

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

p. 37 (cont'd) Many of the "contradictions" the disintegrating critics present as so "insoluble" are due only to Goethe's having been concerned to evoke in Faust a fantastic dream-world not subject to the causal laws of everyday reality, and others are simply manifestations of the inherent dialectical processes of the human psyche. Goethe himself was sceptical of the "Higher Criticism," which had already made considerable progress during his lifetime. He believed that those who applied it to the Homeric poems did not sufficiently take into account "die gewaltsame Tendenz der poetischen und kritischen Natur zur Einheit" (the powerful tendency to unity of the poetic and critical nature) (April 28, 1797 to Schiller), and even thought it better to stick to the text of the New Testament just as it stands, without attempting a historico-critical examination of it.⁶

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p. 38 We should always, in face of an apparent or even a real inconsistency in Faust be on our guard against concluding, with the "Higher Critics," that we know better what Goethe was getting at than he himself did. Our first endeavour should be to accept this poetic world of Goethe's as he created it, in the conviction that it is in the main as consistent as he intended it to be, or saw any need for it to be.

p. 41 The most important point about it is that it contains the only explicit indication we have from Goethe himself about the way in which the principal early scenes of Faust were written, namely, like most of his other work of these Frankfort Storm and Stress years, at one stroke -- "ohne Konzept." That is something that the "Higher Critics," who insist on regarding Faust as an extremely complex and multiple palimpsest, refuse to believe.

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p. 41 Through a lucky chance we possess the next best thing to the original manuscript itself: a transcript of it. In the late Frankfort and early Weimar years Goethe frequently lent the manuscript, or parts of it (it is important to note that "the sections were never stitched together"), to his friends, and about 1776 one of these friends, Luise von Göchlausen, a lady of the Weimar court, took advantage of the opportunity to make - one can be pretty sure, surreptitiously - a copy of it, which remained undiscovered till 1887, when it was published by Erich Schmidt under the title: Goethes Faust in ursprünglicher Gestalt (Goethe's Faust in its original form). This document, usually referred to as the "Urfaust" (that is, "the original Faust"), is of immense value, though it by no means solves all our problems. It disappointed the practitioners of higher critical methods by not differing anything like so much from Faust, ein Fragment of 1790 or from Faust I of 1808 as, according to their theories, it should have done. . . It confirmed some of the more cautious and reasonable hypotheses of the higher critics and refuted once and for all some of their more arbitrary ones: passages they had argued could, on grounds of purport or style, not possibly have been written before 1788, were now shown uncontrovertibly to have been written before 1776. . . But although the "Higher Critics" were at least compelled to admit that nothing in Luise von Göchlausen's transcript could have been written later than October, 1775, they were unwilling to admit anything more than that, and everything has been done to belittle the importance of that transcript and to minimize such objective certainty as it has brought into the vexed problems of Faust scholarship and criticism. As a result, matters remain much as they were before that momentous discovery; the most diverse wiredrawn hypotheses and farfetched constructions, which convince nobody but their own originators, still inconclusively jostle one another, the one point of general tacit agreement //p.43// being that in this field direct factual evidence is on principle to be suspected as probably untrustworthy, and straightforward common sense to be dismissed as unscholarly, or, in the words of Gustav Röthe⁵ as "skrupelloser Dilettantismus" (unscrupulous amateurishness).

5 Röthe, "Die Entstehung des Urfaust," p. 50