

Mason, Eudo C., Goethe's Faust Its Genesis and Purport (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles) 1967

p.vii I have been reluctantly forced to the conclusion that far too much academic scholarship and research on Faust is concerned with factitious solutions of factitious problems, and particularly that the "Higher Critics" have made complex and obscure what is often comparatively simple and clear, thereby setting up artificial barriers between the reader and Goethe's work.

p. vii Amongst the critics to whom I owe most in my attempts to reconstruct and elucidate the visionary conception or "inner fairy tale" that shapes itself in Goethe's Faust, I would particularly name six who, widely though they differ from one another in their conclusions, have in common a fine amplitude of outlook and refreshing sense for essentials: Konrad Burdach, H. A. Korff, Max Kommerell, Emil Staiger, Wilhelm Emrich, and the too little known Karl Wollf.

p.20 We have exact evidence as to when Faust was completed. Goethe put the finishing touch to the second part in January, 1832, a few weeks before his death and when he was in his eighty-third year. The evidence as to the date when he began is, as will be seen, vague and contradictory, but it cannot have been later than 1772, and some scholars would put it appreciably earlier. The two parts of Faust therefore span between the entire sixty or so years of Goethe's effective literary career, if that is regarded as commencing about 1771. Faust was begun by a young man who was just finding his feet as a poet; it was completed by an old man with one of those feet in the grave.

p. 23 The piecemeal, jerky, and long-protracted way in which Faust was produced is conspicuous enough when one reads it, especially when the so disparate first and second parts are juxtaposed.

p. 36 Perhaps Goethe would have been more communicative if he could have foreseen that by his secretiveness and love of mystification he was providing the practitioners of "Higher Criticism" with ideal conditions for using Faust, I. Teil as one of their happy hunting grounds, much to the detriment of "the poet's grandeur." By employing their favourite device of detecting supposed discrepancies and contradictions in action, thought, or language, the critics of this type attempt to demonstrate that Goethe's entire conception of Faust must have undergone a whole series of drastic changes, and that the final text of Part I is just a sketchily coordinated patchwork of mutually contradictory fragments - many of them very brief fragments - produced at all of these various stages. This disintegrating method of interpreting Faust, indeed, has, at least in its extremer forms as represented by Gustav Roethe, now fallen into discredit. But it continues to be employed, many of its contentions are generally accepted, and no serious scholar can afford simply to ignore it. There is, as will be seen, at least one very obvious major discrepancy affecting the relationship between Mephistopheles and the Spirit of Earth which it is almost universally acknowledged can only be accounted for by the hypothesis that Goethe materially modified this earlier plan about 1797; nor is this the only case in which even a scholar who otherwise strongly distrusts the principles and practices of "Higher Criticism" may //p.37// feel himself compelled to resort to such hypotheses. It is one thing, however, to resort thus to such hypotheses only reluctantly and with caution in face of acute major problems where no alternative is to be found, and another to indulge in them irresponsibly in and out of season for their own sake. Everything ~~is~~ turns here upon the question, whether the same kind and degree of consistence may legitimately be demanded of a work of the imagination, as is to be demanded of a purely factual, mathematical, scientific, or philosophical document.