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DISCOURSE WARS: LITERARY SEDUCTION AND RETRIEVAL IN *FAUST II*

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The siren of the springs of guilty song—
Let us take her on the incandescent wax
Striated with nuances, nervosities
That we are heir to: she is still so young
We cannot frown upon her as she smiles
Dipping here in this cultivated storm...
—Hart Crane, “For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen”

Eliza Butler was candid enough to acknowledge openly the secret: “The meeting between Faust and Helen, for which the world had been waiting so long, the very summit of Goethe’s spiritual life, is an inevitable anti-climax.”¹ The very promise of such a union—the marriage of the modern German intellectual with the beautiful representative of the classical past—was perhaps too great from the outset to be fulfilled; there is, in fact, a long history in literature of such promising marriages failed: Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Anthony and Cleopatra, Dido and Aeneas. And when Jessica and Lorenzo sing in the *Merchant of Venice* of their happy marriage to come, the only literary models that come to their minds are tragic ones: Troilus and Cressida, Pyramus and Thisbe, Dido and Aeneas, Jason and Medea. Despite the young lovers’ careful editing of these literary love affairs so as to interpret them as propitious, the very selection of models they choose to enumerate (or did they have a choice?) casts a dismal pall on the possible union of Christian and Jew. Perhaps such cultural marriages as that of Faust and Helen are doomed to failure precisely because the stakes riding on the union are too high and because the symbolic burden the marriage is made to bear renders it overdetermined and therefore impossible to realize. The connection between Faust and Helen would have been a great moment for Western culture, and every reader of *Faust* must regret their failure to connect.

But, in fact, a real union between Faust and Helen was no longer of primary interest to Goethe as he worked seriously to complete the act in which they appear. At the end of his life, Goethe was no longer writing to create a new Classicism in German literature; he was writing to give literary representation to his own poetical development and for him, at this stage of his

life, the confrontation and possible amalgam with the Hellenic world were history. The meeting of Faust and Helen had, by this time, become an [388]allegorized depiction of Goethe's own historical development, recording an initial love followed by a poetic appropriation and assimilation in which the relics of the Other remain as beloved icon of a conquest in a progressive self-development. It is not Helen alone who is used in *Faust Part Two* to reveal Goethe's poetic individuality; Schiller, too, is brought into the play under the symbolic image of the Cranes of Ibycus. Schiller, like the classical world represented by Helen, was both stimulus and threat to Goethe's own poetic identity and his struggle with Schiller is memorialized in the text by Goethe's re-conquest of material he had loaned to Schiller when they were collaborators in a number of literary endeavors. *Faust Part Two* is Goethe's last completed work and is in many ways a summarizing obituary, recalling the grand moments of a great life and setting for all time a seal on the many stages of a personal and poetic growth. It is, as Butler correctly saw, "the summit of Goethe's spiritual life," but that summit turns out to be yet one more autobiography.

For Faust, the affair with Helen begins where the affair with Margarete left off. If we recall the history of Act III in *Faust Part Two*, we remember that the opening passage of the Helen Scene was the first part of the work to have been written. The first two hundred and sixty lines (not including the long choral odes) were written in 1800, at precisely the time Goethe was working on the conclusion to *Part One*. Notebooks for the year reveal that Helen was very much a preoccupation for Goethe in the month of September, the very time the poet was writing the Walpurgisnacht Scene for *Part One*. First mention of the Helen Scene is made in a letter to Schiller dated September 12, 1800: "Glücklicherweise konnte ich diese acht Tage die Situation fest halten, von denen Sie wissen [Goethe is referring to domestic problems in Weimar], und meine Helena ist wirklich aufgetreten."² Just two months previously, Goethe had complained to Schiller's friend Körner that he was unable to learn very much from the books he was reading about the nature of witches,³ a clear indication of work in progress on the Walpurgisnacht. That Goethe was working on his classical Helen Scene at the same time he was researching the nature of German witches is a provocative coincidence, all the more striking when we remember that the writing of the Faust drama took place over a sixty-year period. What can this coincidence mean?

Above all, it points to the crucial resemblances between Margarete and Helen, and indeed the points of comparison are many: both are women who have affairs with Faust; both produce children who die; both are forcibly dislodged from their accustomed world through the agency of Mephistopheles. Furthermore, Margarete and Helen share a difficult and deadly entanglement with literature; both are aware that they are the objects of others' literary projects and this entanglement plays a decisive role in their own conception of themselves. The self-awareness of their literary dimension is unsettling for each of them as characters participating in a drama, and it is unsettling for us as

readers who must fit this literary self-consciousness into an encompassing aesthetic framework for the work as a whole.

Margarete ends her life bitterly troubled by the songs people are creating about her:

[389]Sie singen Lieder auf mich! Es ist böß von den Leuten!
 Ein altes Märchen endigt so,
 Wer heißt sie's deuten? (4448-50)⁴

As she approaches her death, Margarete is only just beginning to realize how fatally her existence has been transformed into literature, but Helen enters the stage already fully aware that precisely this has been her fate:

Denn seit ich diese Schwelle sorgenlos verließ,
 Cytherens Tempel besuchend, heiliger Pflicht gemäß,
 Mich aber dort ein Räuber griff, der phrygische,
 Ist viel geschehen, was die Menschen weit und breit
 So gern erzählen, aber der nicht gerne hört,
 Von dem die Sage wachsend sich zum Märchen spann.
 (8510-15)

Like Margarete, Helen learns that her life has gone from lived experience to “Märchen”; later she will even learn that there are various and conflicting legends about her and these will serve further to confuse her already insecure sense of self-identity.

Consciously or unconsciously, Helen's opening lines suggest by their very language an involvement in literary history, for her language is a resuscitation of Greek tragic diction, rhetoric and meter. Of course, Goethe had Euripides' *Helen* in mind as he created his own Helen, and her speech introduces into *Faust* the iambic trimeter of classical tragedy: “Bewundert viel und viel gescholten, Helena.” This line, which opens Helen's monologue, was added in 1826; originally, the piece began with what is now the second line of the monologue: “Vom Strande komm' ich, wo wir erst gelandet sind,” a line with strong resemblances to the opening line of Goethe's earlier *Iphigenie auf Tauris*: “Heraus in eure Schatten, rege Wipfel...Tret' ich...” Helen's “des Gewoges regsame Geschaukel” reminds us of Iphigenia's “rege Wipfel des...Haines,” and, like Iphigenia, Helen enters the scene full of dark premonitions and at a moment when her own sense of self-identity has been called into question. The relationship between Helen and Iphigenia goes even deeper. After completing his *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, Goethe had planned a sequel, *Iphigenie in Delos*, which would present his heroine's return to her troubled home. Goethe never got far with plans for the drama, but in Helen we see a woman who, like the projected Iphigenia, returns to a home dangerous to her very existence and with an identity radically altered by her experiences in foreign lands. It is easy to see much of the impetus for Iphigenia's further development transferred to Helen, and in fact, the lines given to Helen—

...und sollt
 Ihr weiter nicht mich treiben, Mächte, wer ihr seid.
 Auf Weihe will ich sinnen, dann gereinigt mag

Des Herdes Glut die Frau begrüßen wie den Herrn.

(8657-60)—

are far more appropriate to a returning Iphigenia than to Helen. What possible motivation could Helen have for wishing to purify the home she once abandoned, especially since she herself is the one blamed for its pollution and the ensuing devastation of the Trojan War? The desire for purification and [390]harmonization is far more appropriate to one whose implication in the house's sins is less direct than Helen's. Iphigenia has the requisite innocence for such a desire; surely Helen does not. Helen is, then, a resuscitation not only of classical tragedy, but also of Goethe's own earlier classical resuscitations.

Helen's language, with its clausular, hypotactical style, is reminiscent of the language of tragedy, but when she reports the words spoken by Menelaus, the character of the language changes significantly:

Hier steigen meine Krieger nach der Ordnung aus,
Ich musterte sie, am Strand des Meeres hingereicht....

(8541-42)

The phrase, "nach der Ordnung," repeated three times in the words of Menelaus as they are reported by Helen, is a sign of the difference in language; a translation of the Greek *kata kosmon*, it is an indication to let readers know that Menelaus still speaks the language of Homer. And, in fact, Menelaus' language abounds in Homeric imitations, from the paratactic grammar to the ceremonial gnomic phrases ("denn Das ist des Fürsten Vorrecht..."; "Denn nichts zu ändern hat für sich der Knecht Gewalt"), and the epithets and modifiers so loosely associated with their referents ("des heiligen Eurotas fruchtbegabter Ufer..."; "...mancherlei Gefäße, die der Opfrer sich / Zur Hand verlangt, vollziehend heiligen Festgebrauch..."). Kurt May, in his exhaustive study of the linguistic forms of *Part Two*,⁵ discusses the many Greek rhetorical tropes found in the scene, but fails to perceive the difference in the language of Helen and Menelaus; yet this difference is crucial because Helen is clearly intended to represent, not simply the Greek world, but a particular moment in the course of Greek literary development. As a linguistic phenomenon, she stands at the end of tragedy and looks forward to new developments. At the end of her literary trajectory stands the union with Faust, and the implications of this union for literary history are enormous.

In a recent book on *Faust*, Jane Brown has suggested that a panoramic vision of Western literature is an intentional element of Act III: "...increasing staginess is not the only progression in this act. The three scenes represent the history of European literature in high points: classical tragedy, medieval lyric, modern pastoral opera."⁶ It is important to add to this insight the fact that in her reported speeches, Helen pushes this history right back to Homer and the very beginnings of European literary production. It is also of importance to recognize that this historical movement, as it is presented within the allegory, is not one of slow evolution, but rather one of violence and appropriation. It is Faust's relationship with Margarete that has set the model for relationships in the play, and the more allegorical nature of *Part Two* does not diminish the

element of violence present in the depiction of human relationships. And it is as the history of human relationships that *Part Two* allegorizes the history of Western literature. The very question of violence in history and natural evolution has already been raised in the scene of *Part Two* where Homunculus, Thales and Anaxagoras discuss the relative merits of Vulcanism and Neptunism. There, it seems that the arguments for slow change (Neptunism) win out over those of eruptive force (Vulcanism), but then Homunculus' violent self-immolation on the shell-car of Galatea seems to suggest that the laws of human [391]history and development differ significantly from those that govern Nature. And if the lives of Helen or Margarete can be read as in any way paradigmatic of human life, the model they present certainly has much more in common with the violent wrenching of forces associated with Vulcanism than the slow gentle growth represented by Neptunism. The history of Helen, then, is the history of rape and violence; she rushes to Faust for no other reason than that she fears the death Menelaus has prepared for her. On the level of literary allegory, the shift from Homer to classical tragedy to medieval lyric is presented not as one of slow evolution, but of violence and appropriation.

Helen rushes to Faust also because Mephistopheles, in the guise of Phorkyas, has performed the same function with her that he performed with Margarete: he has successfully forced her to question her sense of identity and has dislodged her from her accustomed world. The role he plays here is the same as the role he plays in *Part One*, but this time he plays it in classical dress. Just as in the Cathedral Scene of *Part One*, where Mephistopheles gives the *Dies irae* a most personal and threatening interpretation for Margarete in order to sever her from her religious grounding in hope, so Phorkyas here interprets the actions of the Homeric heroes to Helen in order to show her the personal implications of the literary context in which she has played so important a role:

Hast du vergessen, wie er [Menelaus] deinen Deiphobus,
Des totgekämpften Paris Bruder, unerhört
Verstümmelte? (9054-56)

Apparently, Helen is responsible not only for the events reported in Homer, but for the continuation of the story as it is found in Vergil, for the mutilation of Deiphobus is recounted in the *Aeneid*, not in Homer. In other words, Helen must be aware of *all* the literature that surrounds her, the sheer quantity of which and the multiple contradictions therein can only make her sense of self-identity all the more tentative and troubling.

Just as Mephistopheles uses the literary texts of Margarete's world (the "well-worn prayer book") to dislodge her from that world and to cause her to swoon as she finds herself irrevocably drawn from her accustomed faith and familiar beliefs, so Helen swoons as Phorkyas points out the ambiguity surrounding *her* identity: "Ich schwinde hin und werde selbst mir ein Idol" (8881), and like Margarete, she sinks into the arms of those around her. When Mephisto offers Helen a refuge from the violence of Menelaus, she naturally assumes that her new-found savior must, also like Paris, be a thief: "sind's Räuber viel, verbündete?" (9005). Because Helen has been stolen so many

times in the past, she simply conceives of such theft as her normal fate. The history of her rape, then, becomes the metaphor for the history of Western literature as it continually attempts to recapture its past.

It is also perfectly natural that Mephisto should deny that Faust is a thief; after all, he is attempting to lure Helen into Faust's castle, just as he contrived to obtain Margarete for him. But his very words undermine his intent:

Nicht Räuber sind es, *einer* aber ist der Herr.

Ich schelt' ihn nicht, und wenn er schon mich heimgesucht.

[392] Wohl konnt' er alles nehmen, doch begnügt' er sich

Mit wenigen Freigeschenken, nannt' er's, nicht Tribut.

(9006-9009)

The mere fact that he does not call his booty "tribute" does not mean that Faust is no thief. What else would a medieval knight be doing in Greece? Of course he has come to Greece to plunder it, just as the Romans, the Normans and the Crusaders did before him, and the relationship of Faust to Greece casts a revealing light on the relationship of Goethe to the whole German-Classical enterprise, of which this very Act is a primary document. For Goethe, this was a movement which began, in Butler's phrase, with the "tyranny of Greece over Germany," but by 1826 when he wrote the greater part of Act III, Goethe may well have wondered whether the terms had not been reversed into the "tyranny of Germany over Greece." Between Winckelmann and the writing of *Part Two*, a simple admiration of the classical heritage had become a conflict with it. That the relationship between Faust and Helen is in some sense agonistic is made clear by the words of the Chorus-leader when she first sees Faust:

Was er beginnt, [wird ihm] gelingen, sei's in Männerschlacht,

So auch im kleinen Kriege mit den schönsten Fraun.

(9186-87)

The nature of the struggle may be hidden beneath the charming and erotic words of the scene, but it is a struggle nonetheless, and one which Faust, once again, is bound both to win and to lose.

Faust, re-enacting the role of Paris, has come as thief, but it is more than Helen that he hopes to appropriate: Faust wants no less than to make the entire classical world his own:

Hier ist das Wohlbehagen erblich,

Die Wange heitert wie der Mund.

Ein jeder ist an seinem Platz unsterblich:

Sie sind zufrieden und gesund.

(9550-53)

The word "erblich" points up the hypocrisy of the enterprise. The comfort and serenity of the classical world are *not* Faust's by right of inheritance; he has come as a warrior to conquer them and to grasp the immortality which only the classical can confer. In his song of praise for the Arcadian landscape (and here we are to remember with some irony Goethe's own epigraph for his *Italienische Reise*: "Auch ich in Arkadien!"),⁷ Faust touches on the birth of Helen, which was itself the product of a rape—that of Zeus upon Leda—, and in the same song he mentions Europa, yet another victim of rape, who gave her name to a

continent. The song which praises the peaceful landscape is effective camouflage for Faust as he, following the path pursued by so many before him, appropriates Helen for his own. The poetry and high purpose Faust expounds here must remind us of an earlier Faust whose pantheistic “Credo” was enunciated to a wavering Margarete before he took possession of her.

Clearly, the taking of Helen represents more than a simple physical fact. As we have seen, she is the embodiment of Greek poetry, specifically that of Greek tragedy in its later phase. As such, she will become a determining element in the last stage of Western literary history, the “pastoral opera” of the third scene, to use Brown’s term for the production.⁸ But before Helen can [393] “marry” Faust, she must learn to speak Faust’s language; she in fact wants to learn to speak as a modern because she has already been seduced by the sounds of Faust’s language as he welcomes her to his castle. Once inside the fortress, she has already begun to lose the Greek elements of her own speech. Whereas, in the first scene of the act, Helen spoke in the classical twelve-syllabic iambic trimeter, here her opening speech is in iambic pentameters, the meter of *Iphigenie auf Tauris* and the idiom spoken by Faust when he comes to welcome his royal guest. Does this alteration in Helen’s speech reveal from the very beginning a willingness to approach and be seduced by Faust? Then, when she hears the language of Lynkeus, she is once again seduced by the sound, describing the poetic ability to rhyme in the most sensuous of terms:

Ein Ton scheint sich dem andern zu bequemen,
Und hat ein Wort zum Ohre sich gesellt,
Ein andres kommt, dem ersten liebzukosen. (9369-71)

Learning to rhyme obviously has more than literary significance.

When Helen asks how she too could speak so beautifully—“wie sprech’ ich auch so schön?”—, Faust answers, in rhyme, with essentially the same message he gave to Margarete, “es muß vom Herzen gehn.” “Gefühl ist alles,” Faust has taught Margarete and the lesson has been her downfall. The lesson Helen must learn is no less dangerous to her existence, for in that fatal lesson Helen will have to give up her own identity. Poetry and seduction have thus become one: to be able to rhyme as Faust does, Helen must also become a Romantic in spirit, for as Faust tells her, rhyme becomes easy for one, “wenn die Brust von Sehnsucht überfließt.” The nature of the confluence of spirits can hardly be mistaken: Faust has not learned to speak Greek; it is Helen who must adopt the language of Faust. Like Margarete before her, Helen must find a place for Faust within her own world; at the end of Faust’s “Credo,” Margarete reveals how she must contort her own intellectual context to accommodate Faust’s Romantic impulses: “Ungefähr sagt das der Pfarrer auch, / Nur mit ein bißchen andern Worten” (3460-61). Just as Faust refuses to conform to the social and religious expectations of Margarete’s world, so in *Part Two* it is Helen who must learn the world of “Sehnsucht” and “Herz” if she is to marry Faust. In the confrontation between modern and classical, Faust, as representative of the modern intellectual world, is once again invincible and

remains the irresistible vortex whose legacy in *Part Two*, as in *Part One*, is the dead child.

The sacrificial child of *Part One* has already died when we see Margarete in her prison, but in *Part Two* the child has a spirited life within the frame of the operatic Arcadian scene before he meets his death. The child of Faust and Helen is called Euphorion and represents the spirit of poetry, especially the poetry of Goethe's younger contemporary, Lord Byron, who had recently died (1824) in the fight for Greek freedom. If Euphorion is intended to be the allegorical result of a union between modern and classical poetry, two things are readily apparent: the enterprise is a failure, and the child has inherited much more from his father than from his mother. From his very first words, Euphorion displays the restless energy of his father:

Nun laßt mich hüpfen,
Nun laßt mich springen!
[394]Zu allen Lüften
Hinaufzudringen,
Ist mir Begierde,
Sie faßt mich schon. (9711-16)

There is nothing here of the classical restraint and composure shown by Helen nor any of the serenity of the classical world praised by Faust in his encomium to Arcadia. Euphorion is sheer restlessness and, furthermore, like Faust, he is a thief. The Chorus compares the child to Hermes, the god who invented the lyre and who was renowned for his larcenous adventures. Also in the spirit of a younger Faust, Euphorion likes to chase the girls of the Chorus and to prepare himself for some imagined war, from which he intends to bring back booty. Where in all this is the spirit of Helen? The answer is clear: there is nothing "classical" about Euphorion except what he leaves behind—lyre and clothing. And these are left behind as easily as Phorkyas steps out of the sartorial trappings of classical tragedy and re-assumes his old personality as Mephistopheles.

Faust has won to this extent: Helen now speaks *his* language while he has not had to change at all. There is nothing surprising in this; in fact, the rape is an old one. Marlowe has his Faust say to that same vision of classical beauty: "Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss." It seems that, for the Fausts of this world, the confrontation with the classical world demands no change in the personality, but simply confers immortality on the modern personality as it already is. Indeed, in his confrontation with the classical world, Goethe's Faust, far from learning to speak in classical form, becomes in his language even more Germanic. Although his opening lines are in unrhymed iambic pentameter, by the end of the act, he is speaking in the short rhymed quatrains so favored by Goethe in his old age:

Alles ist so dann gefunden:
Ich bin dein und du bist mein;
Und so stehen wir verbunden,
Dürft' es doch nicht anders sein! (9703-9706)

That a union with Helen would only confirm in Faust his own German-ness would seem at first a paradox, and perhaps it is, but it represents a paradox which runs through early nineteenth-century German reflection on the relationship between the classical and the modern. In the famous letter to Böhlendorff of December 4, 1801, Hölderlin discusses just this point:

Aber das Eigene muß so gut gelernt sein wie das Fremde.
Deswegen sind uns die Griechen unentbehrlich. Nur
werden wir ihnen gerade in unserm Eigene, Nationellen
nicht nachkommen, weil, wie gesagt, der *freie* Gebrauch des
Eigenen das Schwerste ist.⁹

This, Hölderlin admits, “klingt paradox,” but Hölderlin insists that, for the Western poet, there is nothing so dangerous as the abstraction of artistic models from the world of the Greeks. The importance of the Greeks is that they constitute the “other,” through which the modern self will achieve the difficult task of self-definition (“der *freie* Gebrauch des Eigenen”). After more than a generation of naive classical imitation, the realization has come home that [395]classical art could only stand in an agonistic relationship to the modern, that, in Peter Szondi’s words, “Nicht nur braucht das Abendland, da sein Bildungstrieb anders als der griechische ist, der antiken Kunst nicht mehr nachzustreben, es wird ihm auch die Fähigkeit aberkannt, sie je einzuholen.”¹⁰

The obsession with the classical world becomes then, no longer the obsession of conversion as it was for Winckelmann, but the obsession with ingestion. To conquer and absorb the other is to gain strength for the self, and for Faust, Helen has become precisely this other. That the relationship is an agonistic one is confirmed in the stage directions given to Mephistopheles at the end of the act when he holds up the cloak and lyre of Euphorion: “[er] hebt die Exuvien in die Höhe.” To refer to the mortal remains of the son of Helen and Faust as *exuviae* is remarkable since the word, usually in the formula *exuviae bellorum*, refers to the spoils taken in war. If there was doubt before, this word leaves little room to question the belligerence which underlies the brief union. Typically, after his victory, Faust has moved off in a cloud, this one generated by Helen’s demise; it remains to Mephistopheles to acknowledge the true nature of their relationship. The gesture of Mephistopheles—holding high the symbol of the destruction of a human relationship—is actually the oldest gesture in the Faust drama and is found in what is believed to be the earliest fragment Goethe wrote of the work, the scene entitled “Trüber Tag. Feld.” of *Part One*. To Faust, frantic at the realization that Margarete has been destroyed through his actions, Mephistopheles shows a grinning face of triumph and asks the critical question: “Wer war’s, der sie ins Verderben stürzte? Ich oder du?” He continues in his blistering criticism of Faust: “Greifst du nach dem Donner? Wohl, daß er euch... Sterblichen nicht gegeben ward! Den unschuldig Entgegnenden zu zerschmettern, das ist so Tyrannenart, sich in Verlegenheit Luft zu machen.” His insight into the terrible capacity of Faust for destruction is no less appropriate to Helen than to Margarete; it is Faust’s destiny to destroy the other in order to establish his own identity. Faust,

oblivious in his cloud, must once again delude himself as to the true nature of his relationship to others; once again, it is Mephistopheles who has the mop-up action of realistic assessment.

More than a century and a half of Goethe criticism has laid a heavy burden on the union of Faust and Helen; it is almost impossible to read the scene without reference to the long reception the passage has evoked. The moment represented by this union, both as a part of the drama and as a symbol of cultural history, is over-determined, and critics have been too eager to read into the lines a positive valuation of the meeting of ancient and modern. Emil Staiger may serve as an example of the dominant mode of interpretation. His is a nuanced, sensitive reading of Goethe, but, blinded by beauty, he reads the lines in which Faust teaches Helen to rhyme (9372-84) as one who has himself been seduced:

Ein unausdenklicher Dialog! Der allegorische and der menschliche Sinn der beiden Gestalten fließt zu der selbstverständlichsten Einheit zusammen. Der griechische Stil bequemt sich dem deutschen; die Menschheit gewinnt in der wechselseitigen Spiegelung beider ein höheres Dasein. [396]Zugleich aber waltet eine beinah noch rokokomäßige Galanterie. Die listigen Zeilenenden Fausts, der jeweils folgende Halbvers, der kaum ein Entweichen gestattet, Helenas von erwachender Neigung geleiteter Spürsinn, der gleich das ganze Spiel durchschaut und noch so gern das Erwartete trifft: das ist von einer Anmut, einer überirdischen Grazie, wie selbst Goethe sie nur ganz selten erreicht.¹¹

To avoid seeing the confrontation between Faust and Helen as conflictual, Staiger must revert to Goethe's own words ("sich bequem") and to a concept of "humanity" and a "higher existence." But before we accept such an interpretation (and it is by no means an isolated example in the long reception history of this work), we need to know what this "humanity" is and what the "higher existence" can mean for such a humanity. Staiger himself seems, almost against his will, to recognize the violence of the scene when he refers to the "listig" nature of Faust's language and acknowledges that such language "permits no escape." This is in direct contradiction to his earlier assertion of a "reciprocal reflection" ("gegenseitige Spiegelung"). How can language that is both deceptive and irrefutable be part of a mutual exchange? In fact, there is practically nothing of Helen reflected in Faust, and the "Rococo-gallantry" displayed by Faust serves here as it did in the first scene with Margarete in *Part One* to camouflage a more serious, even violent, intent. There is much more than gallantry at play here.

The meeting of Faust and Helen is not Goethe's first thematization of the confrontation of the classical and modern worlds. Less than three years before beginning work on this scene in *Faust*, Goethe had published his *Hermann und Dorothea*, a parodistic epic of modest length, which tells the story of a very

German Hermann who falls in love with and proposes marriage to a refugee fleeing the French Revolution whose very name points to the classical dimension in her character: Dorothea. The work is much more than an allegorization of cultural history, but clearly such an allegory plays an important role in the constitution of the work. The difference in the cultural types is marked: Hermann, the German, is old-fashioned, stolid, close to nature, inarticulate, where Dorothea, the spirit of classicism leaving France to take up a new home on German soil, is dignified, strong and capable of expressing her mind with clarity. Such a union as that symbolized by the marriage of Hermann and Dorothea is clearly to the advantage of a Germany whose cultural identity will be established on a higher level through its contact with the classical world (“Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss”). However, Hermann’s final speech disturbs us with its overtones of violence and appropriation. He has, through his association with Dorothea, become more articulate, it is true, but his greater command of language is used to declare war; the once peaceful Hermann is now ready to beat his ploughshares into swords:

“Dies ist unser!” so laß uns sagen und so es behaupten!
 Denn es werden noch stets die entschlossenen Völker gepriesen,
 Die für Gott und Gesetz, für Eltern, Weiber und Kinder
 Stritten und gegen den Feind zusammenstehend erlagen.

(ix.307-10)

[397] Even more disturbing is Hermann’s following line which registers all too precisely his relationship to Dorothea—“Du bist mein; und nun ist das Meine meiner als jemals.” Hermann’s appropriation of Dorothea, the allegorical equivalent of German appropriation of the classical heritage out of the hands of France, does not lead to change; rather, it simply hardens the German self as it already is: “nun ist das Meine meiner als jemals.” The incipient tragedy of German classicism could hardly be more prophetically expressed than in these two “marriages.”

Perhaps because the appropriation of the classical was to be such a treasured element of German cultural identity, it has been difficult for critics like Staiger (even though he is himself a Swiss) to look for the more problematic aspects of the union of the two cultures; and for critical terms with which to discuss the issue from a more neutral perspective, it will prove fruitful to look beyond the conventional Goethe criticism with its dangerous concepts of the “higher existence” and of the appealing but undefined notion of “humanity,” to other critical approaches, if we are to gain a better understanding of the Helen scene and its importance for the drama, for Goethe, and for ourselves. Above all, it is the very thematized conflict between different languages that demands our attention. We have noted that in this scene various characters speak various languages and that one linguistic articulation (that of Faust) comes to dominate another (that of Helen). A useful term for this interplay of languages in a single work of art would be the “heteroglossia” of Mikhail Bakhtin, as he develops the concept in his important article, “Discourse in the Novel.” As is clear from the title of the essay,

Bakhtin is primarily interested in the novel, a literary genre of interest to him precisely because, unlike other genres, it has no given form and is free to create sub-forms and languages at will. In this regard, *Part Two* of *Faust* could be seen in a similar typological position, since it operates, on an often parodistic level, in many linguistic and poetic forms and outside any normative concept of drama. For Bakhtin, such a work of literature is an interplay of voices:

The ... writer witnesses ... the unfolding of social heteroglossia *surrounding* the object, the Tower-of-Babel mixing of languages that goes on around any object.... For the prose writer, the object is a focal point for heteroglot voices among which his own voice must sound: these voices create the background necessary for his own voice, outside of which his artistic prose nuances cannot be perceived, and without which they “do not sound.”¹²

Of course, it is Goethe’s voice that sounds through every one of the voices he creates in the Helen scene, and so the question of dominance becomes crucial: which voice will win out?

It is surely no coincidence that Faust, in the course of this act, traces the trajectory of Goethe’s own style, from the meter of *Iphigenie* to the short quatrains of the later years, for the act is not only an allegorization of literary history, but is at the same time a representation of Goethe’s own place in that history. The act dramatically represents Goethe’s own appropriation of the classical and the historical acquisition of his own voice through this act of [398]appropriation. The sense of victory present in this personal sense of achievement extends further: it may well be that in the death of Euphorion, Goethe is also claiming victory over a major poetic rival, Lord Byron, a poet for whom Goethe had great respect,¹³ and for Goethe respect always implied competition. There is, furthermore, another and more serious rival who appears in Faust’s “Weg zu Helena,” as this act and the preceding “Klassische Walpurgisnacht” are so often called.¹⁴ This rival is also the greatest friend Goethe ever had, Schiller, one of the few acquaintances for whom he had real admiration. I suggest that in the two enigmatic appearances of the “Cranes of Ibycus” which precede the meeting with Helen, Goethe is presenting in his text a second act of appropriation—a covert literary reclamation project analogous to Faust’s last act in the drama where land is reclaimed from the sea. It is an act which reclaims for Goethe material he had out on loan to Schiller.

The history of this poetic material is involved and reveals a great deal about Goethe as a poet and as a friend. First reference to the poem about the cranes is in a letter of Schiller to Goethe on June 26, 1797, where he mentions the work as Goethe’s and as a projected “Gegenstück” to Schiller’s own “Ring des Polykrates.”¹⁵ The following July, Goethe writes to K. A. Böttiger, an archaeologist who held the rectorship of the Gymnasium in Weimar, for information regarding the legend of Ibycus and the cranes.¹⁶ Shortly thereafter, Goethe gave the entire project over to Schiller, who completed the poem, incorporating many of Goethe’s suggestions. That the two poets refer to their

respective projects as “Gegenstücke”¹⁷ suggests a sense of (friendly) competition that existed between them as they engaged in their writing of ballads, and Goethe’s cavalier letter to Körner of July 20 the same year attempts to put a good face on what obviously is a poetic defeat for Goethe:

Sie haben durch Schillern erfahren, daß wir uns jetzt im Balladenwesen und -Unwesen herumtreiben; die seinigen sind ihm, wie Sie schon wissen, sehr geglückt. Ich wünsche, daß die meinigen einigermaßen darneben stehen dürfen: er ist zu dieser Dichtart in jedem Sinne mehr berufen als ich.¹⁸

In fact, Schiller’s letters to Körner do not mention the exchange of poetic material at all, and it is interesting to note that Goethe simply assumes that his poetic inferiority in this project is already the subject of gossip (“wie Sie schon wissen...”) when in truth it is not.

A quarter century later, Goethe still remembers the incident, and once again the tone of grudging magnanimity seems to cover over some deeper feeling:

Auch er [Schiller] machte mich mit seinen Ansichten [über die dichterische Behandlung des Tell-Stoffes] bekannt, und ich entbehrte nichts an einem Stoff, der bei mir den Reiz der Neuheit und des unmittelbaren Anschauens verloren hatte, und überließ ihm daher denselben gerne und förmlich, wie ich schon früher mit den “Kranichen des Ibykus” und manchem andern Thema gethan hatte.¹⁹

[399]Schiller had worked a few months on the poem, and by September of 1797 it was more or less completed. These are among Goethe’s words of congratulation: “Ich freue mich, das durch meinen Rathe der Anfang Ihres “Ibykus” eine größere Breite und Ausführung gewinnt.”²⁰ I think it is fair to say that Goethe parted with his poetic material with a real sense of loss and with some resentment.

He was not to give it up entirely. Three years later, as Goethe began his work on the Helen fragment, he re-invoked the spirit of these cranes in the words of Mephistopheles to Helen. Speaking of the incompatibility of beauty and ugliness, Phorkyas (Mephistopheles) says:

...gleich der Kraniche
Laut-heiser klingendem Zug, der über unser Haupt,
In langer Wolke, krächzend sein Getön herab
Schickt, das den stillen Wandrer über sich hinauf
Zu blicken lockt; doch ziehn sie ihren Weg dahin.
Er geht den seinen; also wird’s mit uns geschehn. (8765-70)

The confrontation of cranes and wanderer is of course a very far-fetched simile to invoke the meeting of beauty and ugliness, and there can be little doubt that Goethe had in mind Schiller’s poem in creating his own lines. The context of the material as it re-emerges is intriguing, and the austere and absolute parting of the ways symbolized in the action of wanderer and cranes may be an

expression of Goethe's feelings of injury at the poetic loss he suffered earlier. Furthermore, in Schiller's poem the cranes are witness to the death of a poet, Ibycus, and eventually become the instrument of punishment for the perpetrators of the murder. Do the cranes in *Faust* retain this knowledge of poetic theft? Are they once more the instruments of revenge? Perhaps we are intended to reiterate the very question Schiller has the Greeks utter when they see the re-appearance of the cranes over the theater:

Was ist mit dem? Was kann er meinen?

Was ist's mit diesem Kranichzug?²¹

Schiller places the answer to the questions in the mouths of his audience: "Der fromme Dichter wird gerochen." Schiller of course read the entire Helen fragment of 1800, which ends some thirty lines after the remarkable simile of the cranes, but nowhere in the correspondence between the two poets is Goethe's re-appropriation of the cranes mentioned and one can only speculate as to Schiller's reaction to the lines.

If the cranes are innocent of any motive of revenge in Phorkyas' simile (and I do not believe that they *are* innocent), they certainly do not retain any neutrality in their re-appearance in the drama, in the "Klassische Walpurgisnacht" scene (7660-75), written some twenty-six years later. In fact, it is precisely as *spirits of revenge* that they are involved in this curious interlude during "Fausts Weg zu Helena." Originally, Goethe had planned to incorporate a scene between Faust and Persephone as the heart of this "Walpurgisnacht," and Faust, or a surrogate for him, was to plead for the spirit of Helen. But ultimately these plans were replaced with the wanderings of Homunculus and Mephistopheles through an allegorized classical landscape. During the course of these wanderings, the landscape suffers an earthquake [400] which lays bare a rich vein of gold. Immediately, small creatures appear to mine out the gold, but they are soon replaced by pigmies who seize the ore and begin to forge it into weapons. In turn, the pigmies are attacked by the cranes, who according to Greek legend, are their arch-enemies.²² Goethe calls these cranes the "Cranes of Ibycus," thus conflating two literary traditions—Greek and modern—, and reminding his readers once more that he has not forgotten his earlier lost material. Almost universally, this re-naming of the cranes is seen as Goethe's "Huldigung für Schiller."²³ But it must strike any reader that this is a very curious place for Goethe to honor Schiller, his friend and rival, even more curious when we remember that the Ibycus material was Goethe's to begin with. Karl Reinhardt is one of the few critics to see the potentially deeper meaning in the evocation of Schiller's Cranes:

Die Bezeichnung "Kraniche des Ibykus" ist nebenbei nicht eine unnütz-literarische Anspielung auf Schiller, sondern ein freundlicher Wink des Alten für den künftigen Leser. Was sich in den Kranichen symbolisiert, ist das Gehaben der Dämonen der Revanche.²⁴

Reinhardt also points out that in Goethe's original sketch for the scene, the cranes were to announce "ein ergetzliche Kampfspiel,"²⁵ further evidence of the

aura of competition which the cranes evoke for Goethe. The Cranes of Ibycus are brought in to avenge the theft of gold, and gold has clearly been associated symbolically with poetry in the Masque of Act I where the Boy-Charioteer says explicitly

Bin die Verschwendung, bin die Poesie:
 Bin der Poet, der sich vollendet,
 Wenn er sein eignst Gut verschwendet.
 Auch ich bin unermesslich reich
 Und schätze mich dem Plutus gleich... (5573-77)

The theft of gold is, within the symbolic framework of *Part Two*, the theft of poetry,²⁶ and the cranes come as avengers of the crime. By re-absorbing his own earlier material to his text and making it once more his, Goethe has conquered yet one more discourse and given confirmation once more to his own poetic voice.

Speaking of poets like Goethe, Nietzsche wrote, “das ‘Werk,’ das des Künstlers, des Philosophen, erfindet erst den, welcher es geschaffen hat, geschaffen haben soll; die ‘großen Männer,’ wie sie verehrt werden, sind kleine schlechte Dichtungen hinterdrein.”²⁷ And the Goethe we know has created himself in the discursive interplay of *Faust Part Two*; in the encounters with the classical world and with his contemporaries which have become part of the text, we see Goethe regain and confirm himself, we see him follow Zarathustra’s dictum: “Werde, der du bist!”²⁸ In Faust’s confronting and absorbing of other voices and poetic traditions, Goethe has left an autobiography of his own poetic voice. In his old age, at the height of his Olympian self-creation, the Goethe of *Faust Part Two* could well say with Nietzsche’s Zarathustra:

Die Zeit ist abgeflossen, wo mir noch Zufälle begegnen dürfen; und was *könnte* jetzt noch zu mir fallen, was nicht [401]schon mein Eigen wäre! Es kehrt nur zurück, es kommt mir endlich heim—mein eigen Selbst, und was von ihm lange in der Fremde war und zerstreut unter alle Dinge und Zufälle.²⁹



NOTES

1. E. M. Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* (Boston 1958) 145.
2. Hans Gerhard Gräf, ed., *Goethe über seine Dichtungen* (Frankfurt a. M. 1901-1914) II.2.94-95.
3. Gräf (supra n. 2) II.2.93.
4. Goethe's works are cited from the Hamburger Edition (1949). All line numbers refer to this text.
5. Kurt May, *Faust II. Teil in der Sprachform gedeutet* (Munich 1962), esp. 156-80.
6. Jane K. Brown, *Goethe's Faust: The German Tragedy* (Cornell 1986) 198.
7. How innocent is the "me-too-ism" of Goethe's epigraph? In his masterful article, "Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition" (reprinted in Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* [Garden City 1955], 295-320), Erwin Panofsky demonstrates how the Latin phrase undergoes an interpretative shift in the later work of Poussin. Originally, the phrase referred to the universality of death: "Even in Arcady, there am I." In the later works of Poussin, the grammar of the phrase is misconstrued to become "I, too, was in Arcady," implying that Utopia is accessible to everyone. Panofsky believes that Goethe construed the phrase in this later fashion, but I would like to suggest that Goethe, a good Latinist, and a connoisseur of Poussin's work, may not have been entirely insensitive to the earlier connotation of the phrase and that this darker interpretation may well have influenced the poet in his choice of the epigraph, and the choice may be ironic. The *Italienische Reise* is Goethe's record of his own acquisition of the classical as a phase of his life. Only a naive reader would see that acquisition as an entirely peaceful one.
8. Brown (supra n. 6) 208-15.
9. Friederich Hölderlin, *Werke und Briefe* (Frankfurt a. M. 1969) 89.
10. Peter Szondi, *Hölderlin Studien* (Frankfurt a. M. 1967) 89.
11. Emil Staiger, *Goethe* (Zürich 1959) III.377-78.
12. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (transl. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin 1981) 278.
13. Cf. E. M. Butler, *Byron and Goethe* (London 1956).
14. E.g., Staiger (supra n. 12) III, 330.
15. Gräf (supra n. 2) III.1.279.
16. Gräf (supra n. 2) III.1.280.
17. Schiller, in the letter of July 26, 1797, refers to his own work also as a "Gegenstück."
18. Gräf (supra n. 2) III.1.281.
19. Gräf (supra n. 2) III.1.485-86.
20. Gräf (supra n. 2) III.1.292-93.
21. Friederich Schiller, *Sämtliche Gedichte* (Munich 1965) II.119.
22. Cf. Homer *Iliad* 3.6ff.
23. *Inter alia*, Reinhard Buchwald, *Führer durch Goethes Faustdichtung* (Stuttgart 1964) 167, and Staiger (supra n. 12) 341.

[402]24. Karl Reinhardt, "Die klassische Walpurgisnacht. Entstehung und Bedeutung," reprinted in *Interpretationen: Deutsche Dramen von Gryphius bis Brecht* (Frankfurt a. M. and Hamburg 1965) 128-29.

25. Reinhardt (supra n. 25) 108.

26. Cf. Wilhelm Emrich, *Die Symbolik von Faust II: Sinn und Vorformen* (Bonn 1957), for a lengthy discussion of this symbolic association, esp. 149-52 and 176-81 ("Fausts Doppelrolle als Plutus und Dichter").

27. Nietzsche, *Werke*, ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich 1966) II.743 (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, 269).

28. Nietzsche, *Werke* (supra n. 27) II.479 (*Also sprach Zarathustra*, IV, 1).

29. Nietzsche, *Werke* (supra n. 27) II.403 (*Also sprach Zarathustra*, III, 1).