with the ancient world (as an agent of restlessness and disharmony he will be clearly in opposition to Classical beauty and harmony), but explains that there is a way to achieve what's required (6211).

Faust has therefore not initiated the search for Helen and ideal beauty on his own initiative, but has fallen into the mission. If he is to develop and progress it is obviously going to take him some time in this hit and miss fashion! Goethe is deliberate it seems in his intent firstly to place Faust on the borderline between good and evil, or rather fruitful and unfruitful activity, and secondly to make his development one of chance and muddle, rather than clear will. Faust is an anti-hero in many respects, and rather as Dante in the *Commedia* shifted the concept of the epic protagonist from martial hero to humble seeker after truth, so Goethe shifts the concept a stage further to confused and restless modern man.

Faust, in his traditional Romantic mode, jibs at Mephisto's sorcery, and his warnings, claiming to have fled into solitude with only Mephisto as devilish companion and therefore to be well prepared for entering some mystical wasteland. He is now to be sent by Mephisto into the Nothingness where the mysterious 'Mothers' live. Goethe referred Eckermann to Plutarch for the origins of this idea. Plutarch refers to both the Mothers being worshipped in Sicily at Engyium (probably a representation of the ancient Triple-Goddess), and (in the *Decline of the Oracles*) to a plain of truth, where are the plans and Ideas of all things. The Mothers here indeed preside over the realm of Platonic Ideas. Helen is clearly the Idea of the Beautiful Woman, Paris presumably the Idea of the Adulterer!



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Mephisto gives Faust a key that will lead him to the Mothers and Faust spurs himself into activity despite his dread (6271). Mephistopheles describes the destination as a place where all Forms exist, a directionless void where the Ideas of things that no longer exist on Earth can still be found. Goethe is here poking fun at the Platonic concept of the Ideas, and its apparent inconsistencies. What does qualify to be a unique Idea: can it overlap conceptually with other Ideas: what is the difference between instances of an Idea and the Idea itself: and does Plato mean that the Ideas of what does not yet exist, and what no longer exists, are already, and remain, present in the Ideal realm? Here is an example of those ‘serious jokes’ that Goethe intended for Part II.

Faust is to touch, with the key Mephistopheles gives to him, the tripod he will find in the realm of the Mothers, they being goddesses who preside over eternal formation and transformation. The tripod will fold up and follow him like a servant. Faust will ascend and once returned will be able to summon up Helen and Paris.

Faust stamps hard and vanishes while Mephistopheles is left to speculate cynically as to whether Faust will return or not! We too can speculate while the scene changes.

**PART II ACT I SCENE VI: BRILLIANTLY LIT HALLS**

**W**e are back inside the Court, and Mephistopheles is explaining, under pressure, that Faust is indeed about to satisfy the Emperor's request. Goethe slips in a comic interlude. Mephistopheles is now pestered by the ladies of the Court to assist with their problems: poor skin, a limp, a faithless lover, and then by the page who needs some love advice. Mephisto is so irritated he has to resort to asking the Mothers in mock prayer for Faust to reappear! The whole Court now moves off to the Hall of the Knights.

**PART II ACT I SCENE VII:**  
**THE HALL OF THE KNIGHTS, DIMLY LIT**

**T**he Herald sets the scene, and the Astrologer prepares the stage, while Mephistopheles pops up in the prompter's box, to indulge in some more of his delightful witticisms (6400). A Greek temple façade appears, to be mocked by the 'modern' architect, setting the scene for later mockery of the rawness and crudeness of many elements of the Classical world.

The Astrologer again prepares the audience for marvels, and Faust duly rises to view. He gives a brief description of the Ideal realm from which he has come, filled as it is with the imperishable forms of what has been and will be. Some things are still with us, others, like Helen and Paris, the magician must summon.

Paris appears when Faust touches the key to the tripod once more. Goethe can now have fun with the comments of the audience, the moderns reflecting on the ancients with perennial bitchiness or ardour. The Greek Ideal of adulterous manhood of course shows evidence of his primitive, uncultured background in the Homeric Bronze Age! And now Helen appears too (6479). Mephistopheles, true spirit of denial, immediately criticises and devalues her. But the Astrologer and Faust react quite differently.

Faust has come into contact, as Goethe himself felt he had, with the beauty and wholeness of the Classical world. Faust is now in a passion for Helen (6500), presumably a predominantly sexual passion still. More fun follows with the comments of the audience regarding Helen, and then Paris and Helen as a couple.

Paris now begins to carry Helen off, and Faust, enraged, seeing himself within reach of mastering the double realm, of earth and of spirits, Classical and modern (6555), and desiring Helen himself, tries to intervene. His violence causes the two spirits to vanish, and Faust falls to the ground

unconscious. Mephistopheles carts him off to the old Gothic chamber where the pact was first signed.

Faust, dissatisfied by his old pursuit of supreme Truth, and himself an indirect cause of tragedy in his pursuit of Romantic Love, has now failed in his pursuit of Ideal Beauty too. The Classical World cannot be brought forward intact into the modern world it seems. If Faust retains his desire for that Classical Beauty, and is determined to search for it again, he will have to go back into the past, into the Classical world, in order to achieve his goal, Goethe's wholeness, a merging of both worlds and his equivalent of Goodness, exemplified in the active, creative life.

**PART II ACT II SCENE I:**  
**A HIGH-ARCHED, NARROW, GOTHIC CHAMBER**

**W**e are back where we started in Faust's Gothic chamber at the University. Everything appears the same as when the agreement with Mephistopheles was signed, only a little older and dustier. And so far we are still uncertain whether Faust has made any real personal progress. Goethe has neatly returned Faust to the starting point for a reassessment.

Mephistopheles fancies playing the role of cocksure professor again, and, as Lord of the Flies, celebrates the horde of insects that emerge from the moth-eaten robe to greet him as he dons it.

The old College servant appears, and affords Mephistopheles another opportunity for mocking the world of academia: it's unfinished and probably worthless projects, its undue love of fame and respect. Wagner it seems has taken Faust's place during his absence, and is now the great teacher, but according to the servant still reveres Faust, and has therefore left his room untouched awaiting his return. Wagner it seems is a modest scientist, deep in scientific and alchemical experimentation (6675).

Another comic interlude now as Mephisto, dressed as Faust the professor, interviews the now-cynical senior student, who has seen through the pretensions and is about to leave. Mephistopheles indulges in witty banter, with a few telling in-jokes given the recent action. As usual describing jokes is a waste of time, read the play! But part of Mephistopheles' and the play's, enduring appeal is the fun of it all, and much of Mephisto's wit is quick and pointed enough to survive and raise a laugh (6770-6773!). The banter intensifies as the student praises youth, and flexes his spiritual muscles, much to Mephisto's ironic delight who hits back at arrogant and subjective youth (The German Romantics and Fichte etc are intended) and does so tellingly (6807). Note how the stage direction here makes it obvious that Goethe saw the Faust drama as a play within a

play, in a theatre within the greater theatre, so that he feels free to comment on the audience reaction, and point up the problem of understanding between youth and age.



The Poems of Thomas Gray, Design 105 [Detail]  
William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

## PART II ACT II SCENE II: A LABORATORY

The scene switches to Wagner's laboratory, where Mephistopheles enters in the middle of a crucial experiment. Wagner is attempting to create a test-tube human being. Mephistopheles of course plays the ironist (6836) as they stage whisper together. Wagner explains that the tender sexual act of procreation is now to be superseded. New life is about to crystallise out within the tube, which hardly impresses Mephisto!

Lots of fun now as Homunculus makes his appearance, the Hermaphroditic life form created by Wagner in his apparatus. He starts by calling Wagner 'father!' (6879), and recognising Mephistopheles as his 'cousin', presumably because he himself is the creature of a blasphemous creation, and science is in that sense in league with the devil! His first expectation is activity, life means doing something. And he expects Mephistopheles to smooth the path to something worth doing. Mephisto quickly stops Wagner asking questions about body and soul, as he wants to employ Homunculus to find out what Faust is dreaming.

Homunculus floats off in his test-tube and hovers over Faust, where he describes Faust's dream of swans on a Classical pool. He can see them while Mephisto, a hopeless Northerner, of the age of mist, is unable to dream properly (6924) or understand Faust's dream. Faust needs to be sent off to the Classical Walpurgis Night, to find his true element. Romantic ghosts must be replaced by Classical ones. The scene will be the battlefield of Pharsalus and the banks of the Peneus in Northern Greece. Given the modern battle for Greek Independence (involving Byron), Goethe can't resist Mephisto's jibe at the boredom of it all. The Greeks are always fighting, and always for a notional freedom.

Mephistopheles can offer no help in getting back to Classical times, which he finds distasteful, though he concedes the joyful as opposed to gloomy sins of the pagan past! Mephistopheles is interested too in the idea of attractive Thessalian witches. Homunculus will get them all there, but

Wagner must stay behind, and off they go to those wonderful closing lines from Mephistopheles (7003).

The rest of Act II will be dedicated to this trip. Faust will search for Helen, Homunculus for whatever will complete his birth, since he is only half-born, and Mephistopheles for his relatives among the Classical monstrosities.

The concept of Homunculus is as a bridge between the modern and ancient worlds. Goethe is suggesting the need for completeness and wholeness in human existence. The modern world, created in a test-tube, over-reliant on intellect and reason, represented by Homunculus' shining ringing light, needs to find a sensual body, and its correct complement in the ancient world in order to become a unity. Scientific creation will have to meet natural creation in the waters of the sea.

Mephistopheles will have a role too to play in bringing Helen to Faust. We can then see what Faust makes of the ancient world and Ideal beauty, and whether it improves and develops him at all.

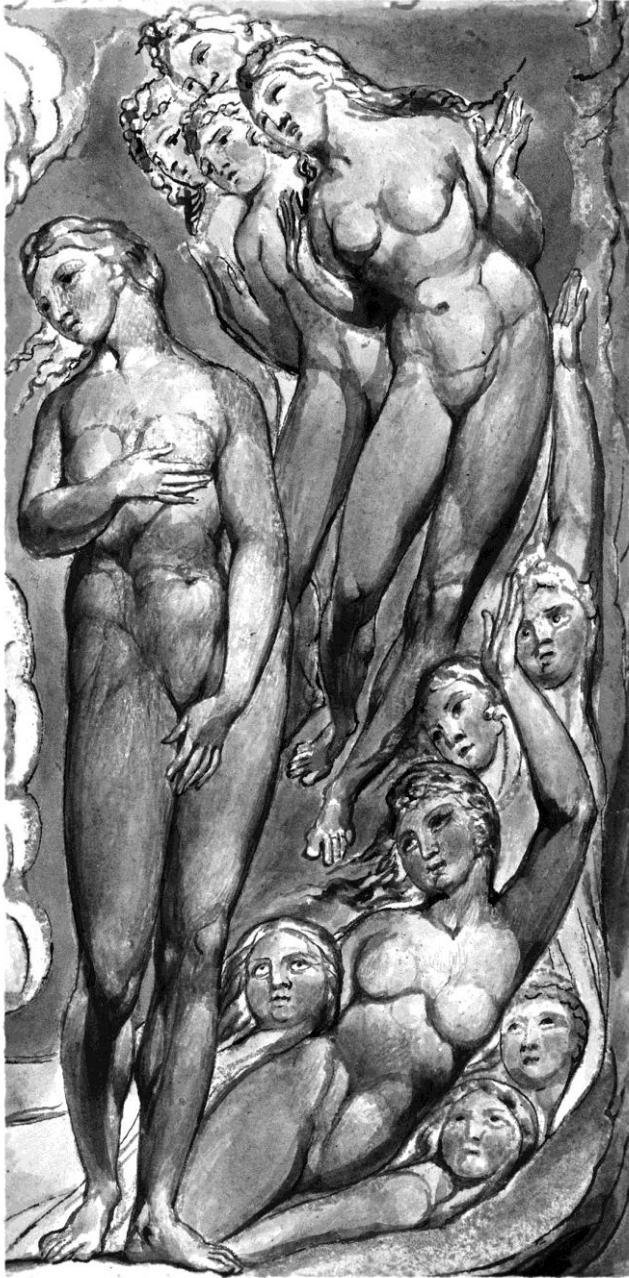


**PART II ACT II SCENE III:  
CLASSICAL WALPURGIS NIGHT.**

**T**he scene is the battlefield of Pharsalus in 48BC where Julius Caesar defeated Pompey in a decisive encounter, near present day Farsala in Greece. Pompey's defeat spelt the end of the Republic and opened the way to Caesar's dictatorship. Lucan's *Pharsalia* describes the battle, and Erichtho the Thessalian witch is taken from Lucan. In eternity these battles are re-enacted endlessly it seems, a potent image, worthy of Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence, perhaps itself prompted by Goethe's lines. Erichtho sets the scene and then gives way to our travellers as they arrive, Homunculus lighting the way. The place is full of ancient ghosts, and Mephisto feels already more at home!

Faust revives as soon as he's placed on Classical soil, and his dream makes contact with the corresponding reality. At once he is in quest of Helen (7056). The three of them separate to pursue their individual quests among the campfires on the plain, and will gather again to Homunculus' ringing light. Faust, feeling strengthened, wanders off to find Helen, while we follow Mephistopheles to the Upper Peneus River.

Mephisto is a little discomposed by the sight of so much Classical nakedness. True indecency, which is his ideal, needs clothing to set it off, after all! He encounters the Gryphon and there is a play on the derivations of the word Gryphon, impossible to exactly reflect in English, though the closeness of the two languages allows the general idea to be communicated, with a few liberties. The Gryphon relates his name to the verb *to grip*. There is now a lot of allusion to activity concerning gold, its mining, collection etc. Goethe gathered these ideas from various sources, including Herodotus (The Histories III:116, IV:13, 27). Gryphons, ants and the Scythian race of the one-eyed Arimaspi are all connected with the mining, storage and guarding of gold.



Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion, Plate 81 [Detail]  
William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

## The Restless Spirit

Mephistopheles sits down next to the Sphinx (7132) who is an expert of course in riddles, and suggests one to which the answer would be Mephistopheles himself, the devil being an entity needed by the good man as a worthy opponent to fight, and by the sinful man as a guide and comrade. The Gryphons dislike him, the Sirens sing to him with no effect.

Faust appears, occupied in 'serious gazing'. After some banter with Mephistopheles he asks the Sphinxes for the whereabouts of Helen, but since they are products of later Classicism they have to refer him back to Chiron, the Centaur, Helen's contemporary. Faust wanders off to look for him. The Stympthalides and the Lernean Hydra are pointed out to Mephistopheles, and then the lustful Lamiae.

The action now shifts to the Lower Peneus where after some exquisite scene setting from Goethe, involving Nymphs and swans, Faust meets up with Chiron the never-resting Centaur, a suitable agent therefore to help the ever-restless Faust find Helen. Chiron wittily repels Faust's flattery, making a neat allusion too to Athene's disguise as Mentor in the *Odyssey*. Chiron was the wise teacher of Achilles, Jason, and others, famed too for his medical knowledge. Chiron gives a quick run down of the most famous of the Argonauts, and Faust leads him on to talk about Hercules the model of male beauty according to Goethe, and Helen, the ideal of female beauty.

We get a touch of erotica, since Chiron has actually carried Helen on his back where Faust is now sitting, and Faust (7434) then praises her tenderness and kindness as well as her beauty. Chiron now takes Faust to visit Manto the prophetess and healer, who leads Faust down to the underworld to fulfil his search for Helen.

**PART II ACT II SCENE IV:  
ON THE UPPER PENEUS AGAIN**

Meanwhile, back on the Upper Peneus, the Sirens flee for the Aegean Sea, the cradle of Greek civilisation, as an earthquake shakes the land. Seismos representing cataclysmic and discontinuous change speaks as the agent of the earthquake, which has given the various metal-seeking and metal-working creatures a chance to get at the earth's riches. The Gryphons, Ants, Pygmies (Dwarves), and Dactyls speak. The Pygmies attack the herons on a nearby pool to get feathers for their helmets, and the cranes of Ibycus retaliate to help their kin. The Ants and Dactyls are meanwhile slaving away. Goethe seems to be making the point that oppressive force, slavery, and war were features of Classical society, itself corrupted by material riches as much as modern society is. The whole of this first part of the scene involves power and violence in an ultimately worthless cause.



Young's Night Thoughts, Page 54 [Detail]

William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

## The Restless Spirit

Mephistopheles is disconcerted by it all, and prefers the quieter north. Goethe is reinforcing the notion that the Devil is in fact a conservative force, constrained, as evil usually is, by its banality and lack of creative imagination, and uncomfortable outside the narrow range within which it operates. Mephisto in this Classical world can only be truly motivated by a base instinct, lust, and sets off again in pursuit of the seductive Lamiae, and speaks with them and the ass-headed Empusa. He then finds himself tangled among these illusory spirits, shape-changers metamorphosing in his grasp. He wanders off into the mountains and finds Homunculus again (7830) who is still searching for whatever will complement his part existence and allow him to fully be. Homunculus is about to pursue two philosophers, and Mephistopheles warns him of the dangers, it's better to try on your own and err than listen to those who only pretend to know, he counsels.

We follow Homunculus as he listens to Anaxagoras and Thales. Anaxagoras represents the Vulcanists, proponents of cataclysmic and sudden change with fire as the agent, while Thales represents the Neptunists, the proponents of gradual change, with water as the agent, with whom Goethe sided. The wider analogy is with the violence of Romanticism, as exhibited by the Gretchen tragedy on the one hand, and the gradual development and restraint of Classicism, represented hopefully by the later development of Faust's character. Goethe is siding with progressive change rather than revelation, and modest activity rather than violence. Life as far as Goethe was concerned evolved slowly and progressively from simpler and primary forms, and that is true of personality and character too.

Thales suggests, contradicting Anaxagoras, that power and force are not the proper examples for human beings, and that Homunculus should avoid power as a means. The cranes will avenge the herons in a continuation of fruitless struggle. Anaxagoras, seeking help for the Pygmies, calls on the Moon, who sends a meteorite to shatter the mountain. Anaxagoras thinks the moon itself has fallen, but Thales points out that she remains in her usual place. Power and violence argues Goethe are ultimately illusory in their effect, while gradual means change the world more fundamentally. Sensitivity to short term effects, he suggests, Romantic

extremism and volatility, are counter-productive, and human development takes place in a slower way, but one more permanent in its effects.

Homunculus is impressed by it all, but Thales reassures him as to its illusory nature, and takes him off to the festival of ocean where the slower but more effective forces of the watery world can be appreciated (7950).

Mephistopheles meanwhile, still trying to orient himself in this strange land, comes across the cave of the Graeae, the three sisters with one eye and one tooth between them, the Phorcides, the daughters of Phorkyas. They are further examples of Greek monstrosity, the ability of the Classical world to incorporate ugliness as well as beauty in its all-embracing range. Mephistopheles tries flattery. Why have they never been properly represented in all their glory in ancient art? His aim is that they should free up one of their forms to allow him to borrow it for a while. The pleasant effect of all this is that Mephisto shuts one eye, sticks out a tooth, borrows their form, changes sex (!) and is effectively a Phorkyad. He exits.

**PART II ACT II SCENE V:**  
**ROCKY COVES IN THE AEGEAN SEA**

**W**e are by the Aegean Sea, and the Sirens are addressing the Moon. We are in a feminine world. Throughout *Faust*, the female element, with all its traditional associations, is the source of the most creative and productive change and challenge. The Nereids and Tritons swim around, and then, to prove they are not mere fishes, head off to the island of Samothrace (8070), and the mythological Greek realms of the Cabiri. Goethe is pushing back the scene to the earliest Greek times that his world was aware of. The Cabiri, ancient gods with an interest in seafaring among other things, were the subject of hot dispute among German scholars. The point however is that they represent the most ancient roots of Greek religion.

Thales meanwhile takes Homunculus to visit Nereus the sea-god. Nereus sums up the ambitious and restless human race succinctly (8094) and quotes two examples of it, Paris and Ulysses, neither of whom accepted his advice! Thales though is the spirit of persistence and continuity, and, despite everything, asks Nereus for his counsel regarding Homunculus. Nereus however is awaiting the Dorides and Galatea whom he has summoned, and a chance to plunge again into the world of 'hearts without hate, lips without judgements' (8151). He suggests they go to Proteus, the shape-changer, to find out if human beings are capable of development.

Back to the Sirens, who watch the Nereids and Tritons arrive bringing the Cabiri on a turtle-shell, for whom the Sirens counsel respect (8192). Goethe treats the Cabiri as gods of those voyagers who 'long for the unattainable' (8205), a sentiment Baudelaire well understood, and a seminal aspect of the Romantic movement. The Sirens, suggesting the alchemical marriage of moon and sun, imply where the answer is to be found, in the female element again. The Cabiri are the 'unformed ones', the protoplasm of the later divinities of Greece, much as Faust is still unformed.

Thales and Homunculus watch the procession, and Proteus, who is hovering near, is attracted, at Thales' instigation, by Homunculus' shining light (of intellect). Thales explains Homunculus' (and therefore the modern world's) preponderance of mind over matter, mentally capable but physically incomplete (8250). After a few jokes about Homunculus' ambiguous sexual status, Proteus suggests that Homunculus recapitulates human development by starting in the sea with the tiniest creatures and working his way up to full being. So Thales (gradualist philosophy), Proteus (the capability for change) and Homunculus (incomplete modernity), go off together to view the sea festival, an odd but potent triple combination.



## PART II ACT II SCENE VI: THE TELCHINES OF RHODES

The Telchines now pass by in the procession. They were the nine dog-headed Children of the Sea, inventors of metalworking who forged Neptune's trident (representing the powers of the sea), and were the creators of the first freestanding statues, making them, for Goethe, the earliest creative artists. Inhabiting the island of Rhodes, as the Cabiri inhabited the island of Samothrace, they are suitable agents to introduce the formative passage of Homunculus through the waters. Islands in the sea represent creative sources for Goethe. Again he is searching for the most ancient creative aspects of Classical culture to illuminate the fusion of the ancient and modern worlds.

The alchemical fusion of Apollo and Diana, sun and moon, is never far away from us here (8290). For Goethe it represents the sacred marriage, the union of male and female, of the active and nurturing, and, if we remember the moon of Walpurgis Night, this corresponding moon of the Classical Walpurgis Night, links modern and ancient as well. But the new Walpurgis Night, is focused through Homunculus, the mind with a purpose, rather than led by a Will O' The Wisp as before. Here we pursue wholeness and beauty rather than sensuality and the purely monstrous, and it is Mephistopheles who is at sea in this world rather than Faust.

Goethe celebrates with the Telchines the beginning of creative art, the expression of mind in form, and tellingly 'the depiction of gods in the image of man'. We are close here to Goethe's religious sentiment, with the gods and God as a human creation, but expressing a fruitful identity with the deeper powers of the universe. This is the wholeness Homunculus and Faust need, and that Mephistopheles is forever denied.

But Proteus, agent of change, throws out a challenge to human creativity: he plays Mephisto's role here as a denier of human value. The statues and all art, all human creation, is doomed to melt and vanish (8305). Vulcanism provides a temporary triumph for the violent forces of earth, and human existence at its very best requires continual effort and drudgery.

Proteus prefers the sea, and offers it again as the true source of life. He changes to a dolphin form to carry Homunculus over the waves, and ‘wed him to the ocean’.

Thales still holds out existence as a human being as a noble goal, and Proteus agrees so long as it’s a human life of Thales’ quality (8335). The Sirens, Nereus, and Thales, now comment on the doves of Paphos, accompanying Galatea (a representation of Venus). The doves signify traditionally peace, love, the warm nest of sexuality and the bonded pair, and here the essential sacredness of the feminine aspects of existence, and of the love inherent in the natural world. Thales (8355) gives the symbol an explicit sexual twist, and Goethe once more emphasises the importance to him of the sexual aspect of human life, and the need to merge humour with seriousness in approaching the most sacred and delicate of human acts, which also puts us in touch with the rawest and deepest, the ‘wild’ aspects of our own nature.

The ancient sea-peoples of Italy and North Africa, the Psylli and Marsi, lovers of peace, bring Galatea from Cyprus, and Goethe makes a pointed reference to the cross and crescent of organised religions in their militant and destructive forms (8372). Here instead all is peace and love, and the true sacredness. Goethe could not be more explicit in his mistrust of accepted religion, and we should therefore approach his conventional Christian ending to Faust with great caution. Woman eternally, the eternal feminine, is what he holds most essential, and all else is only a parable. Gretchen, Helen, Galatea, and the Moon are all aspects of the Great Goddess, and it is she whom Faust-Goethe must learn from at all stages of his development. The Sirens now reinforce both the imagery, and this truth (8379). The weaving creativity of the universe is here exemplified in the festival of the sea, and Galatea as both charming and seductive human femininity, the Goddess Venus herself.

Nereus and the Dorides endorse the concept of a sexually empowered creative union (8402). Goethe is absolutely forthright in his acceptance of free love here, in this Classical world (8420), and in this fluid sea where nothing is fixed or stable. However we remember the Gretchen tragedy on northern land. And Goethe immediately tempers this vision of sexual abandon with the father-daughter relationship of Nereus and Galatea, which is beautifully expressed and handled.

## The Restless Spirit

Thales too embraces this more than Platonic vision of the Beautiful and True (8434). Goethe in lovely imagery conjures up the nurturing, refreshing, reflective nature of water, as the festival weaves its patterns. And Nereus gives us Goethe's ultimate vision of the world, in lines that are at the heart of Faust. Galatea-Venus, representing the force of Love, is the Goddess and the star, the beloved among the crowd of random people and things that surround us, the true and near however far away it is (8450). These lovely lines are a key to the whole work. The part-developed Homunculus is now at home in the waters, and Mind is embodied, the restless intellect given Classical form, and the sacred marriage possible. Homunculus swims to Galatea's feet, intellect to the heart of love, in a symbolic penetration of matter by mind, and there the prison of glass shatters, and the waves are alight with the fire of Eros. And in a final chorus Goethe gives us desire and nurturing creation in a celebration of the four elements, the fiery waters, the breezes, and those sexually hidden caverns!

Galatea and Homunculus in their sacred marriage of ancient and modern, mind and matter, have prepared us for the further tale of Helen and Faust that follows.

**PART II ACT III SCENE I:  
BEFORE THE PALACE OF MENELAUS IN SPARTA**

Style and scene change again, and we have Helen's soliloquy, explaining that she is back at her father's house in Sparta with her husband Menelaus, after her adultery with Paris, the adventures at Troy, and the subsequent journey of return via Egypt. The Chorus of Trojan Women praise her beauty and her fate, but Helen is more concerned with the nature of her homecoming, is she wife, queen, captive, or sacrifice? She carries the burden of her beauty, and its companions, Fate and Fame with her. Menelaus has sent her ahead to meet the Stewardess, and review the house and its treasures. He has instructed her then to prepare to offer a sacrifice, though he has not named the sacrificial creature to be offered. She expresses her fatalism, and the nature of the gods, their inscrutable actions beyond human good and evil (8585).

The Chorus carries on the high Greek tragic style, celebrating Helen, and their escape from the destruction of Troy. Her inner reluctance to enter the house is contrasted with her apparent outward willingness (8608, 8614). She returns from the doorway, having met with the form of Phorkyas, Mephisto in his-her new disguise, who will provide a suitably bathetic contrast to the style of noble tragedy. In the form of the most ugly he has come to meet the most beautiful. Greek harmony is such that both extremes can be encompassed, and in fact must be symbolically to achieve Goethe's aim of wholeness.

What follows is ritual verbal abuse between Mephisto as Phorkyas, and the Chorus of Trojan women. Helen intervenes and her dialogue with Mephisto recounts her history (8850) from her abduction by Theseus to her adultery with Paris, her subsequent union with Achilles, and her phantom presence in Egypt (8880).

## The Restless Spirit



The Poems of Thomas Gray, Design 43 [Adaptation, Detail]  
William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

Mephisto-Phorkyas asks Helen what her orders are, and is told to hurry the preparations for the sacrifice. Helen, claims Phorkyas, must be intended as the victim. But Phorkyas goes on to offer a means of escape. Faust it seems, invading from the North, has created a kingdom in the hills that stretch behind the palace (Goethe's reminiscence here perhaps of the Norman kingdoms in Sicily and Asia Minor), and seems to be running a reasonably enlightened regime. Mephisto proposes to take her to Faust's splendid fortress.

Though Helen doubts Menelaus' intent to sacrifice her, Phorkyas plays on her fears by invoking the shadow of Menelaus' jealousy (9060). Helen now agrees to go, as Menelaus and his troops near the palace. The Chorus soon arrive within the walls of Faust's fortress.

Goethe has established Helen as the ideal of beauty and the object of male desire, while also revealing her as the troubled victim of that beauty and desire. She presciently foresees her future with Faust. Goethe is preparing us for a human re-enactment of the sacred marriage we have already witnessed, another union of the ancient and modern, Romantic and Classical worlds.

**PART II ACT III SCENE II:  
THE INNER COURT OF THE CASTLE**

**M**ephistopheles, in the form of Phorkyas, has vanished. The Chorus now set the scene (9152). Faust, as a knight of the Middle Ages appears and crowns Helen as his queen. Goethe gives us some stage business designed to impress us with Faust's new status as a beneficent monarch (and unfortunately reminds us of Beethoven's comment to his publishers that Goethe was over-fond of Court life). In an age unimpressed by such things, this section of Faust probably fails in its desired intent. But the message is communicated. Faust is being more constructive than he used to be.

Lynceus the warden of the tower, whom Faust has brought along for Helen's judgement having failed in his duty, now utters his verses of adoration of her, and claims to have been blinded by her Beauty. She of course cannot punish a fault that her own loveliness has caused. Another opportunity here for Helen to stress her effect on men, and portray herself as victim of her own beauty and the male desire it stirs. Faust now excels himself in flattery (9258) and offers her his kingdom and himself. Lynceus reappears with the wealth he has amassed during Faust's victorious advance into Greece, and offers it to Helen, ending with some lovely lines (9329) expressing his adoration of her.

Faust and Lynceus now fall over each other in exalting her. Helen accepts all this, and calls Faust to her. Goethe probably considered this scene effective, but Faust does appear as something of a fawning idiot rather than a virile lover, and his wealth and power don't seem to have been achieved by particularly virtuous means. So the impression is rather that Helen is giving herself to yet another robber baron, another Theseus, Menelaus, Paris, Achilles, another man who has effectively captured her, and that explains her prescience in saying that she foresaw her future with Faust. Like the repetition of the battle of Pharsalus for all eternity, Helen as

the ideal of beauty is doomed to re-appear endlessly in her role as object of desire, adulteress and victim. Her liaison with Faust will merely be yet another re-enactment of her past.

Helen now shows her delight in Lynceus's rhyming verses, a modern invention, contrasting with the Classical metres in which she, the Chorus, and others have spoken. The ancient world is meeting with the modern world, and so we have the charming idea of Faust teaching Helen how to speak in rhyme, and thereby unite the two 'poetic' worlds (9377), in the Moment (9381) that transcends the two worlds, and is the place where all worlds meet.

The Chorus cynically rationalises Helen's submission as natural to the female order (9385). Helen and Faust however enact a genuine love scene (9411). The two worlds are meeting: the sacred marriage of Modern Mind and Classical Form is about to take place once more.

Mephisto-Phorkyas quickly arrives though to announce the arrival of Menelaus and his forces, a nice opportunity to mingle ancient and Medieval warfare, but Faust dismisses the urgency of the threat. Goethe's militaristic vein here, that Beauty must be defended with force, even though Helen is of course the eternal adulteress, while unsubtle, has of course some truth in it. But we are hardly on the plane of high morality here. Goethe is more interested in the union of worlds and the sacred marriage than in a legalistic moral code. Faust extols the violent path he has taken to achieve his kingdom. A nice mix-up of nationalistic and semi-historical admiration of rapine follows, whereby Greece is portioned out to the northern races. A new kingdom based on Sparta is to be established by force with Helen as Queen (9480).

The Chorus now praises the use of military might to defend Beauty, and the combination of wisdom with strength. Perhaps Goethe had his contemporary, Napoleon, in mind as an example! However Goethe spends much more time here on the strength than on the wisdom. So far in this scene we have seen Faust as flatterer, lover, and military overlord, seizing on an adulterous wife, and proposing to send her husband packing back to sea! The wisdom is not too obvious. He is the 'powerful possessor', (9501: the Chorus are totally pragmatic, this is *realpolitik*) which is a status achieved by precisely that, power and possession, not necessarily wisdom, morality or love. Homunculus and Galatea's meeting was a far more touching scene, and it suggests that this new marriage may not last too long.



## The Restless Spirit

Faust however praises the Arcadian paradise he is creating, ringed by a wall of subject regions, protected by armed force. The feel of these verses, designed to laud the beauty of what is being created, ring rather darkly now, despite the sensual-sexual nature of the imagery. The idea of the perfect paradise, the utopian return of a golden age, with healthy children of nature populating it, sounds less interesting after the attempts to engineer society in the twentieth century, by the use of covert or overt force. Goethe's personal solutions to the restlessness of modern man are powerful and persuasive, his social and political solutions a great deal less so. The joy which is to be 'Arcadian and free' (9573) will be achieved by ringing this paradise around with weapons and buffer states. We remember Shakespeare's implicit mockery of Gonzalo's perfect Commonwealth in the *Tempest* (Act II Scene I), and its echo in Huxley's 'Brave New World'.

Time passes now, and the scene changes to a natural harbour. Phorkyas explains to the Chorus who have been asleep all this while, that Faust and Helen are now Master and Mistress, and live in the fathomless caverns nearby which contain halls and courts. They have a child too, Euphorion, lovely, wild and impetuous, who is the product of Romanticism and Classicism, of Faustian Mind and Hellenic Beauty. Euphorion seems to be loosely based on Goethe's image of Byron. He is a miniature Apollo (9620), a future Lord of Beauty (9629) and the lyre, music and poetry. Goethe suggests however that the child of Romanticism and Beauty will be rashly adventurous, seeking to fly free of the earth (more like Shelley than the practical Byron). The Chorus relates Euphorion to the myths of the god Hermes-Mercury (9644), daring and mischievous as a youth, the channel of communication between gods and men when older. But Phorkyas calls for a newer music, free of the old mythologies, as befits a child of the union of ancient and modern times (9679).

Phorkyas (who is really the destructive Mephistopheles), praising Euphorion, now seems to celebrate a Romantic idea of the world within the heart, within the mind and emotions, rather than in the external world. Faust and Helen meanwhile celebrate their own perfect union, now blessed by this offspring (9699). Euphorion however lacks restraint and the Chorus (9735) spots the likelihood that this moment of perfection is about to collapse through Euphorion's immoderate behaviour. The marriage of the Classical and the Modern has not produced Classical restraint, but beautiful excess sowing the seeds of its own destruction.

Could this be Romanticism proper and could this be Goethe's mature comment on it? Shelley the Classicist, tormented by his Humean Mind, but inspired by Rousseau, Nature, and the depth of his own emotions is surely the archetype for us, Shelley who admired and translated Goethe, but was unknown to Goethe himself. The marriage of Mind and Beauty, of the restless urge and the yearning for form, ends in apocalyptic vision, and the dissolving of forms, ends in the spirit drowning in a sea of emotions, tormented by its visions and desires. Yet Goethe intended a portrait of Byron whom he did not claim as a Romantic. Goethe was interested in a solution involving action rather than a spiritual or emotional debacle. And it was Byron the man of action and courage who appealed.

Helen and Faust make a joint plea for restraint (9737). Euphorion appears to consent, and joins in a dance with the Chorus, which soon turns into a sexual pursuit, where Euphorion is intent on using force (9780). Helen and Faust despair of calming his hyper-activity. Euphorion's quarry eludes him and she vanishes into the caverns, while Euphorion climbs the heights to view the sea around the Peloponnesian peninsula. He rejects the idea of Arcadian peace, and demands war (note again Byron's involvement in the Greek war of Independence and his subsequent death of illness at Missolonghi.) whose virtues he extols. Again Goethe is in danger of losing our modern sympathy for this posture, in an age where war is at best a necessary evil. And was he truly oblivious to the immense suffering caused by the wars of his own age? Yet Euphorion also represents sacred poetry, and the Apollonian rather than the Dionysian, so we might, being generous, interpret him as predominantly a spirit of restless achievement, and his wars those of the mind and soul rather than of the body. But his desire to share the fate of those fighting does in fact echo Byron (9893).

He now rises, and then falls again, like Icarus, but his physical body vanishes. His voice rises from the underworld of shadows, and the Chorus provides something like an epitaph for the dead Byron, or at least Goethe's image of him, as brilliant but undisciplined, able to understand the world of emotions and poetry profoundly, while intolerant of constraint, and yet in the end involving himself with courage in the Greek war, fulfilling himself in action rather than poetry. The Chorus is left lamenting the absence of a living hero to achieve Greek freedom.

## The Restless Spirit

I have to say I find the whole Euphorion episode confusing and strange unless one accepts that manly courage in war was a virtue Goethe strongly admired, as did his age generally, and unless one accepts his view of necessary force as a creative way of securing and defending what is desirable, especially freedom, rather than as a wearisome, and crude activity, carrying with it the risk of debasement and spiritual corruption.

Byron is Goethe's model and hero here, as Goethe told Eckermann, and it is Byron we should be thinking of, regardless of the fact that the reality of Byron's motives may have owed more to the restlessness of the superfluous man than to pure idealism. Nevertheless Byron, the 'lost Pleiad', presented himself as a champion of Greek freedom in his poetry and his life, and the world-weariness may equally have often been a literary pose. There is enough of an enigma in Byron's own self-conscious attitudes to allow Goethe's interpretation. 'I could use no one but Byron who is without doubt to be regarded as the greatest talent of the century. And then Byron is not antique and not Romantic, but is like the present day itself. Such a one I had to have. Also he fitted in perfectly because of his restless nature and warlike tendencies.' (To Eckermann: July 5 1827).

Fine, but what was the merit Goethe saw in these warlike tendencies? And why should they be embodied in the child of Faust and Helen? The key again would seem to be Goethe's concept of heroic action, prompted in a modern temperament by the spirit of the ancients. If activity proves the man, then heroic activity proves the hero. Which leaves only the question of the desirability of the physical hero, the warrior, wedded to the use of force, rather than the inner spiritual hero. But then Goethe is still a man of his times, and war was not yet the mass evil it has subsequently become, though Napoleon was well on the way to making it so.

The idyll now having been destroyed Helen herself it seems has to vanish, leaving her dress and veil behind. Helen's garments become a magic carpet to transport Faust through time and space, and Mephisto pledges to meet him again elsewhere. While Panthalis the leader of the Chorus praises loyalty and the desire for a name and noble work, and prepares to follow his Mistress, the Chorus refuse to follow to the underworld, and melt into nature. Goethe gives us a Classical ending. The scene ends in Mephistopheles unveiling, and shedding his disguise.

Faust then has been through the Classical experience, and participated in a sacred marriage between the old and the new, the modern and the ancient, ideal beauty and modern restlessness. Euphorion signified the instability of that marriage, and suggests that modern wholeness cannot be a simple recreation of the antique, or be long wedded to it. It has to be created anew. Faust's Arcadia will have to be re-created as a modern Utopia, and since it was a peninsula surrounded by sea, it will have to be re-created by reclaiming just such a peninsula from the sea.

It remains to be seen what Faust will carry forward from his Classical experience. As to his moral character, that seems to have been refocused towards more constructive activity, and a deeper perception of relationship, but Goethe has not stressed his moral progress, rather it is his vision of the full life that has changed. Faust's ideal has become more oriented towards activity engaged with human beings. He is less intensely selfish and self-centred, less emotionally destructive, and has a new perception of mature behaviour. His Romantic aspects have faded, and his yearnings for insight have moderated. He is moving perhaps towards a more balanced, restrained, and creative mode of existence.

It is inevitable that this development may make the action now seem less 'poetic' and certainly less charged than the earlier parts of the play, especially Part I. Faust seen from the outside may be less interesting than Faust seen from within. But Goethe is serious in his message that the development of a not altogether good man, but a sincere one, towards balanced activity amongst other human beings, rather than intense self-examination, and recklessness as to the effect of action on others, can only be beneficial.

The difficulty for the modern reader is whether to endorse the vision of a whole human being that Goethe is putting forward. We cannot forget that Faust began its life as a morality play, that Faust the character has been guilty of recklessness, like Euphorion, and inflicted pain, however unintentionally, through a disregard for consequences. We assume he suffered deep remorse though it was not made very apparent, over the Gretchen episode. He has gone on to create a kingdom through violent conquest in Greece, appropriate Helen, and attempt to create and maintain an idyllic Utopia on ancient soil. None of this is unequivocally admirable, but it is considerably more balanced and creative than his earlier activities.

## The Restless Spirit

We must assume that Goethe intended not only to show Faust as an individual on the moral borderline throughout, but also intended Faust to create muddled and failed solutions to his problems, as well as to gradually develop as an individual and emerge towards the light. Faust is an anti-hero rather than a hero, and morally ambiguous rather than clearly destined for salvation. It was Goethe's intent to make his struggle seem like that of all striving human beings, with their deep aspirations, their idealism, their selfishness, and their inevitable errors. Faust is a play interesting for its honest assessment of the human condition, and Goethe is testing our powers of empathy in our judgement of Faust, as well as suggesting the path of fruitful activity as that which is most guaranteed to keep us whole and sound.

## PART II ACT IV SCENE I: HIGH MOUNTAINS

**I**t is time for another re-assessment. Faust steps out of the cloud that has carried him, and watches it move away forming a shape like a reclining image of feminine beauty, of Juno, Leda or Helen. A band of mist seems like a memory of first love, and Faust, in highly significant words, says that it carries away the best of what he is. Faust then recognises the power of Woman and the power of Love. His time with Helen, and his acquaintance with the Classical World, has transformed him internally to some extent. Not enough though to redirect his energies towards wholly moral aims.

Mephistopheles quickly arrives to break the spell. He has travelled in magic seven-league boots, while Faust has made a celestial journey. And he now gives a Vulcanic origin for the mountain masses, they are the result of the gases of hell swelling and breaking the earth's crust (the reference to Ephesians is to 'spiritual wickedness in high places'). Faust rejects the Vulcanic argument, and re-asserts Thales' continuous gentle change as the main force of Nature. Mephistopheles denies it, having been there!

Well now, asks Mephisto, in all we've done so far have you not found anything you desire? You've looked down after all on the whole world of temptation as Jesus did in the desert (Matthew iv). Mephisto of course, as a divine agent rather than a conventional devil, is caught by the terms of the wager, since he must lead Faust on to more activity in the hopes of finding something that will bring Faust to rest, and damn him, yet by doing so he further fuels Faust's activity and restlessness. Activity is potentially conducive to salvation, and as Faust grows less selfish, Mephistopheles must altruistically aid Faust in activity that is even less likely to damn him. So Mephisto becomes more and more the misunderstood agent of good as he first claimed.



The Poems of Thomas Gray, Design 65 [Detail]

William Blake (British, 1757 – 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

Faust now declares that he has formulated a plan. This will be the result of the Helen episode and his Classical journey. Mephistopheles suggests that he makes himself the centre of attention in some large city. Faust rejects that (and adds a comment about rebels that again reveals Goethe's conservative politics, and, in an age of democracy, fails to engage our sympathy.) Mephisto then suggests sensual enjoyment of women in a garden setting! Hopeless, says Faust, mere decadence in the traditional Assyrian manner (10176). No, Faust is after creating some new and mighty work, winning him power and property. He still seems remarkably unreconstructed morally at this point! Mephistopheles gently mocks, poets at least will give Faust glory for whatever he achieves. Faust is not amused, and Mephisto concedes again his position as servant of Faust's desires.

Annoyed, like King Canute, by the waves of the tide on the seashore, Faust wishes to tame the sea. It is an aimless force (not we note the creative force that Homunculus found it). He is offended by it, and is passionate about a project to channel it, reclaim the land, and assert his will over the ocean waters. There is arrogance here, though the project is in principle morally neutral, even positive. His desire for power and property is a Faustian misunderstanding of the Classical ethos and its desire for balance and harmony. His project is still not altruistic, or driven by love it seems. There is no suggestion that Truth, Love, Beauty, or Goodness, are key factors within it. He is an inch or so nearer the light, but Goethe is still showing Faust as a morally ambiguous figure, treading the dangerous borderline we all tread between doing good or evil as the often-unintended consequence of our actions. Faust's motive is not specifically moral, as activity itself is not *per se*: it is often, as here, morally neutral. His desire is essentially selfish, and related to power and not to higher moral values.

Mephistopheles now seizes on an opportunity for Faust to execute his plan. The Emperor is at war, and has managed his affairs badly (We get some Faustian wisdom concerning the management of power!). The Empire is in a state of anarchy (10260). Mephistopheles' description of the state of affairs is a comprehensive picture of the abuses and confusion of power. A second Emperor has been set up, and a civil war is taking place. Goethe enjoys some tilting at state, church and military establishments, implying that power corrupts them and that they are usually ineffectual. However he also seems to betray a deep dislike of all rebellion! His political satire is often superficial in this way.

Mephistopheles' suggestion is that Faust can benefit from the spoils of war, or at least achieve the land he wants by helping the Emperor to win the battle (10305). Faust seems unduly cynical about Mephistopheles' powers, and Mephisto neatly pushes the onus onto Faust to achieve what's needed, by seizing the moment. Three Mountain Men arrive to assist: Mephisto has recruited them as warriors. Of three different ages they represent the common soldier in various phases, young and aggressive, mature and covetous, old and tenacious.



## PART II ACT IV SCENE II: ON THE HEADLAND

The stage is set for the forthcoming battle, with the Emperor complaining about the disloyalty of his kith and kin, of the masses, and of his erstwhile loyal allies, accusing them all of treason or selfishness. The rival Emperor has taken to the field, and the true Emperor, inspired by his previous activities now prepares to fight for his realm.

Faust now appears with his troops (10423), the three mighty warriors. Faust explains he has been sent by the Necromancer in the mountains, once saved by the Emperor from being burned alive, in Rome. The Magician has been watching over the safety of the Empire. The Emperor wants to indulge in single combat with his rival, but is dissuaded by Faust.

Goethe now has fun with the battle and the roles of the three mighty warriors. Mephistopheles has also brought an array of spirits to the battle dressed in empty suits of armour, gathered from all the halls around. The Emperor is suspicious of the magic, but is reassured by Faust that all this is the friendly Necromancer's doing (10606). They watch a symbolic omen of victory, the eagle representing the Emperor and the mythical Gryphon representing his rival in combat.

Mephistopheles is engineering a final tense moment in the battle, employing his ravens as messengers, and the disheartened Commander-In-Chief retires with the mistrustful Emperor, while Faust is ordered to repel the final attack. Mephistopheles has employed the ravens to flatter the Undines and call up a flood. Faust (10275) now gives us a running commentary, the flood seeming real to him and its victims, while Mephistopheles knows it as an illusion, and sees the defeated armies floundering on dry land. He conjures up some pyrotechnics too, and appropriate noise from the ghostly armoured knights. Victory is being achieved through magic arts.

## PART II ACT IV SCENE III: THE RIVAL EMPEROR'S TENT

A bit of business to start the scene, involving one of the Mighty men and the Emperor's guards, and then the Emperor enters. He now rationalises the success of the army, minimising the impact of magic, praising himself and his servants, and quickly promoting the deserving men to High-Marshal, Chamberlain, Steward and Cup-Bearer, while dedicating himself to better ruler-ship. Goethe's known liking for Court ritual is here in evidence. The Arch-Bishop and High Chancellor receives a fat reward too. Much of this is unfortunately the sort of tiresome Court nonsense that Shakespeare was all too fond of indulging in, and perhaps Goethe caught the bad habit from reading him. For Shakespeare, though, ritual order was a critical element in stabilising society and legitimising Royal dynasties: perhaps we are to assume that Goethe was similarly affected?

The Archbishop now complains about the use of the Necromancer's powers, and the fact that it was the Emperor who had once saved him from the fire, and succeeds in extracting a further concession from the Emperor, who is annoyed at this necessity. The Emperor has also it seems granted Faust the land under the sea by the shore, and the Archbishop returns to try and extract the revenue from Faust's lands too, which are still submerged! (11035) He retires temporarily defeated, but ready to try again when the land has been reclaimed. Once again Goethe attacks the greed of the established Church, though his political thought remains naïve and traditional. His attacks on Court and Church are attacks on human abuse and greed, rather than on the fundamental social structures. And in fact he usually condemns all attempts to disrupt the normal functioning of the traditional State, as rebellious acts. Goethe certainly does not emerge as in any way a political radical, rather he is a traditional right-wing critic of popular uprisings and a believer politically in the innate human tendency to selfishness, greed and corruption. Interesting, since his personal beliefs tend towards seeing human beings as naturally creative and good.

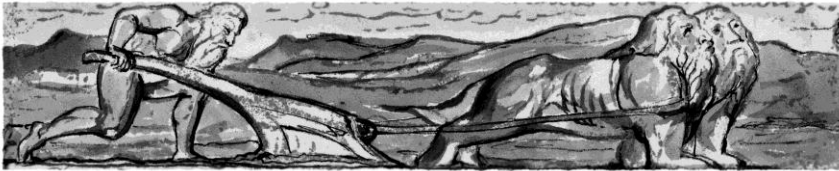
## The Restless Spirit

Faust then, by the use of Mephistopheles and his magic, has acquired the land for his project. No specific evil has been committed in achieving his ends, but yet again the means were not specifically moral, but rather an opportunistic use of force and power. Faust has supported war and magical deceit as a path to achieving his selfish goal. We will now see how he undertakes the land reclamation project itself.

## PART II ACT V SCENE I: OPEN COUNTRY

A wanderer (not Faust) appears. He has apparently been rescued from the sea on a previous occasion by the old couple Philemon and Baucis. See Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book VIII: 611 for this couple and their tale of piety and mutual regard. Goethe has chosen them as representative of the humble and law-abiding.

Where the stranger had once almost drowned, the sea has now been driven back and the land reclaimed (11085). It has become a densely peopled fertile space, a new Arcadia. Faust then has succeeded, at least temporarily, in his aim, which appears on the surface to be an altruistic one.



Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion, Plate 33 [Detail]

William Blake (British, 1757 – 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

**PART II ACT V SCENE II: IN THE LITTLE GARDEN**

**T**he old couple serve the wanderer a meal, and Baucis the wife (11123) now condemns Faust as a godless man, who has subjected the workmen to suffering in order to achieve his aims, and probably employed magic, and is now out to rob the old couple of their morsel of land as well. Her husband explains however that Faust is offering them new reclaimed land elsewhere, in exchange. Baucis is unconvinced of the wisdom of this. Like Gretchen she can sense wrongdoing. They retire to the chapel to pray.

## PART II ACT V SCENE III: THE PALACE

The scene moves to Faust's newly created palace. He hears the bell ringing from the chapel where Baucis and Philemon are praying (11151) and is annoyed by this imperfection of his scheme. There is a suggestion too that its sacred nature causes pangs of buried conscience (11160).

Lynceus the Watchman announces the arrival of a ship containing Mephisto and the Three Mighty Warriors. They are returning from a voyage of piracy on the high seas, and Goethe links war, trade, and piracy as an unholy version of the Trinity (1188). Faust is clearly disturbed by all this, and unwelcoming, but Mephistopheles suggests that Faust will soon accept the reality of the wealth. His project is being funded by crime, and Faust appears as a kind of Godfather, with Mephistopheles and his warriors as his henchmen.

Goethe stresses Faust's hypocrisy in disdaining the means but accepting the end result, and Faust soon turns to his selfish desire to complete his work by ousting Baucis and Philemon from their little piece of land where the chapel also stands. Goethe is certainly keeping Faust near to or below the borderline of moral acceptability. Is Faust genuinely material for salvation at this stage? He expresses an apparently altruistic and spiritual aim (11247) of having provided human beings with living space, and yet the means used have been far from beneficent or moral. The essence of the whole scheme is in fact the imposition of Faust's will on nature, and the perfection of his own vision regardless again of consequences. Mephistopheles caps Faust's complaint with a swift anti-religious summary of human frustration in the face of the pious and honest! (11259).

Faust expresses a beautifully hypocritical sentiment. One can grow weary of being just in the face of unreasonable opposition! (11269). Faust now gives the crucial order to Mephistopheles to have the old people moved to the new location. Once more the consequences will be disastrous,

## The Restless Spirit

and by employing Mephistopheles Faust surely knows the potential for that disaster. Once more he acts selfishly and blindly, without regard to the outcome, though expecting Mephistopheles to act to his instructions. His crimes continue to be indirect, but that does not in any way absolve him from ultimate responsibility for the disasters that occur as a result of his activity. He is a master of collateral damage and consequential loss.

Mephistopheles and the warriors set off, intending to use a little force, though not to commit murder. Mephisto cynically mentions Naboth's vineyard (Kings I:21) coveted by King Ahab, and obtained for him by Jezebel's wickedness.

## PART II ACT V SCENE IV: DEAD OF NIGHT

**L**ynceus, the Warder, is singing on the palace watchtower, the song being one of Goethe's loveliest lyrics, celebrating the endless beauty of nature open to our sight. Suddenly Lynceus sees a fire on the hill where Baucis and Philemon live. Now his powers of vision are momentarily less attractive since they bring vision of terror and pain as well as beauty, and of the transience of earthly things.

Faust below is displeased at the apparent destruction of the lime trees, unaware as yet of the fate of Baucis and Philemon. His intent towards the old couple is still beneficent, though tinged with his usual selfishness. Faust is at the stage of a kind of ethical neutrality, where he is not intent on wrong, but still curiously blind to consequences, and able to convince himself that his own plans are serving what is right.

Mephisto however appears, to give the news that the old couple are dead of fright, and that the wanderer has been killed while resisting them. Faust's reaction is again anger at Mephistopheles, rather than remorse. The Chorus adds a piece of pragmatic and not particularly wholesome folk 'wisdom'. Faust now evidences some regret (11382), though we could hardly call it a sense of guilt.



## PART II ACT V SCENE V: MIDNIGHT

Before Faust can show us anything further of his emotions or thoughts, four grey shapes appear. They are Want (that is Need or Poverty), Guilt, Care (that is Anxiety or Trouble) and Necessity (Constraining circumstance). Faust's wealth inhibits the entrance of Want, Guilt and Necessity to the palace. It is interesting that Goethe includes Guilt here. The implication is that Faust has protected himself against a guilty conscience by employing others to execute his commands.

Once more Goethe is exploring the region of consequential loss and damage, rather than direct intent to cause harm. However Faust clearly must bear the responsibility for his orders. While 'acting under orders' is a weak defence for committing evil actions, it is no defence to claim that one ordered a disastrous course of action but did not intend its consequences. Guilt normally possesses the decent person who unintentionally causes harm. Goethe can choose to show Faust as not directly culpable, but he cannot show him as emotionally unmoved without sacrificing our belief in normal decent human reaction to harm caused even indirectly by a chain of events one has activated. Goethe points the verse at the wealthy, but we are inevitably expecting a deeper and wider reference here.

Three of the Sisters, then, are turned back, though they prophesy the advent of their brother Death. Care, alone, can enter through the rich man's keyhole, and does so. Meanwhile Faust indulges in another self-centred speech, the deaths of Baucis and Philemon already forgotten. Being human is painful, but if only he could throw off the need to employ magic, and merely be human amongst other human beings. He is conscious of having cursed the world and existence, wrongly, but sees himself as entangled like others in the web of life with all its illusions (11410). Once more he sees himself as alone, intimidated. The old isolation is upon him, revealing again his failings regarding human relationships. Only with Helen have we seen Faust apparently whole and sane for a Moment, but that was in a Classical world, and under the influence of her love for him.

Faced with Care personified, Faust warns himself to avoid magic, a sign of his renewed desire to be more human, and sign also of some limited ethical progress. Care presents herself as the spirit of anxiety and failing confidence, that which delays creative activity and causes our courage to ebb. Guilt we must remember has failed to enter the palace. Care is not therefore guilty conscience as such, but rather all those elements that impair human action. Goethe's focus is on the power that disables the will, which he is portraying as negative, regardless of its component of conscience that many might see as a positive force in human affairs.

Faust, with rare insight, now characterises his own past behaviour, driven by the force of various appetites and desires, seizing pleasure. He claims that his approach is now wiser and more thoughtful (11440), though we must remember his capability for self-delusion, and the tragedy of Baucis and Philemon is fresh in our minds. His aim to reclaim land and create a living space for humans is certainly more altruistic, so his appetites seem saner (though how are we to know that is not merely the whim of the moment, an arbitrary choice?), but his execution of his plan seems to contain the same elements of blindness to consequence and lack of remorse. The rest of Faust's speech is a call to creative activity, on this earth, resisting the temptation to speculate about any other non-earthly existence, or after-life. The human spirit should focus on this world, and remain its restless self (11452). It is an appeal to the will to power, or at least to the will to constructive activity, and continuous dissatisfaction with what is achieved. It has no clear ethical content. We have to deliberately read into the situation that Faust's aims, and human aims in general, are to be benign and creative rather than selfish and potentially destructive. The call to action is to personal joy and suffering, personal experience, and once more a sign of Faust's spiritual isolation, a Romantic staking of the game on Self.

Care suggests that such restlessness as she inspires is rather a torment, denying any appreciation of pleasure, causing starvation in front of the feast, and Faust recognises the profundity of her seductive speech. Human life devoid of satisfaction and enjoyment is a questionable good. He rejects the comments violently (11467). Care piles on the agony, conjuring up the worthlessness of joyless activity, the pointlessness of a life where all worthwhile aim is lost. Faust denies the temptation to agree with her, vigorously. It is a far greater temptation than Mephisto's visions of riches,

## The Restless Spirit

power and pleasure, since it is a fundamentally emotional and intellectual one, striking to the roots of the Romantic dilemma, and also to the core of our modern angst. What is worth doing in a world where all achievement ultimately vanishes, and where our psyches forever deny us the satisfaction of intellectual rest? Faust is not seeking a spiritual, or religious solution. He has turned his face towards Earth, and away from other answers to his problems of purpose. His solution is to work at a constructive vision, one that satisfies temporarily one's human need for action and creation, though the satisfaction will be transient, and achievement will only bring desire for new creation.



Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion, Plate 8 [Detail]

William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

Care departs contemptuously, and as she leaves blinds Faust. Symbolically Faust is now in the position of all men, blind to reality. It is also fitting for a man who has been blind to consequences throughout his life so far. Now we can feel some empathy for him, a man who has not set out to do evil, but has been blinkered to the effects of his actions, driven by selfish urges, and incapable of true relationship except when placed in a Classical and more wholesome environment, and when loved by a woman,

Helen. His relationship with Gretchen was more problematic, though I think Goethe wishes us to consider that Faust did in fact love Gretchen, despite the selfishness he evidenced. It is questionable given the evidence of the play to what degree that was a real relationship rather than a mere sexual infatuation on his part, however.

Faust, though blinded, spends no time here in reflection. He pushes on with his plan of mastery over the sea, Goethe reminding us, in showing one 'blind' mind directing many hands, that actions do not always depend on one doing them oneself, it is sufficient to give the orders to both achieve, and to carry responsibility.

**PART II ACT V SCENE VI:  
THE GREAT OUTER COURT OF THE PALACE**

**M**ephisto is driving on the spirits of the dead, the Lemures, ostensibly to complete Faust's project, though in fact to prepare his grave! Goethe adapts another song from Shakespeare's Hamlet (11531: Mephisto has previously used Ophelia's song from Act IV Scene IV, this time Goethe adapts the First Clown's song sung over the grave from Act V Scene I.)

Faust, in a profoundly ironic moment, cheers on the gravedigger's work, mistaking it for activity on his project, while Mephistopheles reminds us that all such works are transient and the elements will in the end destroy whatever Faust has created.

Faust urges on the work, demanding force be used if necessary. One again Goethe relentlessly shows Faust's selfishness, obsessive nature, and tolerance of force to achieve his ends. This is not the ethical vision of the good man: it is the neutral picture of the relentlessly active man. Faust now gives us (11559) a speech to show the benign and generous nature of his scheme, raising the deeper question of whether his end justifies the means employed. It is another vision of a paradisaical Utopia, similar to that which he wished to achieve around Sparta.

This Utopia will be a northern, modern equivalent of that Classical world, a space for human beings to live in freedom. However the emphasis is very much on this project as a symbol of man's conquest of nature, his achievement of self-willed goals, and it is that flavour of the will to power that comes through most strongly here, rather than the more beneficent nature of Faust's aims. He is creating an environment where human beings can illustrate what he has learnt. But his acquired knowledge is personal and motivational knowledge (11575) rather than ethical knowledge: it is the wisdom of how to fulfil oneself, rather than that of how to relate to others. Utopias are dangerous places, because they fail to represent the realities of

human inter-relatedness. Faust is a dictator in embryo, and the living space he wishes to create has the unfortunate ring of *Lebensraum* about it. Perhaps the freedom he intends for his subjects will be viewed by them in quite another way!

Faust now projects himself forward in time to the successful completion of his plan. At that point he will be willing to endorse the Moment (11581), and at that point he will have lost the wager with Mephistopheles. He now anticipates the pleasure that future Moment will bring, so evading the precise terms of the wager by contemplating the Moment in the future only. He then dies, and the wager is now void, since Mephistopheles only has power over Faust while he is on Earth. It was anyway no true wager since momentary enjoyment would not override its deeper meaning, that human life is forever restless, and that Mephisto's whole God-given purpose is to maintain humanity in that state of activity and restlessness.

Mephistopheles savours the moment also. Faust celebrated his vision, while standing above his own grave, and on land that the sea will now reclaim, no doubt causing more consequential losses to its inhabitants! To Mephisto Goethe gives a speech of eternal denial (11595), setting transience against creation. What point is there in activity when all ends in death and silence?

Mephisto thinks he was won the wager, but that is illogical. Faust has died before the Moment of bliss even though he has savoured it in anticipation, and has anyway met the terms of God's greater wager with Mephistopheles that still stands. Faust has continued to strive towards the light, though spiritually blind and ethically limited, and that is sufficient to the divine purpose. Mephistopheles has power over Faust on Earth but not beyond, and Faust is dead.

Nevertheless Mephisto sets his devils on to capture Faust's soul before it leaves the body. A vision of Hell's mouth appears, that we can choose to accept as an object of belief or as a sham designed to frighten, Goethe is being deliberately ambiguous. Are we even to believe in Mephistopheles as other than a stage character, or in Goethe's God as portrayed in the Prologue in Heaven? Goethe is teasing us. We need to be very careful about his use of the Christian trappings to signify deeper realities. As he will shortly tell us, everything transient is only a parable of deeper spiritual truth, has only symbolic and allegorical meaning.

## The Restless Spirit

The Angels are now on their way to rescue Faust's soul. Mephistopheles ridicules them in his annoyance. They are the sugary sentimental platitudes of the pious (11687). The Choir of Angels scatter symbolic roses that cause trouble to Mephistopheles' demon helpers, and their singing (11745) signifies both the need of the loving soul to reject what does not belong to its essential self, that self which Goethe deems to be creative and spiritual, and the implicit identity of Faust with one of the loving. We will return to consider this later.



Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion, Plate 57 [Detail]  
William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*

Even Mephistopheles is now pierced by the effects of Love, scattered by the roses, and is seduced by the appearance of the Angels themselves!! His expression of Love must of course be sensual and corrupted as suits his denying devilish spirit (11796).

The Angels urge their powers. Even the damned can be redeemed by the force of Love which is Truth (11801) in an act of Grace, the ultimate and transcendental activity. The Angels now rise, carrying away Faust's immortal spirit. Mephistopheles considers that he has been cheated, overpowered temporarily by the seductive forces of Love.

**PART II ACT V SCENE VII:**  
**MOUNTAIN GORGES, FOREST, ROCK, DESERT**

**W**e are now in a sacred space, populated by hermits. The Pater (Father) Ecstaticus, in religious ecstasy, tells us that Love is a divine rapture, of heartfelt love-pain and bliss, and that unreality passes away to be replaced by eternal Love. We are close to the core of Goethe's own belief here, non-specific and unorthodox, that in some way Love and Creativity is the essence of the true spiritual reality, and that there are no devils, angels, Hells and Heavens except as allegories or parables or symbols of states of being. Faust cannot be damned because no one is ultimately damned. The Grace of eternal Love prevents that.

It is not an ethical argument per se. In fact if all is ultimately redeemed by Love, then, pragmatically, everything is permitted, since no specific behaviour produces a better or worse result for the individual. A good Faust and an evil Faust end in the same state of redemption. That is however a ridiculously materialistic way to view spiritual truth. The primal urge to virtue and goodness is not selfish in that sense, and values that are not selfish ones but based on empathy, truth and kindness, are expressions of creativity and love on this Earth, and generate beauty, love and inter-relatedness in the human community.

The Pater Profundis in the depths now celebrates the creative and nurturing powers of nature, as expressions of Love, its messengers, that are capable of warming, vivifying, and calming the mind.

The Pater Seraphicus, midway, now welcomes a Choir of Boys, presumably spirits of those who died very young. They form a Choir of Love, and Goethe carefully avoids any shadow of erotic suggestiveness here, they are a spiritual choir untainted by earthly life. They will rise towards the highest sphere that is one of Love and Bliss (11918). Goethe handles the feeling here beautifully in his verse, as ever.



## The Restless Spirit

The Angels now crucially explain that Faust's spirit, which they bear, has escaped from evil and the devil through his own continual striving and the Love that, through grace, he has within himself. Both empower the Angels to save the sinner. Goethe has given us evidence of Faust's flawed striving, and some evidence of his inner love, though throughout the play both have to be heavily qualified. But he was concerned I believe to portray a realistic picture of human beings, as often selfish, self-centred, obsessive, poor at relationship with others, guilty of unintentional harm through blindness to consequences, yett also in general capable of love, and conscious of the true way, though it is often obscured.

Faust is more interesting through being on the borderline of the ethical life, rather than being clearly evil and to be damned, or good and to be saved. His salvation is problematical precisely because Goethe shows him as ethically neutral, driven by desires and urges rather than moral considerations, and yet his salvation is inevitable in Goethe's universe because Faust is neither fundamentally evil, nor incapable of love. It is not a question of whether Faust 'deserves' to be saved, it is a question of the way Love operates in the spiritual and universal dimension.

The Christian trappings are parable, allegory, symbol. There is no Hell and Heaven, only an ongoing process of striving, of creative loving activity, which Faust in his limited and stumbling way is part of. Those who are not irredeemable are redeemed. It is a generous view of human nature, and though less ethically satisfying than Dante's Catholic vision, or even Homer and Ovid's humanistic one, in that Faust though called noble by the Angels does not exemplify the range of human emotions, thoughts and insights that we normally characterise as noble, it is a profoundly charitable one. We are being challenged to forgive Faust and see his better qualities, regardless of the consequential damage he has caused, and his own spiritual and ethical flaws.

The younger Angels now explain that his salvation was also enabled by the roses thrown by the penitents clustering around the Virgin, in other words by those sinners repenting of their sins, including Gretchen (11943), and that Love has conquered the Devil and the forces of evil. The more perfect Angels make it clear that Faust's spirit is still contaminated by earthly impurities, and that only Eternal Love can purify and separate out the soul from its grosser elements (11954).

The transformed Faust, as Doctor Marianus a worshipper of the Virgin Mary, now has clear sight of her, and offers a prayer to her, reminiscent of Saint Bernard's prayer to the Virgin at the conclusion of Dante's *Commedia*. We are back within the conventional Christian world, and Faust now obeys one of the Catholic requirements for salvation, namely that of Faith, while admiring the penitents and implying that anyone can sin through being tempted and seduced, through weakness, as Faust himself has been seduced by Mephistopheles, and by his own desires.

We now have a procession of sinful women, including the woman who anointed Christ's feet, the woman of Samaria, and Mary of Egypt, and finally Gretchen, whom we know was saved at the end of Part I, and who is here to be reunited with Faust, whom she still loves. The transfigured Faust will be capable of using his learning to teach others (12082), and Gretchen tells us that he has returned to his first youth and thrown off his earthly bonds. He is no longer the old Faust, but a fully redeemed soul, who will become aware of the transfigured Gretchen and will be led upwards by the female choir. And Faust bows in adoration to the Virgin, while the Mystic Choir gives us Goethe's final comments. The transient life of earth is only a parable: in the eternal its inadequacies and failings are made complete, and the eternal spirit of Woman, the Eternal Feminine, *das Ewig-Weibliche* is the inspiration for humanity, as exemplified in Gretchen, Galatea, Helen and ultimately the Virgin, in this play of Faust.

## CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

In the play, then, Goethe addressed the primary issue of the Romantic Movement before that movement had truly begun. To Goethe, it is primarily a spiritual rather than an ethical issue, namely how to become a whole and human Individual in a world that fails to satisfy the Individual's yearnings, and how to live when everything around us is transient and unstable, as we are ourselves. Faust is a drama, a piece of theatre in verse, and the trappings that Goethe used, the characters, situations and religious symbolism should be treated with caution for that reason. The story is a parable, and the action symbolic.

Mephistopheles can be regarded legitimately as that aspect of Faust that denies: the aspect that undermines human activity, and declares it worthless, since the results of all human effort are doomed to vanish. Gretchen, Galatea, Helen, and the Virgin represent the aspect of Faust that aspires and is drawn towards the higher. God in the Prologue in Heaven is a mock-serious personification of the Creative forces of the universe that Goethe identifies with Love. Nature is a backcloth throughout representing the fundamentally beneficent aspects of reality.

Goethe's solution, expressed by means of the two wagers, one between God and Mephistopheles, and the other between Mephistopheles and Faust, is one of creative activity. Restlessness is a natural mode for human beings, to be addressed by continuous activity. The 'devil', that is the inner negative force and spiritual weakness that makes us devalue existence, and yield to seductive alternatives to creative activity, is inflicted on us as a goad to both plunge us into fresh experience, and to make us dissatisfied with the results of it.

The primary message from Faust is not ethical, although ethics inevitably impinge on the story. The primary message is that wholeness can only be achieved by effort and commitment, and unflagging energy. Intellectual and emotional dissatisfaction is a healthy sign of our refusal to be content with anything less than the highest and deepest experience. So

Goethe shows Faust, an Individual, dissatisfied with book learning and conventional knowledge, and on an insatiable quest for deeper and truer being. He therefore shares the Romantic and the post-Romantic angst, the search for a basis for human existence that is immune from the shocks, and transience, and ennui, of conventional life, a mode of being that will open the mind and heart to the highest and noblest secrets and mysteries of the universe. What Goethe will seek to show is that human life is limited, that the best we can hope for is to find fruitful activity on this Earth without hankering after other worlds, and that ultimately though generally undeserving of it, we are redeemed by Love, the Creative force of the universe, that is revealed in a beneficent Nature, and in the grace offered by Woman's idealistic love.

Faust turns away from unnatural learning, and from the pursuit of intellectual Truth. Rejected by the overpowering Earth-Spirit, he makes his pact with Mephistopheles. Mephisto will provoke him to activity in order to find what will content Faust, and make him desire the Moment to continue, winning the wager if Faust finds that contentment. Mephisto is therefore, as the Creative Spirit, God, proclaims, the agent planted on Earth within man to stir him to activity, and as Mephisto himself says forces him to work the good while attempting to work evil.

Goethe is as we have seen at pains to show Faust as ethically neutral, neither a particularly virtuous man nor an evil man. He is driven by his urges and desires, in a selfish and self-centred way, and is not given to showing great remorse when things go wrong, or to foreseeing the consequences of his action. The will to power and achievement are his primary motivators, and his emotional world is often isolated and unrelated to others. His capacity for relationship is often questionable. By so depicting Faust, Goethe makes him an everyman, neither hero nor devil, neither saint nor criminal. Faust is like us, often selfish, often blind to the ramifications of our actions, often unrepentant, frequently confused and in error, but constantly trying for the better and higher, as he perceives it. Even if Goethe believed in Hell and damnation, as he clearly does not, Faust cannot be damned since he has no apparent evil intentions. His faults and crimes are the consequence, usually unintended, of his selfishness and his urges. If he is damned then the majority of us are too.

## The Restless Spirit

After making the pact with Mephisto, Faust experiences and rejects mere sensory experience, and then in the Gretchen tragedy follows his deeper needs for a complete sexual encounter by seducing an innocent girl. The consequences are dire and show Faust's blind disregard for the results of his actions, and a willingness to keep Mephistopheles, the negative side of his nature, as a constant companion, so opening himself to error and ensuring his actions continue to cause collateral damage. We cannot accuse Faust of showing no love for Gretchen, we can accuse him of coldness in neglecting her and of cruelty in abandoning her, despite the abortive rescue attempt. His temptation is always to flee to new experience, never to analyse the results of his past actions. So Goethe gives us plenty of soliloquies, but little remorse or agonising over what has happened. Faust remains self-centred. Walpurgis Night represents the powers of ennui and indifference in full flight, a restless activity of petty sins, a superficiality and cynicism concerning human affairs that is amusing but corrosive. The world is shown as Vanity Fair, and Faust as a selfish observer while Gretchen is elsewhere suffering.

Part II of the play takes Faust, via the irresponsible Court of the Emperor, into his Classical experience, and from the pursuit of Love to the pursuit of Beauty. He first brings back Helen then loses her to the past through his violence. Classical beauty and harmony cannot be easily recreated in modern times. Homunculus, the half-born modern Mind, is able to lead Faust and Mephistopheles back to the Greek world, where Faust locates Helen. There too Homunculus finds wholeness and completeness in merging his Mind with Classical Beauty in the womb of the sea, where Galatea represents primal Love and the tender forces of an evolutionary natural world. Goethe is extending the prospect of harmony for human beings through understanding the Greek experience, its wholeness, its range, and its active embrace of form and gradual development.

Faust creates with Helen a Utopia in Sparta. The Utopian vision falls apart, and despite this example of Faust achieving an apparently loving relationship, he is forced back to modern times again. Helen vanishes to follow the child of their union, Euphorion, who as the restless pseudo-Romantic, Byron, merges Faust's intellect, passion, and wilfulness, with Helen's beauty, harmonious acceptance of existence, and love of Greek ideals.

Faust has espoused force to win his realm in the Peloponnese, and his new project is to reclaim a realm from the sea again, involving the use of force to win the land, as a result of the Emperor's victorious warfare, and to reclaim it using expendable labourers. Gradual development of character is slow, and Faust betrays all his old failings of selfishness, isolated self-centredness, obsessive urges, wilfulness, and blindness to consequences. The deaths of Baucis, Philemon, and their guest, illustrate how little he has learnt, though the nature of his project, partially altruistic and beneficial to others (yet in a Utopian and dictatorial way, through blatant social engineering) illustrates that he is developing to some extent.

The visit of Care prompts Faust not to an ethical revaluation, but to a renewed commitment to his personal 'selfish' aims, to purposeful action on this Earth. His blindness is a symbolic representation of his spiritual state, blindly struggling on, blind to consequences, blind too to the realities of imminent death, and the failure of his project, a failure that presumably will cause the death of the inhabitants of the reclaimed land as the sea invades! But the positive nature of his spiritual blindness is that it prevents him from denying existence, and confirms him in his activity. He then dies, having renewed his vision of his project, and anticipated the Moment of its completion when in principle he would have lost his pact with Mephistopheles by resting.

However Mephistopheles was, as we guessed, doomed to lose the wager either through Faust's innate restlessness and the world's inability to satisfy him, or through his death, or through Mephistopheles' own inability to prompt Faust to a sufficiently entrancing experience to quell his restlessness. In fact Mephistopheles the goad is a part of Faust himself, guaranteeing Faust's restlessness. The negative internal force cannot of its nature prompt Faust to an experience that would grant him rest.

Put another way, in terms of the play and its characters, if Mephistopheles had succeeded, then he would also have failed in his own role, since his God-given aim is to keep Man ever restless. The pact with Faust is at odds with his pact with God. The pact with Faust should have been worded differently, from Mephistopheles point of view, in accord with his own role. For example it might have been worded such that if ever Faust did rest, and Mephistopheles could not make Faust dissatisfied with his lot once more, then Faust would win his own soul back, while otherwise

## The Restless Spirit

he would lose it. That is a wager Faust would have accepted since he believed in his own perpetual restlessness, while Mephistopheles should have believed God's comment that Man's activity all too soon finds the level, and ceases. Worded as it is, the pact makes Mephistopheles the agent of finding Faust a reason to rest, without which he, Mephistopheles, could not win, and yet his true role is the opposite, to make sure Faust never rests.

After a tussle over the dead Faust's soul, which Mephistopheles is doomed to lose, Faust is transfigured and enters into a higher world. Assuming that Goethe meant the Christian trappings only as allegory, then the message is that Faust's restless striving and the Love latent within him is sufficient for him to move on into another realm, where we assume that striving must continue, and Love will be fulfilled. From a purely ethical point of view while Faust has not 'deserved' salvation, and has shown himself all-too-human, by being selfish, by being willing to use dubious means to achieve his goals, by being indifferent to the consequences of his actions, nevertheless he is not evil in intent. He is neither good nor bad, but has a glimmering of the true way, and though he is self-deluding and his self-ordained goals are not as they seem to him, nevertheless he has enough Love and enough instinct for the true life to merit Grace being shown him.

There is no place in Goethe's world for Dante's ethical structures, his Purgatory and his Inferno, only for a final Paradiso of Love lacking the precision of Dante's Paradise which is founded on the cardinal and theological virtues. Man, for Goethe, is a confused creature, spiritually blind, and with a great capacity for weakness and error, and his capacity for Love and his untiring efforts to progress must be sufficient. Faust therefore cannot give us, or rather Goethe chose not to give us, a view of the noblest human moral aspirations as Dante tries to, or even convey to us the narrative Humanism that pervades Homer and Ovid. Faust is a flawed individual who is redeemed by universal Love. Goethe gives us no view of evil, of what might have damned Faust, nor of true virtue in terms of visible self-denial, remorse, kindness, selfless courage or deep relationship. The work can therefore seem disappointing to those who seek such an ethical framework.

On the other hand, in a work of consummate poetry, he has shown us the average intelligent human being, capable of failure and unintentional harm, but also capable of development and redemption. The Reader must decide whether Goethe's portrayal is convincing, and whether the play works coherently as an artistic whole, or whether, despite its poetic power and its many beauties, Goethe failed to make his point clearly enough, so as to satisfy our instinctive need for ethical evaluation.

If we feel the former then Faust's salvation will seem inevitable, and his development as sufficient or even tangential to the main message of creative activity. If the latter then we will question as to why Goethe did not show Faust gradually evolving in character in a more obviously ethical way, shedding aspects of his selfishness, his acceptance of magic and violence, showing thoughtful remorse and exhibiting love, in his advance towards Truth, Love and Beauty. Why, we might ask, is Faust not gradually more steadfast and careful in his relationships, more empathetic in foreseeing consequences, and tender, and less selfish in showing love? Why did Goethe's vision of Greek harmony not filter into Faust's final projects, lending the penultimate scenes some of the beauty of the Galatea, Nereus, Homunculus episode?

Goethe chose not to handle his material in that way, but to have Faust follow a more uneven course, and to challenge us perhaps to condemn him at the end, and by so doing condemn Everyman, the average man. The true path for restless spirits, in this modern Northern world, Goethe seems to be saying, involves inevitable errors and failures. Tireless activity, though, and a continuing capacity for love still redeem the Individual despite the associated suffering, and the selfish motives. In the end Man for Goethe is not fallen, or radically evil in nature, 'God' is Love, and Love is immanent in the world, and in creativity. The Creative force does not judge, it nurtures and renews, and therefore Nature including human beings is holy and incorruptible. The aim for human beings is harmonious development, creative effort, and openness to Love. Perhaps indeed Goethe might have given us even less of an orthodox ending to Faust, and at the risk of causing problems in his own time, spelled out a vision of the universe more acceptable to our own.





Jerusalem: The Emanation of The Giant Albion, Plate 100

William Blake (British, 1757 - 1827), *The Yale Centre for British Art*



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**A**nthony Kline lives in England. He graduated in Mathematics from the University of Manchester, and was Chief Information Officer (Systems Director) of a large UK Company, before dedicating himself to his literary work and interests. He was born in 1947. His work consists of translations of poetry; critical works, biographical history with poetry as a central theme; and his own original poetry. He has translated into English from Latin, Ancient Greek, Classical Chinese and the European languages. He also maintains a deep interest in developments in Mathematics and the Sciences.

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