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A Hero for All Seasons? Illustrations for Goethe's 'Faust' and the Course of Modern German History

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## A Hero for All Seasons? Illustrations for Goethe's ›Faust‹ and the Course of Modern German History

Illustrations constitute one of the most tangible records of a text's critical reception over the course of history, particularly so when the artist negotiates a considerable span of time between the production of the text and the creation of the image. However earnest the attempt to achieve a ›faithful transference of word into image, the artist always brings pictorial conventions into play, not only literary interpretation, and, by dint of its imaginary) surfeit, the illustration manifests intricate links to the political and cultural fabric of its own period. Hence, the visual communication of a text is never mere ›translation‹ of word into image, but rather a process that adds a layer of meaning, one which may even defy the text itself. As both verbal and pictorial representation are exposed to shifts of interpretation, their interrelationship, too, fluctuates with the passage of time. Nevertheless, illustrations visibly register how a text has been read at a specific moment in history, for images, perhaps more poignantly than interpretative readings, mirror the changing cultural role that literary works and their authors play beyond their own time. Because illustrations function both as aesthetic artifacts in their own right and as a partial visualization of the literary text, they assume a dual role: as the former, they bring image traditions into textual focus; as the latter, they break through literary conventions and supply visual evidence of a text's critical reception. The case of Goethe's *Faust* with the prolific production of illustrations for the play signals dramatic shifts in the interpretation of the text, from the Napoleonic Wars through the phase of unification, the Wilhelminian Empire, the Weimar Republic, and the Third Reich. No less than literary interpretations, these images testify to the appropriation of Goethe's text by successive generations.

The changing pictorial representations of *Faust* clearly bespeak two major shifts occurring over time: one in the reading of the narrative structure, the other in the perception of its content and meaning. The two are closely related both to the textual structure of Goethe's tragedy and to the historical and cultural fabric of Germany at large. Since *Faust* occupies a central position in modern German culture, visual representations of Goethe's fictional hero come to embody, again and again, fundamental aspects as well as specific tendencies in German history. From the time of the first public staging of *Faust* in 1829, a potential reciprocity establishes itself between the imagery of stage productions and illustrations of the text, so much so that it is often impossible to unravel the threads of mutual inspiration. Because of the complex and intricate web of interconnections of text, image, and performance, and their common linkages to the course of history, the image tradition sharply articulates profound shifts in the reading of Goethe's text.

The following essay is not intended as a complete survey of nineteenth- and twentieth-century German illustrations to *Faust*, nor does it consider all the multiple readings of Goethe's text. Instead, it attempts to trace the visual interpretation of Goethe's fictional character from hesitant philosopher to national hero, and comes to recognize, in the end, a radical reversal of Faust's image in the work of Max Beckmann. It is through the lense of illustration that the political meaning attributed to Goethe's Faust comes into sharp focus. Therefore, as a case study, this analysis of the visual portrayal of Faust illuminates the manifold intersections and transformative forces which give shape to artistic production<sup>1</sup>.

Goethe had liberated Faust from the stereotyp-

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed analysis of German nineteenth century illustrations, cf. Forster-Hahn, »Romantic

Tragedy or National Symbol? The Interpretation of Goethe's Faust in 19th Century German Art,« in *Our*

ical features of the popular medieval legend, transforming him into a thoroughly modern man. Though he was still enmeshed in magical pursuits and metaphysical struggles, Goethe's Faust combined the philosophical reflection, the intense ambition, and the emotionally charged erotic adventures that made him an entirely modern man in the eyes of contemporary audiences. Yet, throughout the nineteenth century, artists who were attracted to Goethe's tragedy continued to resurrect the popular medieval aspects of the tale, for these had come to symbolize a typically German tradition. From the moment the first illustrations appeared, they revealed that German artists were drawing not only on Goethe's text but also on the popular fable behind it. To be sure, this contradiction did not escape Goethe, who took a highly critical position on the question of pictorial representations of his text, and finally came to the conclusion that the work was essentially unsuited for illustration. In 1805, he wrote to his publisher Cotta: »Den Faust dächt ich, geben wir ohne Holzschnitte und Bildwerke. Es ist schwer, daß etwas geleistet werde, was dem Sinne und dem Tone nach zu einem Gedicht paßt. Kupfer und Poesie parodieren sich gewöhnlich wechselweise. Ich denke der Hexenmeister soll sich allein aushelfen«<sup>2</sup>. Despite his own conviction that *Faust* should not be illustrated, Goethe himself executed several drawings for *Faust I*. He did not, however, intend them to serve as »illustrations«, but rather as sketches for a stage production planned to take

place in 1812<sup>3</sup>. *Faust, ein Fragment* (1790) had been published with a single engraving by Johann Heinrich Lips (1758 – 1817), a frontispiece depicting Faust in his study, modeled on an etching by Rembrandt<sup>4</sup>. The first edition of *Faust I* (1808) appeared without any illustrations. Only after the author's death in 1836 was Wilhelm von Kaulbach commissioned to design twelve steel engravings for a »Prachtausgabe«, or deluxe edition, of Goethe's works, but this project never came to fruition<sup>5</sup>. Finally, in 1854, it was Cotta who published the richly illustrated edition of *Faust I*, for which Engelbert Seibertz provided the drawings. While it took half a century for a fully illustrated text to appear on the market, artists produced graphic cycles, independent of the text, before the first public performance of Goethe's play occurred in 1829. These »picture stories« effectively coined an image of Goethe's Faust long before their hero found popular acclaim on stage. The most significant pictorial representations of the earlier nineteenth century are Peter von Cornelius's *Bilder zu Goethe's Faust* (1816)<sup>6</sup>, *Umriss zu Goethe's Faust. Gezeichnet von Moritz Retzsch* (1816)<sup>7</sup>, and in France, Eugène Delacroix's illustrations for the French translation by Albert Stapfer (1828)<sup>8</sup>.

Cornelius's crisp engravings gained importance that the young artist could never have imagined when he undertook his timely project. In 1811, three years after the publication of *Faust I*, Cornelius executed the first seven drawings while still residing in Frankfurt; he completed his cycle in Rome

*Faust? Roots and Ramifications of a Modern German Myth, Monatshefte, Occasional Volumes 5* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 82–123.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe in a letter to Cotta, quoted from Neubert, 1923, VI.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Forster-Hahn, in *Our Faust?*, 83.

<sup>4</sup> Neubert, 1932, ill. p. 3; Wegner, 19, 41; Rembrandt's print had been identified as Faust since the eighteenth century, providing the model for numerous successive representations of Faust in his study.

<sup>5</sup> As early as 1836, Wilhelm von Kaulbach had been commissioned by Cotta to execute twelve drawings for steel engravings to illustrate a »Prachtausgabe« of Goethe's works, a project that was later abandoned. Between 1857 and 1864, Kaulbach produced the chalk drawings for his *Goethe-Galerie*, a portfolio of twenty-one pho-

tographic reproductions published by Bruckmann; cf. Neubert, 1932, 245; Wegner, 1962, 79; Popitz, 1983, 170 and 172. Cf. Fritz von Ostini: *Wilhelm von Kaulbach*, Bielefeld und Leipzig 1906, and Evelyn Lehmann and Elke Riemer: *Die Kaulbachs. Eine Künstlerfamilie aus Arolsen*, Arolsen, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> *Bilder zu Goethe's Faust von P. Cornelius. Gestochen von F. Ruscheweyh. Frankfurt am Main bey F. Wenner, 1816*. For a critical assessment of Cornelius' prints, cf. Alfred von Wolzogen: *Peter von Cornelius*, Berlin 1867; Hermann Riegel: *Peter Cornelius. Festschrift zu des grossen Künstlers 100. Geburtstage*, Berlin 1883; Alfred Kuhn: *Die Faustillustrationen des Peter Cornelius in ihrer Beziehung zur deutschen Nationalbewegung der Romantik*, Berlin 1916; *Goethe's Faust. Der Tragödie erster Teil mit Zeichnungen von Peter*

during the autumn of that year. The entire suite of twelve scenes, including the title page, appeared four years later, in 1816. The most striking features of Cornelius's conception lie in his consistently neo-medieval setting, his focus on the narrative elements of Goethe's text, and, within this framework, his highly personal definition of the relationship between Faust and Mephistopheles. Not once does the artist allude to the brooding old Faust in his study, the only image that had accompanied the 1790 edition of Goethe's *Faust, ein Fragment*. Instead, Cornelius devotes half of his series of images to the tragedy of Gretchen. In the sixth scene, in ›Marthe's Garten‹ (*Faust I*, 3073 ff: fig. 14) where the four figures of Faust, Margaret, Mephistopheles, and Martha are united, the artist tellingly pictures his reading of Goethe's text: the setting, architecture, and costumes evoke a medieval Germany, with the two couples secluded in a walled garden. Faust, in the guise of youthful knight, is prominently figured in the left foreground pursuing Margaret, the amorously submissive young woman, whereas Mephistopheles, sporting the traditional feather in his cap, clubfoot, and fingernails extending into claws, harks back to a medieval stereotype. The emblematic ›flatness‹ of Mephistopheles creates a striking contrast to the psychologically differentiated modern character of Faust. If the fixed attributes of Mephistopheles preserve the stereotypes of a medieval play, the strikingly modern and therefore fluctuating traits of Faust's character consistently defy moral and social cate-

gorization. Cornelius distinguished between the protagonists of the play by casting Mephistopheles with the conventions of an emblematic tradition while construing Faust according to a modern psychology of character, yet framing the encompassing scenes in the period setting of a fictional German middle ages.

The dramatic dominance of Faust comes into even sharper focus in the crucial eleventh scene, *Der Ritt* (*Faust I*, 4399–4404: fig. 1), in which Cornelius poignantly articulates the relationship between Faust and Mephistopheles. The picture represents Faust and Mephistopheles ›speeding onward on black horses around the ravenstone‹. Cornelius's Faust is a self-possessed and virile figure whose imperious expression and commanding gesture belie the horror Goethe's character experienced in the face of the dreadful gallows scene, and the deeply disturbing question he must ask: ›Was weben die dort um den Rabenstein?‹ Mephistopheles sits stooped and passive in the saddle, overshadowed by his billowing cape, while Faust, his mouth sternly set and his arm raised in accusation, supremely dominates the composition. As one of Cornelius's early critics observed, the artist had defied Goethe's text here by shifting the active role entirely to Faust.<sup>9</sup> This reversal of roles is underscored even more emphatically when we compare Cornelius's image to Delacroix's illustration of the same scene (*Faust I*, 4399–4404: fig. 2). In Delacroix's conception, the cunning, everpersuasive Mephistopheles becomes the very personi-

Cornelius. *Eingeleitet von Alfred Kuhn*, Berlin 1920; Alfred Kuhn: *Peter Cornelius und die geistigen Strömungen seiner Zeit*, Berlin 1921; Felix Salomon: *Die Faustillustrationen von Cornelius und Delacroix*, doctoral dissertation, Würzburg 1930; and, Maria-Luise von Graberg: *Die Nibelungen-Illustrationen von Johann Heinrich Füssli und Peter Cornelius*, doctoral dissertation, Berlin 1970.

<sup>7</sup> *Umriss zu Goethe's Faust. Gezeichnet von Moritz Retzsch*, Stuttgart and Augsburg 1836, dated 1837 on title page); the first part consists of twenty-nine plates, the second of eleven; the first edition of the first part appeared in 1816; cf. Leopold Hirschberg: *Moritz Retzsch. Chronologisches Verzeichnis seiner graphischen Werke*, Berlin 1925.

<sup>8</sup> Goethe: *Faust, Tragédie, traduite en Français par M. Al-*

bert Stapfer. *Ornée d'un Portrait d'Auteur et de dix-sept Dessins composés d'après les principales Scènes de l'ouvrage et exécutés sur Pierre par M. Eugène Delacroix*, Paris 1828; see also F. Salomon: *Die Faustillustrationen von Cornelius und Delacroix*, Würzburg 1930; Günter Busch: *Eugène Delacroix: Der Tod des Valentin*, Frankfurt a. Main 1973; for a discussion of Delacroix's sources, cf. Guinevere Doy: ›Delacroix et Faust,‹ in *Nouvelles de l'estampe* 21, 1975, 18–23; Delacroix's and Cornelius's prints have often been compared, most recently in the rather general article by Ronald Salter that does not go beyond a survey, ›Illustrative Approaches to Goethe's Faust,‹ in *Goethe Yearbook*, Publications of the Goethe Society of North America, IV, Columbia, SC, 1988, 57–82.

<sup>9</sup> Wolzogen, 1867, 16.





1. Peter von Cornelius. *Der Ritt*. From: *Bilder zu Goethe's Faust von P. Cornelius. Gestochen von F. Ruscheweyh*. 1816. Düsseldorf, Goethe-Museum

fiction of evil who exercises total control over the entire scene. Approaching Goethe's *Faust* as an ›outsider‹, largely unburdened by the heavy layers of historical and cultural meaning that *Faust* signified for the German audience, the French artist could turn his attention to the darker, the supernatural and irrational sides of Goethe's work. For this, Delacroix chose to employ the new technique of lithography whose velvety dark tonalities and sharp contrasts proved themselves to be uniquely suited to the representation of metaphysical drama. Apparently inspired by a melodrama which he saw in London during his visit in 1825 – though his sketches after Retzsch's prints reveal that he also knew the German line-engravings<sup>10</sup> –, Delacroix accentuated the dramatic highlights in

the text, and also embedded the story in a gloomy setting. In his attempt to picture the subjective and irrational dimensions of *Faust*, Delacroix went far beyond mere illustration of Goethe's narrative. Goethe must indeed have sensed the close affinity that Delacroix exhibited for the ›poetic‹ sensibility and ›romantic‹ character of his play, because he responded more favorably to the Frenchman's illustrations than he did to any by German artists: »Dabei ist aber eins besonders merkwürdig, daß ein bildender Künstler sich mit dieser Produktion in ihrem ersten Sinne dergestalt befreundet, daß er alles ursprünglich Düstere in ihr eben so aufge-

<sup>10</sup> Delacroix's drawings after Retzsch are in the Louvre; cf. G. Doy, in *Nouvelles de l'estampe*, 1975, 18–23.



2. Eugène Delacroix. *Nacht, Offen Feld*. Lithograph.  
 From: *Faust. Tragédie de M. de Goethe, traduite en français par M. Albert Stapfer*.  
 1828. Düsseldorf, Goethe-Museum

faßt und einen unruhig strebenden Helden mit gleicher Unruhe des Griffels begleitet hat<sup>11</sup>.

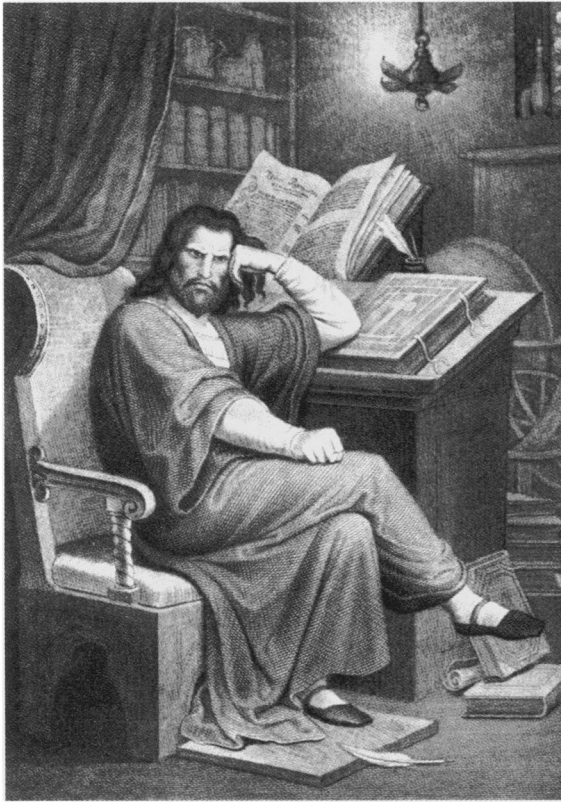
With his line-engravings for *Faust I* (1816) and *Faust II* (1836), Moritz Retzsch followed the style of print cycles of Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey* by Flaxman and the brothers Riepenhausen, producing a pictorial narrative accompanied only by subtitles and brief explanatory comments in the preface. The edition of 1837, consisting of both *Faust I* and *Faust II*, was illustrated with the most complete set of images to Goethe's text up to that

time. The clarity, even flatness, of these simple line drawings, their lack of any shading – literal or metaphorical – emptied the depicted events of all internal and external connotations. Despite this shallowness, Retzsch's prints achieved enormous popularity well beyond Germany, and served as models for subsequent graphic and theatrical interpretations in both England and France<sup>12</sup>. If Retzsch's *Umrisse zu Goethe's Faust* functioned primarily as a pattern book for the canon of standard illustrations, it was Cornelius's historicizing

<sup>11</sup> Goethe, in *Schriften zur Literatur*, regarding »Faust, Tragédie de Monsieur de Goethe, traduite en français par Monsieur Stapfer, ornée de XVII dessins par Monsieur Delacroix,« in *Goethes Werke*, XII, Hamburg 1960, 354–356.

<sup>12</sup> Retzsch included in his pictorial sequence two scenes which became an integral part of all later illustrations: Faust in his study and Margaret at the spinning wheel; cf. Forster-Hahn in *Our Faust?*, 87.





3. Wilhelm von Kaulbach. *Faust in seiner Studierstube*. From: *Galerie zu Goethe's sämtlichen Werken nach Zeichnungen von W. Kaulbach und seinen Schülern*. 1841

vision that converged with the rapidly growing tendency in German politics. His conception of an energetic, youthful Faust with characteristically northern features released a powerful model for the future. By anchoring his visual narrative in a firmly material world – made the more familiar by exclusion of precisely those spiritual and magical elements that Goethe explored in his own drawings and that had held a strong attraction for Delacroix – Cornelius turned the tragedy of

Gretchen into the centerpiece of his pictorial sequence. Significantly, Cornelius omitted any reference to Faust as an introspective scholar, casting him instead in the powerful role of Mephistopheles's equal – if not superior – counterpart. This rupture with Goethe's text marks the beginning of the process that transformed Faust from a romantically soul-searching and world-exploring subject, with his virtues and failings, into the heroic embodiment of national identity.

Cornelius's pervasive neo-medieval setting immediately signified to its audience a typically ›German‹ tradition and ambience. Taking his cues from Dürer and the art of the north, he forged a pictorial mode that represents at once the contemporary Nazarene ideal of a new German art and the national patriotic mood of the anti-Napoleonic movement. It is only consistent with this ideological background that he invented an image of Faust as a dynamic, taut, and virile character, wholly a ›man of action‹, not one plagued by doubt and introspection. In old age, looking back upon his *Faust*, the artist explicitly confessed his intentions: »... ich wollte ganz deutsch sein und wählte absichtlich diese Form ...«<sup>13</sup>. Later biographers and critics immediately capitalized on this avowed »nationalist tendency«, which they claimed for their own agendas, reading the Goethe-Cornelius Faust as an energetic »knight«, self-possessed with »imperial defiance« and an »Olympian« air<sup>14</sup>. When Wolzogen published this interpretation of Cornelius's Faust in 1867, he effectively merged the patriotic spirit of the anti-Napoleonic movement at the beginning of the century with the new, virulent current of nationalism that would soon precipitate German unification.

It is only during this period of intense struggle for German unification that the figure of Faust is endowed with powerful Teutonic features befitting a national symbol. If Cornelius's illustrations were merely ›altdeutsch‹, as Goethe had critically

<sup>13</sup> Riegel, *Peter Cornelius*, 1833, 31.

<sup>14</sup> Wolzogen, 1867, 16: »Es zeigt sich keine Spur von grauenvollem Entsetzen in dieser ritterlich-straffen Gestalt, die vielmehr mit imperatorischem Trotz dem Teufelsspuk am Galgen ... Halt zu gebieten scheint ...«

and he continues to describe Faust in comparison to the figure of Mephistopheles: ... »wenn dieselbe nicht neben jenem olympisch blickenden Faust allzusehr einschrumpfte.« For the political reading of Cornelius's *Faust* cycle, cf. also Forster-Hahn in *Our Faust?*, 84–87.



4. Alexander Liezen Mayer. *Studierzimmer*.  
Wood engraving. 1876. From: French edition, Paris, 1878.  
Düsseldorf, Goethe-Museum

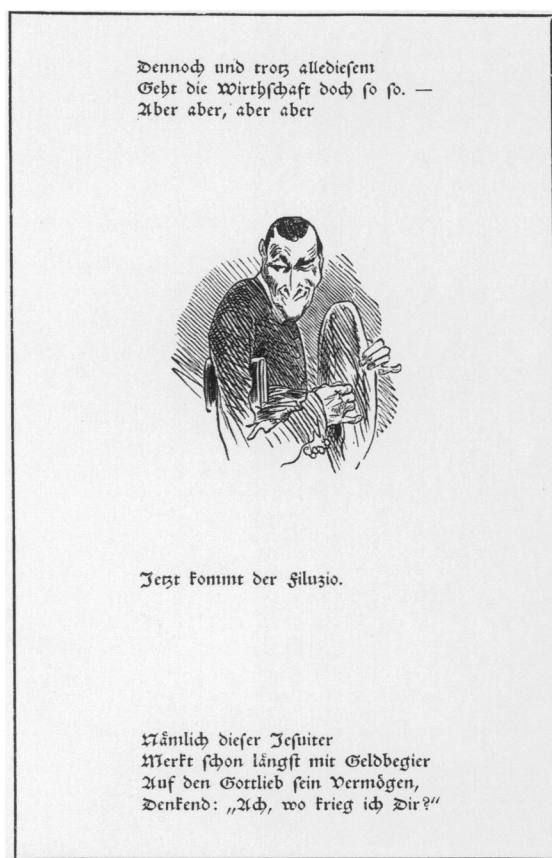
described them<sup>15</sup>, Engelbert Seibert's steel engravings for Cotta's richly illustrated editions of *Faust I* and *Faust II* of 1854 and 1858<sup>16</sup> mark the turning point in the transformation of Faust into a truly Germanic hero. During the Vormärz period, Wilhelm von Kaulbach had already begun

to pave the way with his interpretation of Faust as a man of bold gestures. Kaulbach's numerous pictorial representations of Goethe's works, especially his *Goethe-Galerie*, had the dual effect of popularizing Goethe for a wide German audience and molding the image of his fictional characters

<sup>15</sup> Goethe first learned about Cornelius's drawings through Boisserée in May 1811 when the artist had completed only part of his cycle. Whereas Goethe praised the »geistreiche Behandlung« in a letter to Cornelius in May 1811, he judged the engravings harshly in 1828 when he discussed Cornelius's art with the painter Stieler; »Er möge den Corneliusschen »Faust« nicht leiden, ... , er sei ihm zu altddeutsch ... Dieses Gedicht

hat man so oft darzustellen gesucht, ich halte aber dafür, daß es wenig für die bildende Kunst geeignet ist, weil es zu poetisch ist. Retzsch hat mehr das wirklich Darzustellende ergriffen«, quoted from Neubert, 1923, IX–X.

<sup>16</sup> Goethe, *Faust. Eine Tragödie von Goethe. Mit Zeichnungen von Engelbert Seibert. Zwei Teile*, Stuttgart and Tübingen 1854 and 1858.



5. Wilhelm Busch. *Pater Filucius*.  
From: *Pater Filucius. Allegorisches Zeitbild*.  
1872. Düsseldorf, Goethe-Museum

for several future generations<sup>17</sup>. In his illustration of *Faust in seiner Studierstube*<sup>18</sup> (*Faust I*, 355ff: fig. 3), the artist inscribes into his portrayal of the old Faust the features of concentrated energy and dominance: although Faust, sitting at his lectern, is cast in the traditional contemplative pose, his fiercely determined mien and clenched fist contra-

dict the very state of reflection and introspection. This subversion of the pictorial convention signals that the scholar was only a ›pupa‹ from which a strong-willed man of action emerged overnight. Kaulbach's student Seibertz went yet a step further when he endowed Faust with the features of a blond Teuton, an iron-willed ›man of action‹ (*Faust II*, 4, 10039ff: fig. 16). Seibertz invented a highly nationalistic image of the Faustian hero that served as a model for nearly a century, gaining special currency during the periods of the Wilhelminian Empire and the Third Reich. In 1900, Alexander Tille summarized the nationalistic refashioning of Faust when he claimed that »erst Seibertz hat den rabenhaarigen Christuskopf des Berliner Faust ins Blonde, Germanische übersetzt, ihn dadurch seiner deutschen Abkunft zurückerobert und ihn wirklich zum geistigen Nationalheros des deutschen Stammes gestempelt<sup>19</sup>. The nationalistic makeover of Faust parallels the contemporary tendencies in the reading of Goethe's drama. In his preface of 1864 to *Gustav Nehrlich's Zeichnungen nach Goethe's Faust*<sup>20</sup>, Heinrich Düntzer suggested that the essentially German character of the literary work held a strong attraction for artists: »Ein Werk von so wunderbarer Anziehung, so tiefem Gehalt, wie die reiche Welt des Goetheschen ›Faust‹, worin deutsches Leben, deutsches Sinnen und Fühlen so ergreifend sich spiegeln, mußte vor allem den bildenden Künstler mächtig anregen ...«<sup>21</sup>. Seibertz, in particular, had relocated Faust from a vaguely spiritual and metaphysical realm into the material world of contemporary political realities. As the century progressed, Goethe's text was read in ever closer rapport with contemporary politics. The Kulturkampf with its vicious anti-clericalism – chiefly directed against the Jesuits – added a new subtext to the illustrations published during the 1870s and 1880s. When

<sup>17</sup> In 1906, Ostini characterized Kaulbach's Goethe-Galerie as a cultural icon: »Die Kaulbachsche Goethe-Galerie war in den sechziger und siebziger Jahren ein Kulturrequisit, das ... damals in keinem ›besseren Hause‹ fehlte.« Ostini, 1906, 98. Cf. note 5.

<sup>18</sup> From *Galerie zu Goethe's sämtlichen Werken nach Zeichnungen von W. Kaulbach und seinen Schülern*, Stuttgart and Tübingen 1841.

<sup>19</sup> Tille, *Westermanns Deutsche Monatshefte*, 88, 1900, 769.

<sup>20</sup> *Subscriptions-Einladung zur Gustav Nehrlich's Zeichnungen nach Goethe's Faust. Mit erläuternden Worten von Heinrich Düntzer*, Coblenz n.d. [1864], no pagination.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, from Düntzer's preface, »Gustav Nehrlich und frühere Faustzeichner.«





6. Peter von Cornelius. *Nach dem Kirchgang*, from: *Bilder zu Goethe's Faust* von P. Cornelius.

Gestochen von F. Ruscheweyh. 1816.  
Düsseldorf, Goethe-Museum

Alexander Liezen Mayer, a student of Piloty, illustrated *Faust I* with fifty compositions (1876)<sup>22</sup>, he depicted Faust in his study with Mephistopheles as the glib agent of evil in the guise of a Jesuit. The model for Liezen Mayer's Mephistopheles is readily found in Wilhelm Busch's *Pater Filucius* of 1872<sup>23</sup>, a scathing caricature of the avaricious »Jesuiten« Filucio (*Faust I*, 1338 – 1340: figs. 4, 5). By means of such specific reference to contem-

porary issues in some of their most popular manifestations, the artist unabashedly conveyed his partisanship with Bismarck's politics enforcing an explicitly nationalistic reading of Faust as an agent of German power. This dislocation of Faust brought pictorial representation ever closer to the trajectory of German nationalism.

At the turn of the century, when Alexander Tille propagated the figure of Faust as national hero,

<sup>22</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust. Eine Tragödie. Erster Theil. Illustriert in 50 Compositionen von Alexander Liezen Mayer. Mit Ornamenten von Rudolf Seitz*, München 1876.

<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm Busch: *Pater Filucius. Allegorisches Zeitbild*, 1872. Busch's *Die fromme Helene* dates from the same time. Cf. Gordon Craig, *Germany 1866–1845*, New York, 1978, p. 74.



7. Franz Stassen. *Kirchgang*, from: *Faust. Eine Tragödie von Goethe mit 163 Federzeichnungen*. n. d. Düsseldorf, Goethe-Museum

Franz Stassen, a member of the ›Werdandibund‹, published his illustrations for *Faust I* and *Faust II*, based on an outspokenly ›völkisch‹ ideology<sup>24</sup>. It comes as no surprise that Stassen's images of Faust as a blond, Germanic hero, a man fulfilling his national mission through titanic deeds, were re-published in 1934<sup>25</sup>. Both Seibertz and Stassen also illustrated *Faust II*, and it is in some of these images that Faust becomes the role model for the enterprising pioneer in the period of Germany's most rapid industrial expansion between 1871 and 1914. Stassen's rendering of the Philemon and Baucis episode turns into an allegory of colonial endeavor, the ›high mountains scene‹ (*Faust II*, 4, 10039ff: fig. 17) into a platform from which Faust broadcasts the worldly mission of an all-conquering Germanic hero.

This insistently Germanic reading of *Faust* has continued to inform pictorial interpretations of the drama in the twentieth century. Stassen's impact was especially pervasive in the picturing of Faust and Margaret, be it in the scene of their first meeting, in the arbor, or in Margaret's room. While Cornelius had integrated Faust and Margaret comfortably into the urban setting of a northern medieval town (*Faust I*, 2605–2606:

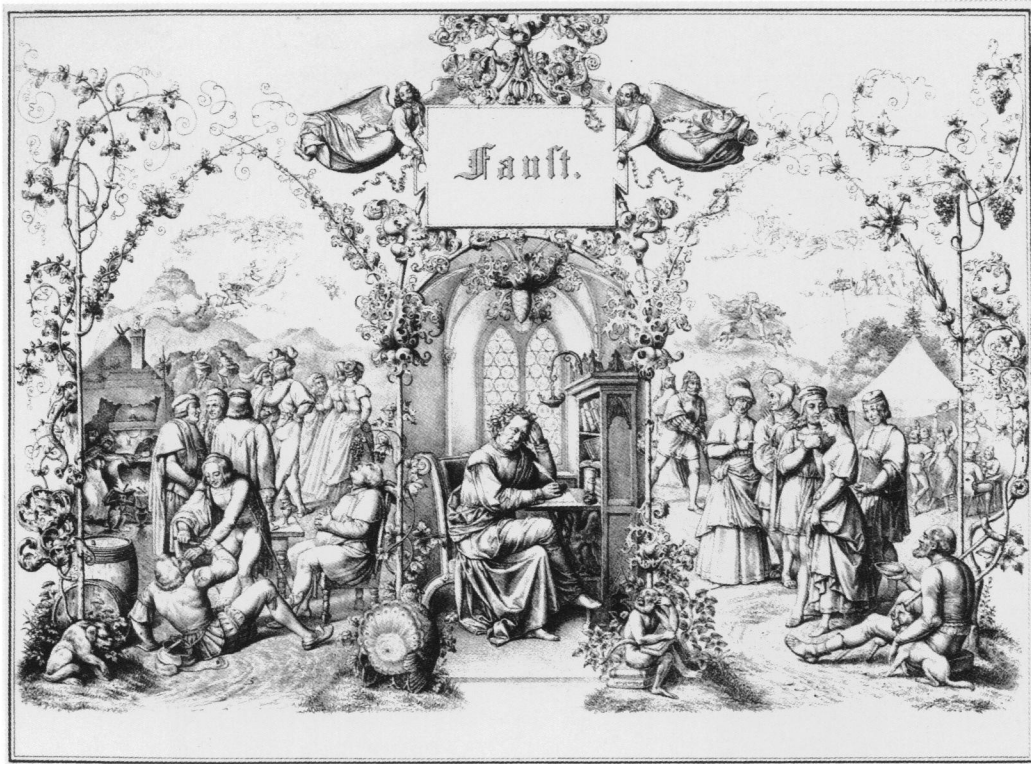


<sup>24</sup> *Faust. Eine Tragödie von Goethe mit 163 Federzeichnungen von Franz Stassen*, n. d.; *Faust. 12 Zeichnungen zum II. Teile von Franz Stassen*, Berlin n. d. [1902]; this is a picture portfolio without text, published in the series *Teuerdank. Fahrten und Träume deutscher Maler*, 22. Folge.

<sup>25</sup> *Faust. Eine Tragödie von Goethe mit 163 Federzeichnungen von Franz Stassen*, Berlin 1934.

8. Ernst Liebermann. *Strasse*, from: *Goethes Faust, Erster Teil*. 1907. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek





9. Peter von Cornelius. Title page for *Scenen aus Goethe's Faust in acht lithographischen Bildern nach der Ausgabe des Fürsten Anton Radziwill*. 1835.  
Düsseldorf, Goethe-Museum

fig. 6), Stassen, and later Ernst Liebermann<sup>26</sup>, further intensified the teutonic characteristics of the couple (*Faust I*, 2605–2606: figs. 7, 8). They cropped the urban scenery down to the two main figures, and thereby focussed on the values of intimacy and *Innerlichkeit* in the protagonistis. The two figures in their northern costumes – disconnected from their environment and pressed to the very edges of the frame – gain a specificity that far exceeds the ›gothic‹ fairytale ambience of Cornelius's pictures. The virile Faust and demure Margaret, portrayed in such a manner and setting, at once evoke a German tradition of feeling and con-

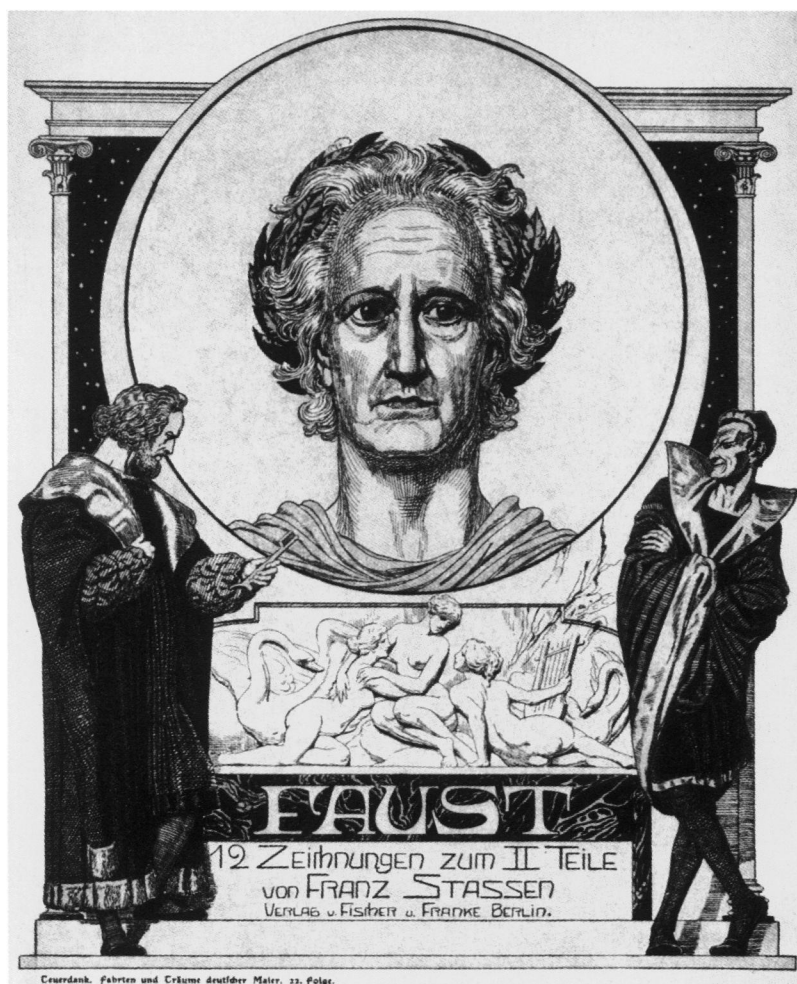
struct the conventional gender roles of nineteenth-century bourgeois society.

Ultimately, the identification of Goethe's Faust with the hero of German national destiny also shaped the image of the author. Goethe, so long overshadowed by Schiller as the nation's ›first‹ poet, ceased to be portrayed as the meditating intellect and gradually assumed heroic proportions in conjunction with the transformation of Faust from doubting scholar to strong-willed man of action. For Anton Radziwill's *Faust* of 1835<sup>27</sup>, Peter von Cornelius rendered Goethe in the traditional pose of a man immersed in thought, as the

<sup>26</sup> *Goethes Faust. Erster Teil. Mit Bildern und Buchschmuck von Ernst Liebermann*, Hamburg 1907.

<sup>27</sup> *Scenen aus Goethe's Faust in acht lithographischen Bildern nach der Ausgabe des Fürsten Anton Radziwill ...*,

Berlin 1835: several artists produced drawings for this series of lithographs; the title page, with a lithograph by Hosemann, was designed by Cornelius.



10. Franz Stassen. Title page from: *Faust. 12 Zeichnungen zum II. Teile*. (1902). Düsseldorf, Goethe-Museum

poet at work in the seclusion of his medieval study (fig. 9). Cornelius's Goethe is set apart from his fictional characters by means of the architectural ›frame‹ of his Gothic cell, but he is also firmly bound into the larger composition that defines the ›setting‹ of his artistic activity: the act of creating and the fictional product forming a coherent unity. Stassen, by contrast, designed a title page for his sequence of *Faust, 12 Zeichnungen, zum II. Teile* of 1902, in which the portrait of the artist as divine

genius is completely separated from the cameo figures of Faust and Mephistopheles (fig. 10). By fashioning a likeness of the poet in the manner of an antique portrait, and by elevating it on a quasi-classical sarcophagus in a circular frame, suggestive of a nimbus, Stassen transfigured Goethe into a national hero of Olympian stature. The identification of Faust with Goethe's own person comes full circle when, in 1923, Oskar Graf endowed the dead Faust at the moment of his redemption with





11. Oskar Graf. *Grablegung*, from: *Faust eine Tragödie von Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Erster und Zweiter Teil*. 1923.  
West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek

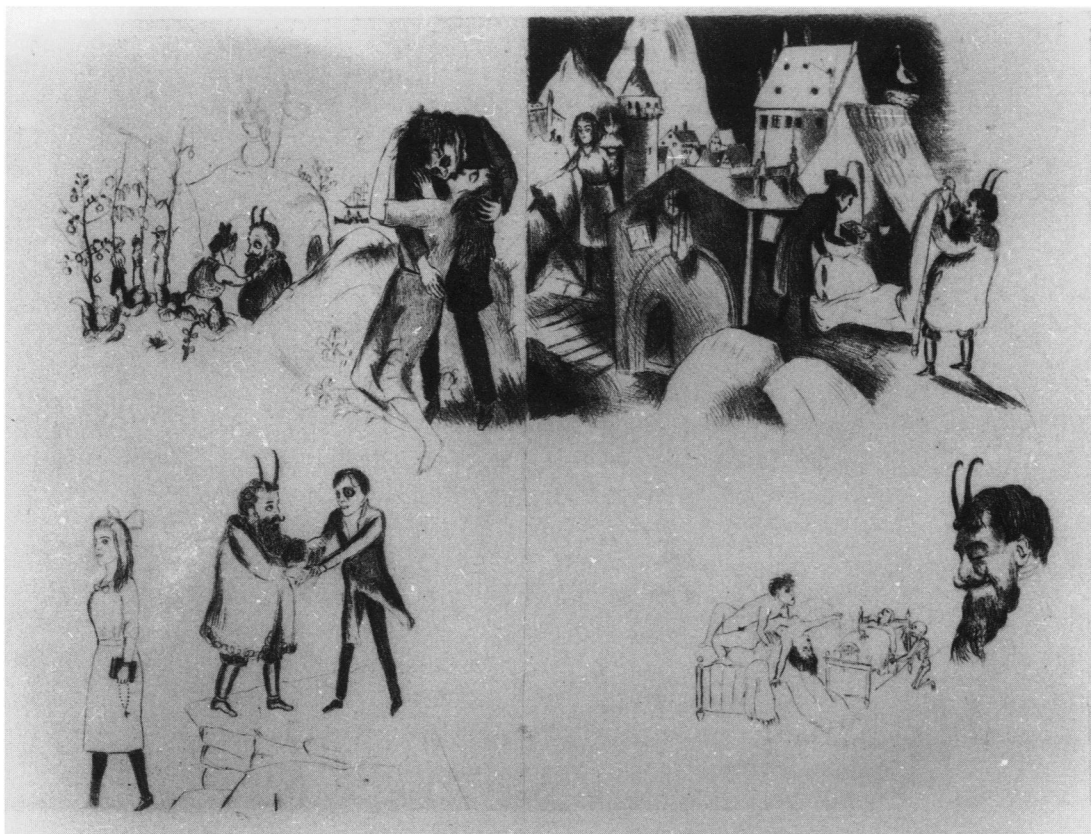
the features of the poet himself (*Faust II*, 5, 11604ff: fig. 11)<sup>28</sup>. Here, the portrait of the creator merges with the image of his creation. While the inscription of Goethe's personal features into those of his fictional character effectively blurs the boundaries between historical and fictional space, the poet – disconnected from his historical persona – is pictured in the role of mythical genius.

Among the large number of luxury editions of the 1920s, only those illustrated by Karl Hubbuch

and Max Slevogt departed radically from this nationalist interpretation of the text. The social critic Hubbuch relocated *Faust I* into a contemporary proletarian setting (*Faust I*, combining several of the scenes with Gretchen: fig. 12). Published privately in an extremely small edition, this portfolio

<sup>28</sup> *Faust eine Tragödie von Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Erster und zweiter Teil. Mit 39 Originalradierungen von Oskar Graf*, Zürich and Leipzig 1923.





12. Karl Hubbuch. *Garten*, from: *Faust. 10 große und 4 kleine Originalradierungen*. 2nd ed. 1967. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek

of etchings<sup>29</sup> challenges Faust's fitness as national symbol for the first time. Not only in his provocative interpretation of Faust, but also in his break with pictorial conventions, the artist articulates his radical critique. While Arthur Kampf's illustration of Martha's garden (published in 1925, only a year after Hubbuch's portfolio)<sup>30</sup>, harked back to Cornelius (*Faust I*, 3073ff: figs. 13, 14), the modernity of Hubbuch's imagery gave a special edge to his critique. Instead of constructing a coherent narra-

tive, Hubbuch adopted the jarring juxtapositions and displacements of contemporary expressionist films, employing the technique of montage, combining several motives within a single composition, and juxtaposing individual scenes with fragmentary parts of other images. Since all narrative coherence of time and space has been suspended, the world is plunged into a state of chaos not unlike that of the theater of the absurd. This illogical structure defies not only traditional pictorial

<sup>29</sup> Karl Hubbuch, *Faust. 10 grosse und 4 kleine Originalradierungen. Abzüge von den Originalplatten aus den Jahren 1922 – 1924*, Munich 1967. This postwar edition of 100, edited by Richard Hiepe, is based on the first edition of five copies dating from 1924; cf. *Goethe in*

*der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt a. Main 1982, 62–63 and Popitz, *Von Odysseus bis Felix Krull*, 1983, 7/17.

<sup>30</sup> *Faust eine Tragödie von Goethe. I und II. Mit Radierungen von Arthur Kampf*, Berlin 1925.



13. Arthur Kampf. *Marthens Garten*, from: *Faust eine Tragödie von Goethe. I und II*. 1925. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek

›order‹ but also the familiar rapport between text and illustration. To complete his demystification of a national symbol, Hubbuch's Faust is characterized as a feeble scholar in pursuit of a working-class girl. Hubbuch's prints deflate Faust as a cultural icon by training the satirical eye of an Otto Dix or a George Grosz on this idol of nationalist pathos.

<sup>31</sup> Max Slevogt, *Goethes Faust. Zweiter Teil*, Berlin 1927. The portfolio in the Kunstbibliothek, without text, contains 510 lithographs and 11 etchings; cf. *Goethe in der*

During the years of the Weimar Republic, the reading of *Faust* that emerges from the pictorial record of illustrations seems least consistent, even contradictory, in its widely divergent aesthetic and ideological connections. In 1927, Bruno Cassirer published Max Slevogt's extensive illustrations to *Faust II*, 510 lithographs and eleven etchings<sup>31</sup>. Slevogt's prints evocatively echo contemporary

*Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt a. Main 1982, 64–81 and Popitz, *von Odysseus bis Felix Krull*, 1983, 7/16.



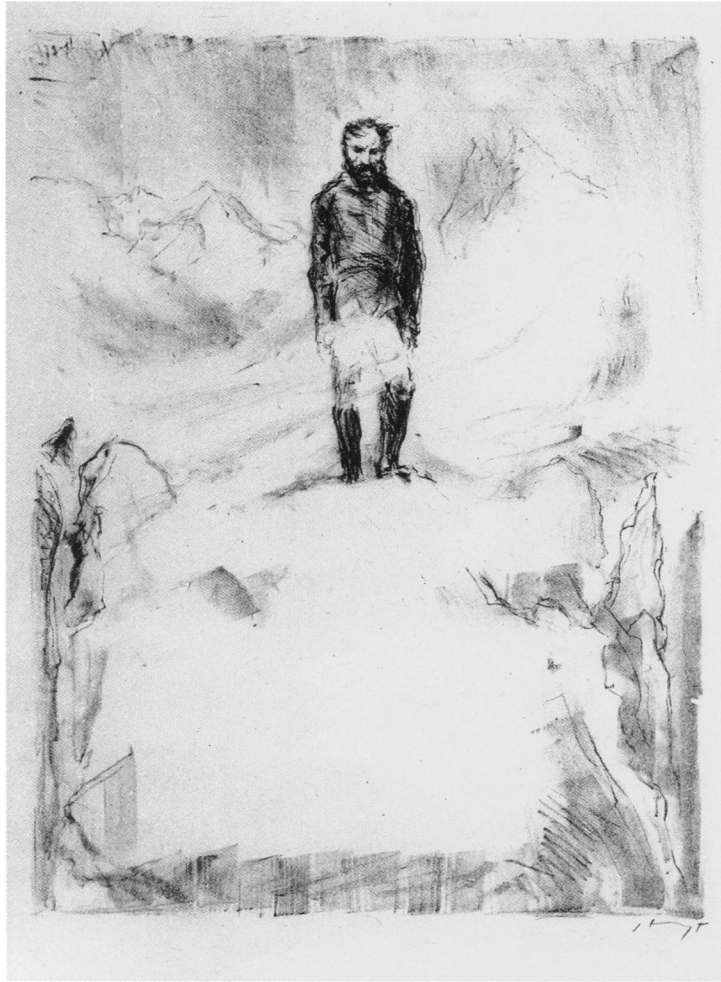


14. Peter von Cornelius. *Marthes Garten*, from: *Bilder zu Goethe's Faust von P. Cornelius. Gestochen von F. Ruscheweyh*. 1816. Düsseldorf, Goethe-Museum

theater, but they also enunciate a highly personal reading of Faust's character. Slevogt seems to be the first German artist of the twentieth century to depict Faust in his old age as an isolated, lonely figure, a frail old man reckoning with his failure and guilt. In particular, his Faust ›in the high mountains‹ (*Faust II*, 4, 10039ff: fig. 15) betrays melancholic soul-searching rather than the assuredness of action, an image of introspection rather than of Nordic heroics, as in Seibertz's and Stassen's plates (*Faust II*, 4, 10039ff: figs. 16, 17). Slevogt's personal vision of Faust as a tragic rather than a heroic figure breaks completely with the popular identification of Faust and the national

mission of Germany. His Faust, deeply marked by frailty and introversion, literally turns his back upon both the viewer and the man of action, expressing his aversion to the theatrical posturing of Stassen's illustrations (*Faust II*, 5, 11378ff: fig. 18; and, 11475ff: fig. 19).

After the demise of the Third Reich, the old and often repressed question of Faust's guilt and redemption pressed itself anew upon graphic and theatrical visualizations. Already during the Second World War, the exiled Max Beckmann posed the very questions that would dominate later readings of the text. Commissioned by Georg Hartmann of the Bauersche ›Giesserei‹ in Frankfurt,



15. Max Slevogt. *Faust im Gebirge*, from: *Goethes Faust. Zweiter Teil*. 1927. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek

Beckmann produced over 150 pencil drawings for *Faust II* in Amsterdam between 1943 and 1944. They were published only in 1957, seven years after the artist's death, and then in a very small edition<sup>32</sup>. Beckmann's understanding of the drama and his

pictorial conception challenge, but also radically reverse, all nationalistic and heroic interpretations of his own time. While the nationalistic reading that had prevailed in his native country for so long was now raised to its most strident pitch in fascist

<sup>32</sup> Max Beckmann, *Goethe. Faust II. Teil*, Hamburg, 1957. This first and partial edition appeared in the small edition of 850 copies; for the first complete publication of Beckmann's drawings in the original size and with the artist's references to Goethe's text, cf. *Faust. Der Tragödie zweiter Teil mit 143 Federzeichnungen von Max Beckmann*, Munich 1970; the pencil sketches for the

finished drawings were only published in 1984, Max Beckmann, *Illustrationen zu Faust II. Federzeichnungen – Bleistiftskizzen. Interpretation von Rike Wankmüller und Erika Zeise*, Munich and Münster 1984; cf. *Goethe in der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Frankfurt a. Main 1982, 82–114 and Popitz, *Von Odysseus bis Felix Krull*, 1983, 718.



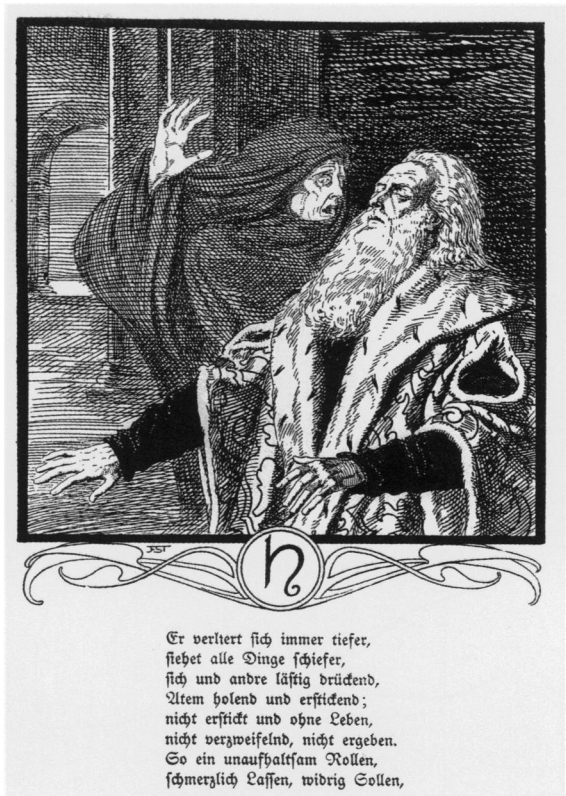
16. Engelbert Seibertz. *Hochgebirge*, from: *Faust. Eine Tragödie von Goethe. Zweiter Teil*. 1858. Düsseldorf, Goethe-Museum.  
 17. Franz Stassen. *Hochgebirge*, from: *Faust. Eine Tragödie von Goethe*. n. d. Düsseldorf, Goethe-Museum

propaganda, Beckmann, in his Dutch exile, gave himself over to a new and probing exploration of a text with which he was, of course, intimately familiar. He approached the task of illustrating Faust with an independence and energy released by the perilous instability of his daily existence. Deeply scarred by the experience of Hitler's falsely ›Faustian‹ plans for Germany and personally vilified by the regime that persecuted him as a ›degenerate‹ artist, he had found temporary refuge from the violence of war in Holland. There, Beckmann confronted the vexing duality of Faust and Mephistopheles as he tackled the question of Faust's guilt. Separated by force from his country and working in almost total isolation, he stripped

away from Faust the last vestiges of a national symbol and excavated from the text precisely those aspects that Germanic mystification had so assiduously suppressed.

Beckmann fashioned his powerful images at a fateful intersection of biography and political circumstance. His recognition of Faust's unavoidable guilt did not inhibit him from attributing to Mephistopheles emotionally intense, deeply human qualities. Only now do they become entirely equal partners whose actions are inextricable and, in some ways, reciprocal. The complementarities in the visual characterization of Faust and Mephistopheles hint strongly at Beckmann's identification with both characters (*Faust II*, 1, 6256: fig. 20). This

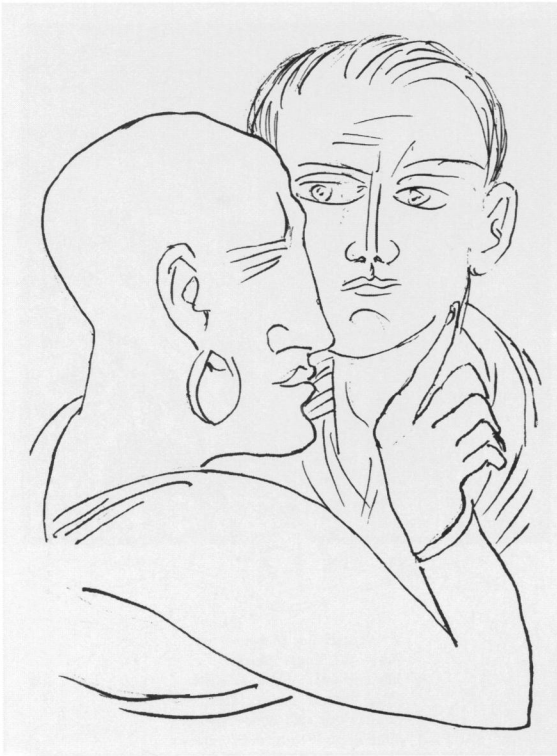




18. Max Slevogt. *Die Sorge*, from: *Goethes Faust. Zweiter Teil*. 1927. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek.  
19. Franz Stassen. *Faust, die Sorge*, from: *Faust, eine Tragödie von Goethe*. 1934 edition. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek

complementarity holds the key to his reading of the text and to his creation of a modern allegory of good and evil. As Beckmann superimposes the profile of Mephistopheles over Faust's face, both patterned after his own features, he presents himself in a graphic overlap of physiognomies that is also a cypher for his moral dilemma. The contours of each identity emerge only from the counterplay of their difference. In lending his own features to both Faust and Mephistopheles within a single image, Beckmann conflates his graphic strategy with his message: through a portrayal of two inseparable characters as necessary parts of *one* configuration, he realizes in his image the ambivalence and duality inherent in the relationship between

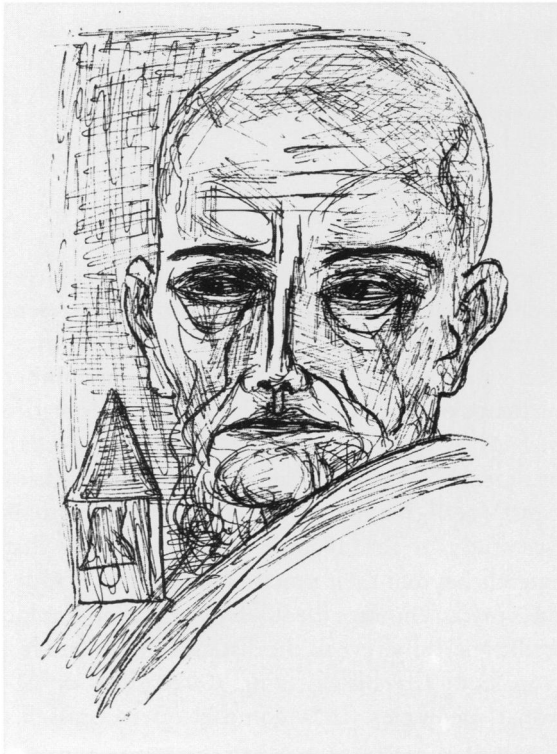
Faust and Mephistopheles. The artist's own physiognomy, and hence his identity, are ever-present in these illustrations. Beckmann's self-identification with the pair, rather than with one or another of the two protagonists, culminates in the figure of Faust in his old age (*Faust II*, 5, 11151ff: fig. 21), or in that of Mephistopheles mourning the loss of Faust's soul (*Faust II*, 5, 11825ff: fig. 29). An attentive study of Beckmann's illustrations, one that extends beyond their precise relationship to Goethe's text to embrace the full scope of iconographic traditions, fully reveals the distance Beckmann has won from any historicizing conventions or national ideologies. In a comparison to Stassen's (*Faust II*, 5, 11378ff: fig. 22) or Kampf's (*Faust II*,



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20. Max Beckmann. *Finstere Galerie*, from: *Goethe. Faust. II. Teil*. 1957. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek

21. Max Beckmann. *Faust im höchsten Alter, wandelnd, nachdenkend*, from: *Goethe. Faust. II. Teil*. 1957. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek



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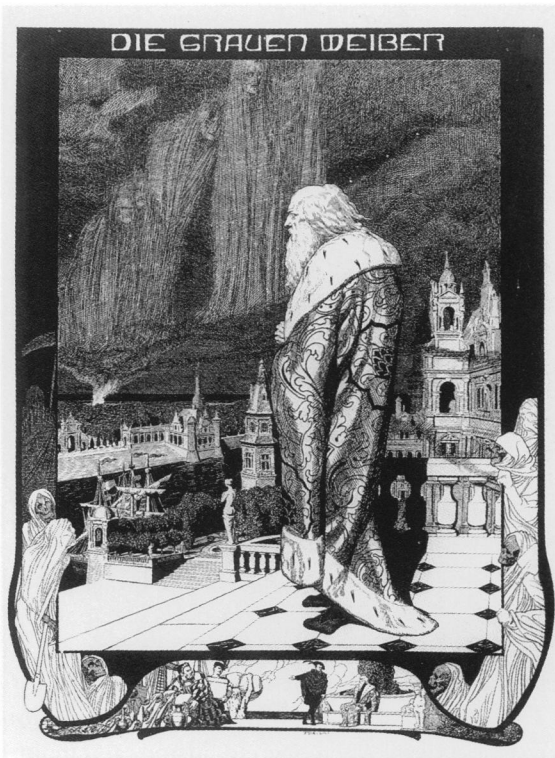
22. Franz Stassen. *Die grauen Weiber*, from: *Faust. 12 Zeichnungen zum II. Teile*. 1902. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek

23. Arthur Kampf. *Offene Gegend*, from: *Faust eine Tragödie von Goethe. I und II*. 1925. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek

24. Max Beckmann. *Die vier grauen Weiber*, from: *Goethe. Faust. II. Teil*. 1957. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek

25. Max Beckmann. *Die drei Gewaltigen*, from: *Goethe. Faust. II. Teil*. 1957. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek





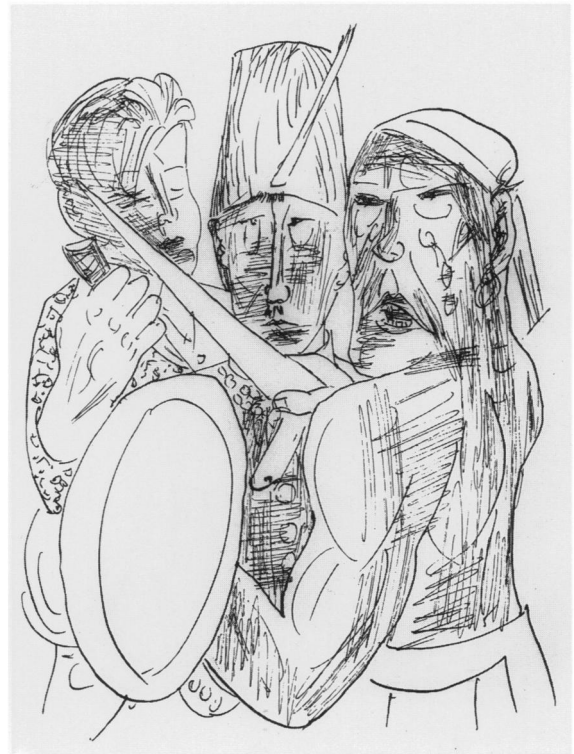
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26. Arthur Kampf. *Die drei gewaltigen Gesellen*, from: *Faust eine Tragödie von Goethe. I und II*. 1925. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek

5, 11043ff: fig. 23) depictions of the old Faust, Beckmann's vision of the ›grey hags‹ (*Faust II*, 5, 11378ff: fig. 24) makes for a particularly stark contrast. Beckmann's highly fragmented yet cogent drawings excavate the psychological and spiritual, while Stassen's and Kampf's hierarchical images merely conjure the figments of power, as in the looming incarnation of the old Faust, who clings desperately to command over his worldly creation. By transferring the conflict from the material world to the psychological and, ultimately, metaphysical realm, Beckmann breaks the yoke that had forced *Faust* into servitude to German nationalism.

This does not mean, however, that no connection exists between the concrete historical circumstances of the artist's own condition and his interpretation of Goethe's text. Throughout his suite of drawings, Beckmann mediates between the externality of historical existence and the internality of artistic imagination. The extent to which this interconnection finds its roots in the experience of his own life is particularly apparent in two instances: when he attributes the features of Hitler and Goering to the ›three mighty ones‹ (*Faust II*, 4, 10323ff: fig. 25), a group that had been figured as aggressive Teutonic mercenaries (*Faust II*, 4, 10323ff: fig. 26); and, in his reading of the Philemon and Baucis episode (*Faust II*, 5, 11043ff: fig. 27). Ever since Seibertz used the episode of Philemon and Baucis as a symbol of imperialist endeavor



27. Max Beckmann. *Philemon und Baucis zeigen dem Wanderer den von Faust geschaffenen Streifen Land*, from: *Goethe. Faust. II. Teil*. 1957. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek



28. Engelbert Seibertz. *Faust. Mephistopheles. Die drei gewaltigen Gesellen. Prächtiger Kahn, reich und bunt beladen mit Erzeugnissen fremder Weltgegenden.* From: E. Seibertz. *Eine Tragödie von Goethe. II.* 1858. Düsseldorf, Goethe-Museum.

(*Faust II*, 5, 11167ff: fig. 28), it had helped artists define Faust as the ›Mann der Tat‹ intent on fulfilling his national destiny in an age of industrial expansion and political hegemony. In a sharp break with this tradition, Beckmann instead identifies Philemon and Baucis with the contemporary fate of the Jewish people. He reverses received meaning and uncovers utterly destructive forces in Faust's mission.

The impact of Beckmann's drawings on readings of *Faust* after the Second World War should not be underestimated, even though their first publication occurred only in 1957, a year before Gründgens' production of *Faust II* in Hamburg. The strong visual affinities that exist between Beckmann's illustrations and Gründgens's interpretation of Mephistopheles – not to neglect the shaping of his relationship to Faust – seem to go far beyond





29. Max Beckmann. *Mephisto um Fausts Seele betrogen*, from: *Goethe. Faust. II. Teil*. 1957. West Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek

30. Gustaf Gründgens as Mephistopheles. Hamburg, *Faust II*, V. 1958.



mere coincidence. The highly emotional qualities of Beckmann's Mephistopheles, especially in the scene where he mourns the loss of Faust's soul (*Faust II*, 5, 11825ff: fig. 29), may have inspired Gründgens's conception as well as his mask<sup>33</sup> (*Faust II*, 5, 11825ff: fig. 30). In Ernst Schröder's 1966 Berlin production of *Faust II* at the Schillertheater, Faust and Mephistopheles wore identical costumes; and, both Klaus Michael Grüber's staging in the Salpêtrière in Paris of 1975 and Claus Peymann's Stuttgart productions of 1977 expose failure and guilt, destruction and defeat, rather than creation, heroic action, or national mission. Goethe's closing scene in the mountain gorges has often been omitted from postwar stage productions, and the significance of Faust's redemption has given rise to controversy in recent German literary criticism. Beckmann closed his cycle of drawings not with his deeply personal view of Faust's redemption, but with a complex image of the fall of man. In their essence, then, Beckmann's illustrations to *Faust II*, produced at an extraordinary juncture of historical, biographical, and artistic moments, foreshadow the new reading of Goethe's text in Germany for the postwar decades.

If Goethe believed that illustrations and poetic texts usually result in mutual ›parody‹ – one medium mocking the other –, the long artistic lineage of *Faust* illustrations surely demonstrates a reciprocity between the reception of a text and its interpretation in images. More tangible than words, and intricately enmeshed in cultural traditions of its own, the image not only helped to popularize the literary work, but also insinuated itself into its reading at crucial moments in German history. By reinventing Faust over time, artists assigned and reassigned to Goethe's fictional hero his shifting roles, only to assess and reassess the ideological contradictions they brought to the fore.

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of Gründgens's *Faust* productions, cf. Siegfried Melchinger, *Gründgens Faust*, Frankfurt a. Main 1959.

★ A shorter version of this paper was read at the international symposium *Faust through Four Centuries, Vierhundert Jahre Faust*, held at Indiana University, Bloomington, October 1987.

The number of each illustration is preceded by a reference to Goethe's *Faust, Eine Tragödie*, in: *Goethes Werke, Hamburger Ausgabe*. Volume 3, ed. Erich Trunz, Hamburg, 5th ed., 1960.

## Documentation

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Aufnahmen: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 14, 16, 17 Goethe-Museum Düsseldorf. – 3, 5, 8, 10–13, 15, 18–30 Archiv der Verfasserin.