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Faust II

Mirroring and Framing in the Form of Faust

What is *Faust I*? The previous chapter used terminology that would, at first blush, seem to have supplied a ready-made answer to this question. The distinction between the frames and the main body of the tragedy presupposes knowledge both of what a tragic drama is and how it differs from its frames. The latter distinction prioritizes essence over accident, the thing itself over its supporting structures. The foregoing chapter would seem to have assumed that the frames are external to the tragic story of Faust's deal with the devil and the ensuing corruption, condemnation, and redemption of Margarete (Gretchen). This intuitive approach is worth analyzing in closer detail and revising.

One of the most prevalent ways of grappling with the curious design of Goethe's tragedy—its inclusion of multiple frames, its disconnected scenic structure, its intermingling of tragic gravitas and comic levity—is to invoke Shakespeare, whom Goethe deeply revered from his early youth to the end of his life. Indeed, the impact

of Shakespeare's major plays can be felt in the formal construction of individual scenes as well as in the selection of plot elements in Goethe's tragedy; and, on a deeper level, Goethe's conception of tragic conflict owed a significant debt to his English forebear.[1] Despite the obvious merit to reading the form of *Faust* through a Shakespearean lens and thus as a riposte to the strictures of classicism, one of the most intensive periods of Goethe's work on *Faust*, 1797–1806, actually coincided with his concerted effort to work out "general poetic laws."[2] Remarkably, Goethe's attempt to draw categorical distinctions among types of poetry did not rely on any of the moderns, including Shakespeare. The famous epistolary exchange between Friedrich Schiller and Goethe during these years focused, instead, on the distinction between epic and drama that was first laid down in Aristotle's *Poetics*. In their back-and-forth, Goethe and Schiller took liberty with the classical categories, perhaps in no small part because the generic system did not, by this point in time and for Goethe in particular, have binding force. By this, I mean that Goethe did not feel beholden to traditional nomenclature or even to the necessity for a complete generic order; he relished experimental possibilities afforded by classical and nonclassical forms alike, and even worked on both simultaneously.[3] This does not deny the deep meditation on the nature of the tragic in *Faust*, or the artful, often very subtle methods Goethe employs to inscribe his play within the lineage of European tragedy. In fact, the unobligatory status of genre in Goethe's hand actually makes the use of the denomination "tragedy" in the case of *Faust* all the more remarkable. Goethe's awareness of the contingency of generic systems—of their regional and temporal rootedness—invests the willful reproduction of their terms with increased significance.

The principal emphasis in the Goethe-Schiller correspondence is not on the classification of genres like comedy and tragedy, however, but on a higher-order distinction between the different modes

1. David E. Wellbery, *Goethes Faust I: Reflexion der tragischen Form* (Munich: Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung, 2016), 69–70.

2. "Über Epische und Dramatische Dichtung," FA I 18:445.

3. Schiller's loyalty to the generic system is more thoroughgoing than Goethe's, as evidenced in particular by the emphasis he places on the conformity of his *Wallenstein* (1799) to the classical conception of tragedy.

of presentation in epic and dramatic literature. In 1797, the very same year that, after a seven-year dormancy, he resumed work on *Faust*, Goethe instigated a protracted discussion with Schiller on this very topic.[4] Their focus on Aristotle's *Poetics* dictated that Homer's *Odyssey* and Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* stand in as paradigmatic examples of epic and drama. The best-known fruit of their exchange is the brief essay Goethe composed and, after Schiller's death, published under both their names: "On Epic and Dramatic Poetry."[5] Four points crystallize in their discussion and this compact but far-reaching essay:

1. Goethe rereads Homer in an attempt to uncover the fundamental principle upon which epic is founded, and applies this principle to his own already completed poem *Hermann und Dorothea*. He discovers that "one of the chief qualities of the epic poem" is that it is capable of moving "backwards and forwards" in time, thus rendering "all retarding motives epic."[6] Everything that happens within an epic has already happened; the events are "completely past." This, it bears emphasizing, is a principle of formal organization, not a thematic one. In other words, Goethe pays no mind to the traditional idea that epic poetry recounts the adventurous deeds of hero and nation. In fact, in an earlier letter to Schiller, he goes so far as to say that what determines a genuine epic is the "*how* and not the *what*."[7] Distinctions among kinds of poetry, in short, are distinctions among ways of

4. The poetological principles of the letters have been incisively discussed in Georg Lukács, "Der Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Schiller," in *Deutsche Literatur* (Berlin: Aisthesis, 1964), 89–124. For a discussion of the letters in relationship to *Faust*, see Wolfgang Binder, "Goethes klassische Faust-Konzeption," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift* 42 (1968): 55–88; and Johannes Anderegg, "'Grenzsteine der Kunst': Goethes Gattungspoetik und die Arbeit an Faust," *Monatshefte* 102 (2010): 441–457.

5. The essay has been reprinted in FA I 18:445–447. For the sake of simplicity over the next four paragraphs, I only indicate the reference for those quotations lifted from the letter exchange. The other quotations are taken from the three-page essay that was written by Goethe and shared with Schiller.

6. Letter, 4/19/1797, FA II 4:320.

7. Letter, 4/22/1797, FA II 4:322.

configuring time; drama and epic can be thought of as the arrangement of events into one of two forms, distinguished by their respective temporalities.

2. If epic is defined by the capacity to move freely across time, reaching back into the past and stretching forward to the future, drama is defined by its "complete presentness." Every word or deed of a drama unfolds as it is happening, and every instant in a drama occurs at the moment of its portrayal. Again, this is not a thematic distinction, but one that bears on the distinct way—the *how*—a drama creates a fiction. It is this absolute, formal inhabitation of the present that makes drama distinct.
3. When Goethe resumes work on *Faust*, he refers to the play as a "barbaric composition."[8] Given the prevailing interest in the poetic forms of classical antiquity during this period, he can mean by this only that *Faust* aspires to accomplish something quite different from what he had achieved in classicizing plays such as *Iphigenia in Tauris* (1787) and *Torquato Tasso* (1790), which were the fruit of his travels in Italy. Goethe goes so far as to refer to *Faust* as one of his "farces" or *Possen*, a genre-concept often used to describe the fool's antics.[9] This work, he suggests, does not proceed seamlessly and uniformly from start to finish, as was characteristic of the classical paradigm, but instead consists of "different parts" that can be "dealt with in different ways."[10] Goethe suggestively calls his internally heterogeneous work a "tragelaph," a mythological creature that is half goat and half stag.[11] *Faust* is a play marked by an unclassical, distinctly northern doubleness; it is a monstrous, hybrid creature that "will always remain a fragment."[12] It would not be a stretch to say that Goethe thinks of *Faust* as a play of *pieces and patches*, much like those that had their home on the itinerant stage.[13]

8. Letter, 6/27/1797, FA II 4:357.
9. Letter, 7/1/1797, FA II 4:362.
10. Letter, 6/22/1797, FA II 4:354.
11. Letters, 6/10/1795 and 6/18/1795, FA II 4:82 and 84.
12. FA II 4:357.
13. For this terminology, see chapter 2.

4. Schiller objected to the *Faust* fragment published in 1790 that he had encountered "great difficulty" in "happily get[ting] through the jest and earnestness" (*zwischen dem Spaß und dem Ernst glücklich durchzukommen*).[14] Ever protective of classificatory divisions, which predominate in his own poetological treatises, Schiller is perturbed by a drama that, in his own view, intermingles comic levity and tragic gravitas. In response to this challenge, Goethe merely responds that his goal was not so much to "fulfill" as to "touch upon" the "highest demands."[15] Goethe sees his play as the exploration of preexisting generic standards, as their productive appropriation and transformation, not their wholesale application. One might speculate that Goethe is here alluding to the comic as a countervailing force to tragic dimensions of the play.

Although the letter exchange between Goethe and Schiller never takes on the comic, comedy, or the tradition of the stage fool, these four distilled points chart provisional coordinates for identifying the structure of *Faust*. In particular, they point to the fact that Goethe defines drama by its immersion in the now; that the play satisfies this formal principle in a barbaric, that is, anticlassicizing, way; and that interference between comic and tragic elements shapes the final horizon of meaning in the play. Concerning the final item in this list, Schiller was not the only one to find the hybridity of *Faust* disturbing. No one less than the philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854) remarked of *Faust: A Fragment* (1790) that Goethe had written a "modern comedy of the highest style,"[16] a remark all the more baffling because this earlier version did not include the (then not-yet-written) *Prelude on the Theater*. Similarly, the first extensive commentary on the play in Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* (*On Germany*,

14. For unclear reasons, Schiller's letter of 6/27/1797 is not included in the Frankfurter Ausgabe. See Emil Staiger and Hans-Georg Dewitz, eds., *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Schiller* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 2005), 408.

15. FA II 4:357.

16. See Friedrich W. J. von Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960), 375–377.

1810/1813) devoted significant energy to understanding what she regarded as Goethe's bewildering figuration of the devil.[17] This very same figure has led some modern commentators to refer to the tragedy as a "disguised comedy" (*verkappte Komödie*).[18] In their puzzlement over this generic duplicity, some modern directors have even gone so far as to excise large sections of Mephistopheles's lines.[19] But what if such an emendation amounted to an amputation of an indispensable element in the tragedy? And what if the prevalence of the comic is not meant to indicate a hidden genre identity, but instead must be understood as immanent to the tragic as it is realized in *Faust*?

If *Faust I* amounted to a mongrel in Goethe's own eyes, then all the more reason to wonder whether the division between the frame and the main body of the tragedy, which I used in a naive fashion in chapter 13, provides an adequate vocabulary. According to the ordinary scheme, we might suppose that the tragedy begins with the scholar's monologue in the Night scene and concludes in the prison cell when Mephistopheles steals Faust away. The framing sections, according to this logic, are defined in terms of their job of presenting a separate entity, to which they are ultimately subordinate. Taken to the extreme, it would even seem that, by virtue of their detachability, the frames could be replaced with alternative ones, without modifying the self-identical core of the drama. The text actually seems to encourage this line of thought. In the 1808 publication as well as the 1828 final, authorized edition, Goethe interleaved a title page after the three framing units (fig. 3), indicating that the scenes

17. Quoted in Johannes Anderegg, *Transformationen: Über Himmlisches und Teuflisches in Goethes "Faust"* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2011), 56–57.

18. The desire to grasp Mephistopheles's comic presence has led some critics to make a genre-based argument. My own approach is to analyze Mephistopheles's appropriation of the (genre-independent) role of the fool. Dieter Borchmeyer, "*Faust*—Goethes verkappte Komödie," in *Die großen Komödien Europas*, ed. Franz Norbert Mennemeier (Tübingen: A. Francke Verlag, 2000), 199–225; Walter Müller-Seidel, "Komik und Komödie in Goethes *Faust*," in *Die Geschichtlichkeit der deutschen Klassik: Literatur und Denkformen um 1800* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler Verlag, 1983), 173–188.

19. Jörg Hienger, "Mephistos Witz," in *J. W. Goethe: Fünf Studien zum Werk*, ed. Anselm Meier (New York: Peter Lang, 1983), 30–49.

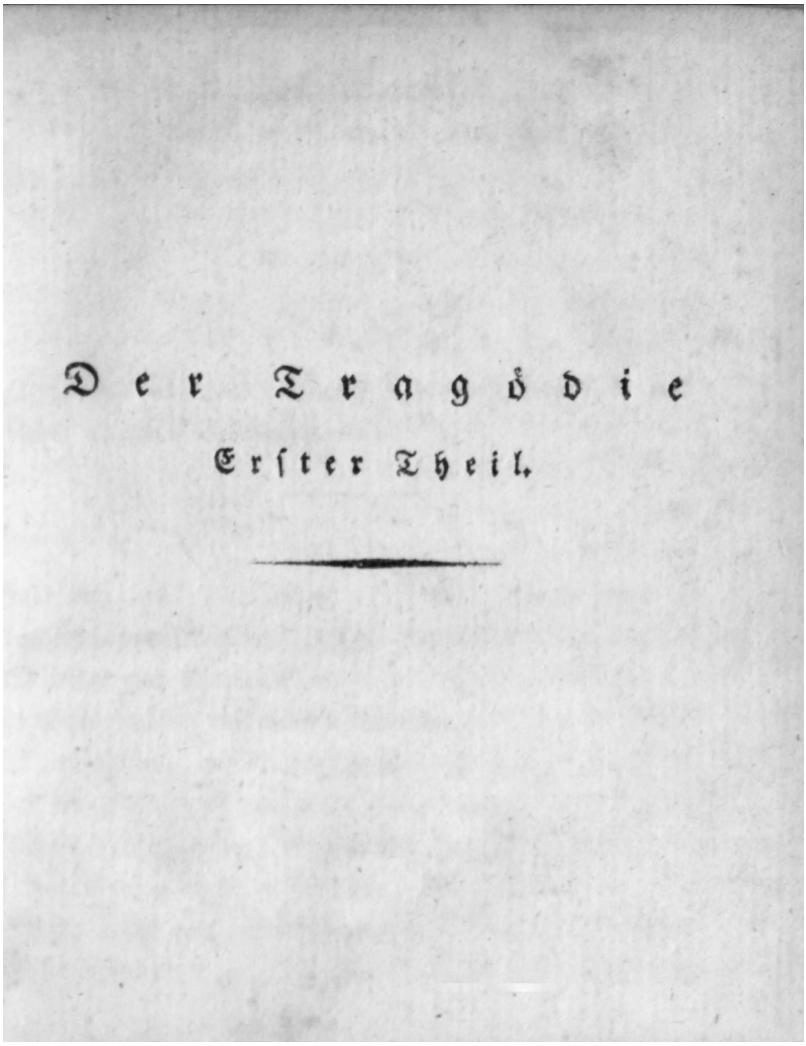

Figure 3. Interleaved title page in first printing of Goethe's *Faust* (1808)

thereafter constitute the first part of the tragedy. Although in many cases, we might treat this textual caesura as mere ornament or happenstance, Goethe's letters to his publisher, Cotta, indicate that he felt very strongly about the layout of the tragedy and sought to

eliminate, insofar as possible, deviations from the (now lost) manuscript.[20] There is good reason to ask, then, whether the division in plain sight is a hermeneutic clue, a piece of material evidence pertinent to an investigation of the form of Goethe's play. The insertion of this page can be taken as a signal that the scenes thereafter really make up the tragedy. Accordingly, the three preceding framing units prop up but do not properly belong to the tragedy's first part.

A specific concept underlies this intuitive approach to the relationship between frame and work. Its basic contours can be drawn according to Aristotle's seemingly unimpeachable definition of tragic form in terms of three parts: a beginning, a middle, and an end.[21] The tragic process, it seems patently obvious, consists of the utterances, actions, and events that transpire in between the first and final scenes. These parameters render the frames extrinsic supplements that stand alongside, but do not properly belong to, the tragedy itself. In a more technical cant, they are parerga or paratexts. Such an understanding resonates with the Horatian verdict, foundational for the eighteenth-century conception of drama, that a poetic work must be *simplex et unum*: one story, recounted in sequential parts. Even if one does not wed tragedy to the classical unities (time, place, plot)—which the young Goethe jettisoned in his 1771 encomium for Shakespeare and ignores entirely in his essay "Epic and Dramatic Poetry"—it seems difficult to imagine what it means to refer to a tragedy, in the singular, if not to identify it as unified in its possession of a narrative beginning, middle, and end.[22] And, of course, the main body of the tragedy is held together by, among other things, the internal consistency of figures, the causal relationship among events, and the existence of a recognizable plotline. The function of the prefatory texts, according to this line of thought, consists in their disclosure of the "play character" of the tragedy that follows.[23] In the crudest summary, the *Zueignung* introduces what follows as a poetic song, as a verbal

20. See Goethe's letter of 9/30/1805 to his publisher, FA I 7/2:64.

21. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450b–1451a.

22. For Goethe's earliest disavowal of the three unities, see "Zum Shakespears Tag," FA I 18:9–14.

23. For an influential discussion of framing under this heading, see Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), especially pt. 4.

configuration brought to life through live, lyric performance; the *Vorspiel auf dem Theater* portrays an object caught in the tension between drama and theater; and the *Prolog im Himmel* reveals the tragedy as the product of a deal between the devil Mephistopheles and the Lord.[24] Each in its own way, these three frames indicate the literary character of the tragedy.

Before contenting ourselves with this conventional stance, it is worth considering two further pieces of evidence. First, what are we to make of the fact that there is another title page that precedes the prefatory poem and playlets (fig. 4), and that seems to mark another sort of beginning? This title page, with its indication of generic affiliation (tragedy), supports the belief that the poem and two plays are not external signals of the fiction, but included within it. But what do we learn about the form of the work by taking the work-internal status of the frames seriously?

A partial answer can be found in one of the jottings among the paralipomena, the collection of drafts and notes that Goethe accumulated over decades of work on both parts of the tragedy. The verse text titled *Abkündigung*, a jocose send-off that Goethe composed as a bookend, asserts a concept of form, in line with the principle of narrative continuity but, at the same time, challenging the idea of completeness. The second half of the poem reads:

> The life of man is a similar poem
> it has its beginning and its end.
> But a whole it is not.
> Sirs, be so good and clap your hands at once.
>
> Des Menschen Leben ist ein ähnliches Gedicht
> Es hat wohl seinen Anfang und sein Ende.
> Allein ein Ganzes ist es nicht.
> Ihr Herren seyd so gut und klatscht nun in die Hände.[25]

24. I describe the *Prolog im Himmel* as the source of the deal because the dialogue leaves it ambiguous, in my view, as to whether it is the Lord who wants to test his servant Faust (lines 296ff.), or whether it is Mephistopheles who wishes to demonstrate his ability to corrupt him. It seems to me that one of the great accomplishments of the *Prolog* is to leave it uncertain whether the tragedy that follows is a demonstration of creation's goodness by the Lord (i.e., a theodicy) or a demonstration of an intrinsic failing of the human being.

25. FA I 7/1:573.

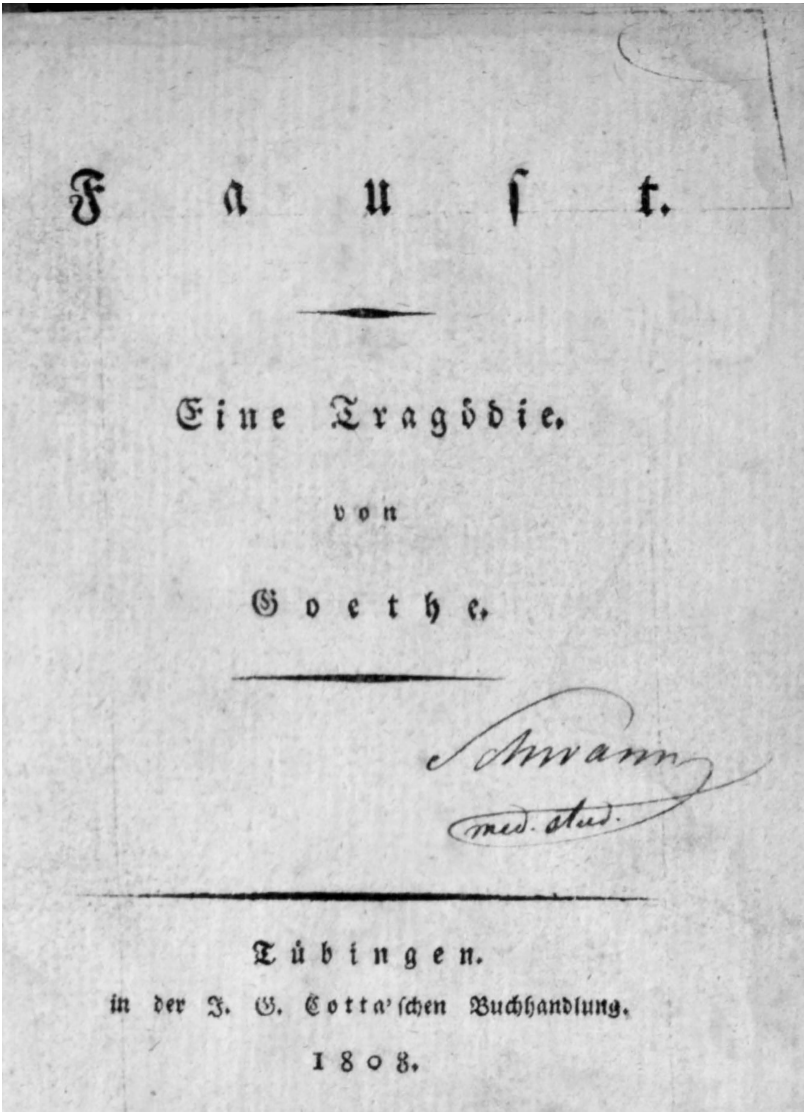

Figure 4. Title page in first printing of Goethe's *Faust* (1808)

The passage is revealing in three respects. For present purposes, it is crucial to note that these lines would have likely been delivered by the same fool who spoke in the *Prelude*.[26] In addition, the German title *Abkündigung* indicates an abrupt and willful quitting or discontinuation, rather than a consummation or progressive arrival at a terminal point. Finally, at the same time that the fool cites the Aristotelian narrative parameters of beginning and end, he discourages the perception of the play as an entity of perfectly interlocking parts and seamless transitions.

The fool's role in the coda is meant to echo his function in the prelude of the play. The envisioned parallelism between these two utterances hints at the echoing technique that, as scholars have noted, links together other discrete utterances, figures, and even scenes. Goethe indicated elsewhere in his aesthetic reflections that a procedure he called "repeated mirrorings" (*wiederholte Spiegelungen*) possesses programmatic importance for his literary activity in general.[27] He claims that his literary works are structured by the paratactic accumulation of related items that "work one upon the other, but are of little concern to one another" (*auf einander wirken, aber doch einander wenig angehen*).[28] The structural principle of "repeated mirrorings" can be illustrated by an example that builds on our discussion in chapter 13. The dedicatory poem uses the very same vocabulary (*Gedränge*, line 19; *der unbekannten Menge*, line 21) to describe its ambivalent

26. Goethe composed two concluding poems, neither of which was included in the publication of *Faust I* or in the final version of *Faust II* that Goethe completed before his death in 1832. He entitled the penultimate concluding unit *Abkündigung* and the final one *Abschied*. They evince thematic parallels with the *Vorspiel auf dem Theater* and *Zueignung,* respectively. As Schöne points out in his commentary, these were written long before the first part of *Faust* was completed, but after it was divided into two parts. Given the framing techniques associated with the fool and carried on by Mephistopheles in the course of the tragedy, we can comfortably ascribe these lines to the fool. I see no evidence in support of Schöne's conjecture that the lines could also have been spoken by the Director. See FA I 7/2:152 and 954–956.

27. In addition to the famous 9/27/1827 letter to Carl Iken, see the short jotting "Wiederholte Spiegelungen," FA I 17:371–372. There is also a good discussion in the editor's notes to the final volumes of *Kunst und Altertum,* FA I 40:1128–1132.

28. Letter, 2/13/1831, FA II 12:403.

relationship to its audience as later occurs in the *Vorspiel* dialogue and then again in the discussion between Faust and Wagner in the later scene *Vor dem Tor* (*Before the Gate*: e.g., lines 929, 1012, 1030). Each of these sections is characterized by a concern with insularity from the vagaries of the social world. These repetitions do not just lend increased emphasis to a single thematic element, but further establish a kinship among a group of figures in the play, including the Poet, Faust, and his amanuensis Wagner. Each of them expresses the desire for transcendence of the mundane sphere, a rejection of the bare facticity of experience, and discontent with the mere materiality of the object world. The serial arrangement of different but undeniably affine figures brings into view what appears like a class or type. That being said, the Poet, Faust, and Wagner are not all manifestations of a uniform type; they are, rather, independent figures making up a similar but nonidentical array. That they should not be treated uniformly is also evident from one of the most brilliant comic scenes in the tragedy's first part, in which Mephistopheles masquerades as Faust, speaking to an aspiring student. The recurrence of the similar is meant to create oppositions and differences, not eliminate them in favor of an overarching type.[29]

In addition to narrative coherence (beginning, middle, end), *Faust I* is held together by processes of serial configuration. As is evident from Goethe's methodological essay "Der Versuch als Vermittler zwischen Subjekt und Objekt" ("Experiment as Mediator between Subject and Object," 1793), the concept of the series is foundational for scientific work beginning in the early 1790s. Although the essay has recently commanded significant scholarly attention, all indications are that Goethe regarded it as a minor, even dated, account of the proper conduct of science. In the present context, it has the advantage of clarifying Goethe's belief that scientific observations cannot be made individually but rather through the "unification and connection" (*Vereinigung und Verbindung*)[30] of

29. Nor is this serial arrangement reducible to the sort of double plot structure found in Elizabethan drama. For the contrary view, see Jane Brown, *Goethe's Faust: The German Tragedy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 64.

30. LA I 8:309.

an array of closely related experiments. The task of the scientist is to craft a succession of experiments that approach a single phenomenon or closely related phenomena from a plurality of perspectives and that, through their aggregation, capture regularities in natural processes of change.[31] Serial experimentation has the capacity to furnish natural phenomena with a structural relationship where none existed beforehand, thereby enabling the observer to recognize the relationships among natural entities. Although the concept of the series is most strongly affiliated with Goethe's scientific endeavors, it is relevant to his literary projects as well. In an exceedingly complex letter from 1797, Goethe remarks to Schiller that at the origin of his writing stands the study of certain sorts of objects, namely, ones that "call for a series, excite similar and different things in my mind, and that therefore make a claim to unity and allness" (*eine gewisse Reihe fordern, ähnliches und fremdes in meinem Geiste aufregen und so von außen wie von innen an eine gewisse Einheit und Allheit Anspruch machen*).[32] Goethe claims that the "auspicious subject for the poet" is not one that can be captured individually, but rather one that is articulated in a series of related but distinct terms. We might extrapolate from this oblique formulation that the activity of reading one of Goethe's literary works demands a comparative back-and-forth among distinct elements (figures, lexemes, images) in order to reconstruct their serial structure.

This methodological framework opens up an avenue to understanding the complex form of *Faust I*, without relying on narrative modes of compositional unity or for a classical dramatic whole. In particular, acknowledging the importance of serial constructions provides an alternative to the opposition introduced at the outset of this chapter, namely, the opposition between the extrinsic frame and the tragedy itself. By searching for related constellations throughout the entirety of *Faust I*, from the frames up through the rest of the play, an attentive reader of Goethe's play begins to

31. For a recent discussion, with references to further literature, see Eva Geulen, "Serialization in Goethe's Morphology," in *Compar(a)ison* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), 53–70.

32. Letter, 8/16–17/1797, FA II 4:389.

notice the repetition of shapes such as circles, objects such as mirrors, images such as the alpine hut, activities such as weaving, and properties such as liquidity. But the present discussion has a more limited purview: the "repeated mirrorings" between the Fool of the *Prelude* and the *Prologue* and, in turn, the irrepressibly funny devil Mephistopheles, as he appears throughout the remainder of the tragedy, opposite the austere scholar Faust. The formal principle of "repeated mirrorings" provides a starting point to understand the comic elements that have so puzzled readers since Schiller and Schelling. Of course, the unity that shall come into view will not be one defined simply in terms of beginning, middle, and end, nor a unity of seamlessly connected and causally interrelated plot episodes, but rather one constituted by the serial arrangement of related and mutually informing elements.

For the analysis of the fool in Goethe's tragedy, then, it is crucial to recognize that the triangular structure of the *Prelude*—Poet, Fool, Director, as we saw in chapter 13—reappears under altered guise in the second prefatory playlet, the *Prologue in Heaven*. Many interpreters see the dialogue between Mephistopheles, the Angels, and the Lord as the proper frame of the tragedy, the threshold that launches the plot trajectory and introduces the core thematic concerns of the play.[33] But there are also patterns of reflection that extend across such divisions. The contrast between the thrall of the present moment championed by the Fool, associated with the earthly domain of human cohabitation, and the Poet's emphasis on the gravity of the eternal, sought in the heavenly province, reappears here under altered guise.

The *Prologue* provides an array of details about Mephistopheles that extend back to the *Prelude* and forward into the rest of the tragedy. Unlike the rough-hewn Satan or adversary from the book of Job, upon which the *Prologue* is famously based, Goethe's devil is introduced as a playful, even comical, showman. After an initial round of statements from the three archangels Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael, celebrating creation for its pristine glory and

33. See Karl Eibl, *Das monumentale Ich: Wege zu Goethe's "Faust"* (Frankfurt am Main/Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 2000), 69; Brown, *Goethe's Faust*, 66.

its violent force, Mephistopheles greets the Lord with an address that strongly dissociates him from religious embodiments of the devil: "Fine speeches are, beg pardon, not my forte. / Though all this round may mock me; but I know, / My rhetoric you would laugh it out of court, / Had you not cast off laughter long ago" (*Vezeih, ich kann nicht hohe Worte machen, / Und wenn der ganze Kreis verhöhnt; / Mein Pathos brächte dich gewiß zum Lachen, / Hätt'st du dir nicht das Lachen abgewöhnt*) (lines 275–278). Mephistopheles offers more than a *captatio benevolentiae* to solicit the Lord's goodwill. He begins by distinguishing himself and the Lord along the lines of earnestness and folly, much like the Poet and the Fool of the previous playlet: the Lord is incapable of laughter, Mephistopheles of seriousness.[34] And this distinction is coordinated with a second one that comes immediately on its heels. Mephistopheles knows nothing of the cosmological glory that the angels have been extolling; he feels out of place in the ethereal and timeless domain of the Lord. His proper station is within the mundane sphere inhabited by humankind, for whom he bears far less ill will than one might expect. This devil is remarkably sympathetic with the suffering of man: he "feels for mankind" in their "wretchedness" so much that he "wants to plague them less" (lines 297–298):

> Earth's little god runs true to his old way
> And is as weird as on the primal day.
> He might be living somewhat better
> Had you not given him of Heaven's light a glitter;
> He calls it reason and, ordained its priest,
> Becomes more bestial than any beast.
>
> Der kleine Gott der Welt bleibt stets von gleichem Schlag,
> Und ist so wunderlich als wie am ersten Tag.
> Ein wenig besser würd' er leben,

34. The suggestion that the Lord does not laugh may be the appropriation of a topos associated, at least in the Middle Ages and early modern period, with Jesus Christ. See Karl-Heinz Bareiß, *Comoedia: Die Entwicklung der Komödiendiskussion von Aristoteles bis Ben Johnson* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1982), 122.

> Hättest du ihm nicht den Schein des Himmelslichts gegeben;
> Er nennt's Vernunft und braucht's allein
> Nur tierischer als jedes Tier zu sein.
>
> (lines 281–286)

Mephistopheles inverts a commonplace theologeme, which would have it that reason constitutes the presence of the divine in man and that, as a consequence, sets him apart from the rest of creation. By the devil's account, however, it is the intrusion of the celestial light (*Himmelslicht*) into the mundane sphere that diminishes human happiness in life and condemns mankind to a rude existence. The source of human dissatisfaction is not vice or guile, but the aspiration to the inbuilt element of the divine.

At this point, Mephistopheles has already emerged in association with three elements connected to the Fool of the *Prelude*: laughter, the earthly domain, and antipathy toward reason. And yet just as the dynamic interplay among the three figures of the *Prelude* sets up a tension between the Fool's, the Poet's, and the Director's perspectives, so too does the *Prologue* set up a contrast between the Lord and Mephistopheles. There is also a parallel between the Director and the Angels.[35] For now, it is important to take note of the deal made in this final framing playlet that sets up the remainder of *Faust I*. The Lord hands his "servant" Faust (line 299) over to Mephistopheles "for as long as he lives on earth" (line 315). Although it is not made explicit, the Lord here introduces a division between Faust's earthly existence and his heavenly salvation in death. At first blush, this appears a mere consequence of the relationship between the devil and the mundane sphere. But the citation of this spatial division is also one that recurs as an internal fissure in Faust himself; he is a figure suspended between the mundane and supermundane, a figure tortured by the faculty of reason that Mephistopheles denounces. The details of Mephistopheles's initial description of Faust—the first contours the doctor achieves

35. We might say that the Director and the Angels share an encompassing viewpoint within which the opposing viewpoints of the Lord and Mephistopheles, the Poet and Fool, coexist.

in this play—tell us quite a bit about the dynamic interplay of these two spheres at the heart of the tragedy:

> Not of this earth the madman's drink or ration,
> He's driven far afield by some strange leaven,
> He's half aware of his demented quest,
> He claims the most resplendent stars from heaven,
> And from the earth each pleasure's highest zest,
> Yet near or far, he finds no haven
> Of solace for his deeply troubled breast.
>
> Nicht irdisch ist des Toren Trank noch Speise.
> Ihn treibt die Gärung in die Ferne,
> Er ist sich seiner Tollheit halb bewußt;
> Vom Himmel fordert er die schönsten Sterne,
> Und von der Erde jede höchste Lust,
> Und alle Näh und alle Ferne
> Befriedigt nicht die tiefbewegte Brust.
>
> (lines 301–307)

The distinction between Mephistopheles and the Lord reappears as the structure of Faust's desire and the cause of his dissatisfaction. Particularly striking is the reference to the fact that Faust's unhappiness comes from a source "not from the earth" (*nicht irdisch*). This unearthliness is manifest on both sides of Faust's internal division: he is torn between the desire to possess heavenly bodies associated with the beautiful (*die schönsten Sterne*) and to satisfy the most extreme corporeal pleasures (*jede höchste Lust*). On a linguistic level, the superlative adjectival forms describing Faust's pursuit of the stars and pleasures underscore the extreme, constitutionally self-undermining nature of Faust's aspiration. Mephistopheles thereby names the foundation of the overpowering dissatisfaction that Faust obsessively laments in the first scenes of the tragedy and that he seeks to escape through conjuration or imaginative projection. Although the dialogue hints at the traditional notion that the devil shall supply Faust with a period of sinful indulgence, Goethe imbues their pairing, through the Lord's remarks, with a novel purpose. The Lord entrusts his servant to

the devil under the explicit premise that their relationship will encourage Faust's overreaching of earthly boundaries, not in order to facilitate their overcoming, but instead to perpetuate the pursuit of, their limits. The key passage follows:

> Man all too easily grows lax and mellow,
> He soon elects repose at any price;
> And so I like to pair him with a fellow
> To play the deuce, to stir, and to entice.
>
> Des Menschen Tätigkeit kann allzuleicht erschlaffen,
> Er liebt sich bald die ungedingte Ruh;
> Drum geb' ich gern ihm den Gesellen zu,
> Der reizt und wirkt, und muß, als Teufel, schaffen.
>
> (lines 340–343)

The Lord assigns Mephistopheles to Faust as a provocateur, as a spur driving Faust forward indefatigably.[36] If this partnership entails a Job-like test of faith, its measure is untraditional. Mephistopheles, as one of "the spirits who negates" (linr 338), pricks and prods Faust in such a way that, in the end, is generative (the key word here is *schaffen*). The famous formula—"Man errs as long as he strives" or *Es irrt der Mensch so lang er strebt* (linr 317)—is transformed from an abstract apothegm into a genuine description of the period in Faust's human life overseen by Mephistopheles. Mephistopheles does not lead Faust toward a determinate goal, neither toward moral perfection nor toward destruction, but instead ensures that his stretching beyond the limits of his own finitude will not abate. And it is this unabated overreaching that the Lord calls "creating" (*schaffen*).

At this point it is worth recalling the temporal and spatial opposition between the Fool and the Poet introduced in the previous

36. David Wellbery reads this passage, following Max Kommerell, as the signal that apathy (*Trägheit*) constitutes the mortal pitfall that the partnership with Mephistopheles is meant to test. Our interpretations diverge in the assessment of the danger's source. In the *Prologue*, the Lord expresses confidence that Mephistopheles cannot pull Faust from his *Urquell* (line 324), and goes on to say that the devil's accompaniment shall provide an antidote to the desire for the *unbedingte Ruh* (line 341). I address this theme at greater length in chapter 15.

playlet. The guiding distinction there was between the here and now of the *Mitwelt* and the eternity of the *Nachwelt*. It is not difficult to feel the reverberations of this opposition in the lines I have just quoted. Mephistopheles assumes his place alongside Faust to ensure that he goes on inhabiting the world of the now, his *Mitwelt*, and that his unhappiness at his inability to escape from his delimited sphere is productive rather than destructive. The Lord assigns, in a seeming paradox, Mephistopheles as Faust's accompaniment, with the injunction that the devil should encourage the mortal's striving. Mephistopheles counters Faust's search for "unconditional peace," for possession of the most beautiful object and satisfaction of the most intense desire, with ever new experiences of the present moment that, ultimately, perpetuate this search. Rather than feeding into satisfaction or the disavowal of unremitting pursuit, the devil plays an enabling role. In the terms laid out in the essay "On Epic and Dramatic Poetry," Mephistopheles's association with the present instant makes him not just the orchestrator of this dramatic process, but of the tragic drama as such.

After Mephistopheles emerges as the advocate of the embodied here and now of human experience, a position that aligns him with that of the Fool in the playlet, he goes on to play this role scenically as well. In a two-step process, the heavens close and the archangels disperse, severing the earthly domain in which the ensuing drama will take place from the heaven of the *Prologue*. And then, left in his mundane element, Mephistopheles performs a scenic operation—which is to say, he makes a move within the orchestrated sequence of speech and gesture—that evokes the comic practices of the fool. Closing the frame in a double sense, Mephistopheles provides a final commentary on the foregoing scene. He not only announces the end of the scene, but also provides hermeneutic information on how it should be understood. His concludes the playlet: "It is quite swell of such a grand lord / To speak so humanely with the devil himself" (*Es ist gar hübsch von einem großen Herrn, / So menschlich mit dem Teufel selbst zu sprechen*) (lines 352–353). These lines do more than express gratitude for the creator's kind bearing. As one would again expect from a fool, they break out of the intrafictional space and humorously underscore

the simulated status of what has just transpired, neutralizing the effect of the Lord's imposing presence. In having the last word, Mephistopheles steps to the fore, orchestrating the events of the drama in two ways: theatrically and cosmically. For his task is not only to ensure Faust's endless striving, but also to serve as the comic commentator of his divine-like aspirations. And this double role depends upon Mephistopheles's ability to stand both inside and outside the fiction in the drama, treading the line, traditionally reserved for the fool, between extrafictional and intrafictional modes of address.