

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

p. 44 In face of such a work as Faust and of such a poet as Goethe a greater measure of good will, of trustfulness, of - one might almost say - faith is called for on the part of the reader than the disintegrating critics are prepared to accord. Such critics seem to be unaware how insulting their fundamental postulates often are to Goethe's integrity as an artist and even to his intelligence. There is room in literary criticism and scholarship for an aesthetic principle analogous to the juridical principle of British law that a prisoner must be assumed to be innocent until he has been proved guilty. On the analogy of this same juridical principle it is here proposed that the Göchlausen transcript should be regarded as in the main a faithful and also a substantially complete reproduction of Goethe's original Faust manuscript until something weightier has been proved against it than anybody has so far succeeded in proving, and that it is therefore entitled to be called the Urfaust.

p. 54 This formal heterogeneity of the Urfaust tends to be the point of departure of the disintegrating critics in their ingenious exertions to take the work to pieces and demonstrate that those pieces never originally belonged together and have only been patched into a semblance of coherency. In the light of this formal heterogeneity all the other real or apparent disparities and contradictions observable in the work, and all the scanty objective or semi-objective evidence we have in the form of statements made by Goethe and his acquaintances, of possible sources, influences, parallels, and presumable inspirations from Goethe's own private experiences, are interpreted as proving that the Urfaust was produced in two or three different stages, each in all respects entirely distinct from the others - one characterized by the use of prose, one by the use of Knittel verse, and perhaps an intermediate one characterised by the use of free verse - and that the text we have is only a pastiche of fragments from these disparate phrases. It is the same kind of method as that by which it is proved that such productions of the remoter past as the Homeric poems, the books of the Bible, or Piers Plowman incorporate, in the form in which we know them, the work of many different writers remote in period, antecedents, and outlook from one another. (Continued on 3.86-12) →

p. 56 For one thing, there can be differences of opinion as to what does or does not constitute maturity. It is not a question on which the judgment of the average academic critic is to be trusted. We shall see how Scherer in 1879 set up a demonstrably nonsensical rule of thumb in this matter which has remained unchallenged to the present day.

p. 105 The great, infallible test established by Scherer for distinguishing Goethe's dramatic prose of the years 1771-1772 from that of the years 1773-1775 turns out to be completely fallacious. He draws attention to the hyperbolic "grosse Zahlen" (big numbers) in which the original text of Gotz abounds, such as "Das würd ein Jahrtausend vergangner Höllenqualen in einem Augenwink aus meiner Seele verdrängen" (That would in an instant remove a thousand years of past hell-torments from my soul), asserts that all such "big numbers" were eliminated on the revision of that text February, 1773; and then triumphantly points to the two phrases in "Trüber Tag. Feld": "Du grinsest gelassen über das Schicksal von Tausenden him!" (You sneer complacently over the fate of thousands), and "Den entsetzlichsten Fluch über dich auf Jahrtausende!" (The most fearful curse upon you for thousands of years), proclaiming: "Das entscheidet. Es ist unmöglich, dass ein Dichter, der an einem Werke mit sich einig ist, solche Übertreibungen wegzuschaffen, sie an einem anderen sollte neu gemacht haben" (That decides the matter. It is impossible that a poet, once having made up his mind to eliminate such exaggerations in one work, should indulge in them all over again in another one).²⁰

Ftn. 20 Scherer, Aus Goethes Frühzeit, p. 80

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