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A Scene from Faust -- C. G. Bell

The woes of Aristotelians confronted with Goethe's Faust need not trouble us; for what would you expect when a standard based on Greek tragedy is brought to bear on a work which neither Aristotle nor the Greeks could have conceived as existing. What these people mostly want is to find out how Faust can be a tragic hero, and of course they decide he can't (though it's doubtful in their terms whether Othello, Lear or Hamlet can be either); for one thing the drama insists on pursuing him beyond the grave and getting him (for no reason even the Christian can see, there being no repentance, no pardon) into heaven, his happy home. So Aristotelians feel if that last scene had only been omitted, all that operatic ascent to the skies, we would at least have a death-close, a man who has thought to rule himself and the world, falling in blindness and age to the grave dug (Sophoclean irony at any rate) where he commanded a land-draining, ambition-assuaging dike. But they would still have an amorphous, strange composition at best, a pathetic allegory, preaching the futility of hybris; but without unity of space, time, or action, dignity or catharsis, a hodge-podge unsatisfying on any ground the Poetics might afford.

The hostility of Platonists is harder to allow, not because Goethe could have been envisaged from any point where Plato or his contemporaries stood, but just because Plato doesn't lay down rules for poetry, only aims and directions, and Goethe's Faust, like Dante's Comedy, though in a different way, is a significative work, not an imitation but a moulting of the wings toward some truth or other, some apprehension of ultimate things.

Of course, there's a problem what we mean when we talk about Platonists. There is a tradition of thinkers from Pico and Bruno through Goethe and Hegel, Platonists in a sense, though literal and classical followers find them perverse. The heart of the difficulty is the location of the reasonable. For the classic mind it lies ultimately in the one, the changeless, the rational and ideal which is the essence of God and man; and whatever there is of impulse, multiplicity, matter, is invalidated, pushed aside as some inexplicable, trivial, or fallen necessity. Thus the realm of mind is cleared, by abstraction from that very muddle in which mind and world are involved. Whereas Hegel and Goethe and most modern "Idealists" have incorporated matter, time, multiplicity, and the passions, into the substance of God, mind and reason, leaving a world-embracing spirit, a one-many at war with itself, refining itself under the aspect of contradiction and tension through what Whitman called "all terrible balks and ebullitions" -- a development forced on later philosophy by the scientific submission to "brute fact," by that Western acceptance of process and variety as the inescapable stuff of experience in which even Platonizing theory must build.

Certainly on the basis of this division of classical and post-romantic, Goethe is one of the most flagrant romantic offenders -- or to turn the better side, one of the boldest moderns. And the wonder of the Faust (which a classical critic might call its formless defect) is that the organic principles of ambivalence, tension and paradox, of growth and denial where failure and success, good and evil round on each other in a vortex in which every action is cloven, aspiration with its dual aspects benign and sinister, and its time-mamocking consequences, of which the other face of ruin and debacle is the

heaven-ascent of active spirit (man errs as long as he strives; but by that erring and striving is also saved) -- these organic principles are not only the shaping soul of the thought as reflected in the action, but of poetic form, of the style, whose defects -- the half-emergence of puzzling pattern and meaning in a texture of sketches turned out over a period of fifty years by a poet growing in character as in his conscious design of the work -- are virtues of a new and vital order: this is a work in which, as in Hegel's history, something shapes more profoundly than the individual making will.

But is this an art-work, this container through which forces beneath the conscious level surge and battle, like winds in a tropical disturbance? The answer must be given in the terms of organization in which such conflicting and unplanned winds round to the vortex of a hurricane, self-perpetuating, bearing in the center its clear and windless heaven-observing eye. The Faust is a symbolic case-history, a nautilus shell in whose concretions the temporal and hence timeless life of a soul (not the least significant soul of the West) is recorded, or if not recorded, hinted at, sketched in the accidents which would discredit a classical construction, but are here of the essence of spirit's operations in the world. And in what other realm can spirit operate? As Faust translated St. John: In the beginning was the Act; not that mystical faith-word, the Word; not the Platonic rational potentiality of Thought; nor the Renaissance prime-mover of Power; but the temporal and factual, the uncaused, immanent Deed.

But if the primacy of the Act means anything, it means that the Faust is less to be theorized over than exhibited in its embodied particularity. So instead of writing an essay on the play, it might be better to translate a scene. Not that translation is really possible. This work has been put into English more often than any other, and most of the productions are utterly unreadable. There is something in the polarity of translation -- to copy the original and create a poem -- which is contradictory and insoluble. Yet the impossible still beckons; the whoreson progeny must be acknowledged. It is astonishing how easily we put up with bungles we ourselves have made. As Touchstone says: "An ill-favoured thing, sir, but mine own."

So I translate a scene, one which (as often with the monad details of art) seems to carry the dialectic of the whole. For me it is also the richest scene -- I mean the opening of Part II, one of the supreme moments of world literature, where Faust lies in a meadow, recovering from his most destructive involvement, his love for Gretchen.

There is a fundamental opposition that runs through the whole Faust; it could be called that of fire and water, of the daemonic and eunomic, of classical and romantic, Werther and Wilhelm Meister, Enlightenment versus Storm-and-Stress (though each wording alters the antithesis). It is ultimately a question whether the Faustian desire must burn through the texture of relationships and prove suicidal (as in so many myths of Icarian and Satanic aspiring), or whether the flame can be contained, as it were, in a vital structure, buttressed against itself, to effect a dynamic harmony, working for the good.

Goethe has defined the polarity in an earlier scene where Faust trying to halt the inevitable, withdraws from Gretchen and is found musing in "Forest

and Cavern." Addressing the world-spirit, he says: "Along with this ecstasy which brings me nearer to the gods, you gave me a sinister companion from whom I cannot separate myself, . . . though with a breath he turns your gifts to nothing . . . He fans a wild fire in my heart for that beautiful image. So I rush from desire to satisfaction, and in satisfaction I yearn for desire." It would be too simple to say that Goethe in his long life shifts from suicidal to constructive Faustianism, though that might be a first level of the analysis. Rather the two poles are perpetually sustained and woven into more intricate configurations; so that Faust's final achievement of a free land brought out of the ocean (a work of fire) is also punctuated with terror (the burning of the pious old couple); it is final only in the sense of being terminal; like Faust's other efforts it is also a dire miscarriage, a sign of the blindness in which he dies. And even the lyrical ascent to the sky is less an ultimate judgment on Faust's success, than a mythical spelling out of what has been immanent from the first, the transcendental aspect of every temporal sequence of desire, involvement, destruction, with the reconstitution of desire.

In no scene are these animomies as delicately and enigmatically woven as in the present one. Here as always, if one would ask: does the Faustian catch, or merely catch at, reach for, or actually reach? -- the answer would be: both in one; both in one. The two are aspects of a single act. And if we ask: does this fever the heart to wilder aspiration, or subdue it to a wisdom in which it limits itself to achievable goals? -- we must answer, Neither or both. The recognition that we live our life in the refracted color ("Im farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben") does not deter a maturer Faust from rising to the new day of more incommensurate longings. Has he not even been told by the comforting small spirits of nature (though they themselves hide from the dawn): "The noble soul that understands and seizes may accomplish all things" ?

Faust, Part II, Scene 1.

A Pleasant Landscape. Faust stretched on a flowery bank, tired, restless, seeking sleep. Twilight. Spirits hover around him, graceful little forms.

Ariel (Song accompanied by Aeolian harps):

When spring in petals
Floats down like rain
And children of the fertile
Ground gather the green
Blessing, magnanimous spirits
Of earth, the elves, in pity
Help as they can
Good or evil,
All in pain.

You whose airy circles weave this head,
Perform your elfin healing, touch the heart
And calm its raging fever; forbid remorse,
Draw out the bitter darts, and let him wake
Clean of terror; let the past be past.

Night is measured by four silences;
Fill all of them with service:
First let him sleep pillowed on coolness;
And the dew that bathes him bring from Lethe
Quiet forgetfulness; and the cramped tendons
Ease as he slumbers on to the dawning;
Last is the noblest: let him awake
And come again into the sacred light.

Chorus (singly, then by pairs and groups, alternating and together):

Serenade: When the wind blows
 In the green fields,
 Twilight falls
 In perfumed veils;
 And his heart like a child
 Is rocked in peace,
 And the tired eyes close
 And the day's gold gates.

Notturmo: Now night has fallen,
 Star on star
 Holds the watches,
 Far and near;
 Waters mirror
 The sky's fire,
 And the moon sheds sleep
 On the world's floor.

Mattutino: Quenched are the hours
 Of grief and glee;
 The heart is whole,
 Greet the new day.
 Hills and valleys
 Bush into shade
 And the ripe wheat works
 In waves like the sea.

Reveil: To gain your wishes
 Trust the light.
 Sleep is a chrysalis;
 Cast it off.
 All things yield
 To the great soul
 That knows its purpose
 And lays hold.

(A terrible tumult announces the coming of the sun)

Ears of spirits hear it, hear it.
 Thunder of daybreak and hearing fear it:
 Storm of the hours, the earth's rim shattered,
 Jarring of rock gates and the wheels' clatter;
 Apollo's day-bright wagon comes;
 Always in tumult light is born.
 It drums, it trumpets; deafened, blind,
 Spirits creep in flower-crowns;
 Unhearables should not be heard.
 Deeper, deeper, in leaves, in rocks;
 Close to your ears; the day breaks!

Faust: The pulse of life is quickened, stirred to greet
 The mild ethereal gray. And earth that was steadfast
 Through the long dark, breathes with awakened power,
 And clothes itself in light and us in air,
 And wakes as always longings in the heart,
 Soul-reachings for the goals and heights of being.

The world is wrapped in the gray shimmer of dawn;
 The woods are full of voices, living songs;
 In the low places veils of mist are poured,
 That take the light of heaven and are pearl;
 And twigs and branches from the vaporous gorges
 Where they have slept unseen rise and aspire,
 All fresh, all green; colors come from the gray,
 Where leaf and flower are trembling with the dew;
 And Eden is around me; all is Eden.

I lift my eyes to the hills. The highest peaks,
 Already crowned with light announce the coming.
 They drink the day before us, the great brightness
 For which we lower creatures wait in longing.

And now the uplands and the last green pastures
 Receive the glory; and step by step descending
 Down the long sequence of the folded ranges,
 The presence comes; it strikes, it strikes; and blinded,
 I turn away, my eyes pierced with anguish.

It is always so. Whenever restless longing
 Has found a basis for its highest wish,
 And the portals of its promise are flung open,
 Then from the reach of those eternal vistas
 Break prodigies of flame; we stand confounded.
 We thought to kindle our life's torch a little;
 A sea of fire enfolds us, a fiery ocean.
 Is it love or hate? It wraps us in its burning
 Incredible waves of ecstasy and wounding;
 And we are glad to take to the earth again
 To wear the shelter of some childish veil.

And so I turn my back upon the sun.
 The waterfall that roars down the rock chasm
 Now fills the orbit of my sight with wonder.
 From fall to fall it breaks in a thousand streams,
 Each broken in its turn to a thousand thousand,
 With spray blown in the air, cool fountains of spray,
 At whose white peak and crown, vaulting the storm,
 A rainbow shows and fades, always reborn,
 The hovering spirit of the downward shower.
 I see it now; it images our striving --
 Itself an image, born of the sun and water: --
 We do not live in the light but the broken color.

A Descent Into The Maelstrom

It is a simple fact that St. John's College does not exist to train Professional actors, directors, stage technicians, and other practitioners of the dramatic arts. Nevertheless, any given production, whether it be by students of the liberal arts in Annapolis or by the professionals of the New York stage, must, because it is presented without excuse for public consumption, be judged without excuse on its merits as a production. In this light, about all one can say of the recent offering of the King William Players is that the music was lovely.

It seemed that this time, at long last and after more or less public political and artistic troubles, the KWP was attempting something that it could reasonably be expected to execute with some degree of success. None of the problems of elaborate production, large casts, and difficult and demanding roles that have plagued the KWP in the past seemed to be present here. And yet Don Juan in Hell, for all its simplicity, failed much more completely -- indeed, almost totally -- than some of the spectacles of other years. I think the reasons are much more fundamental than the usual excuses of little time and less talent.

The prime trouble seemed to be that Mr. Settle, who directed, apparently could not quite make up his mind whether to present just a reading of a full-fledged play. The result was that, although for the most part his actors were seated on stools and reading from scripts, at times -- often, most disconcerting times -- they would emerge from their cocoons and come forth as actors, speaking rather than reading, posturing and gesturing as though they had been doing this all along. The audience, who, as the players read, were forced to provide all the usual externals of the stage from their own imaginations, were suddenly called upon to forsake those pictures of Hell itself, Don Juan, the Old Lady, the Statue, and the Devil that they had laboriously conjured forth with the aid of Shaw's words and forced to pay attention to the same pictures suddenly visually presented, as fruits of Mr. Settle's imagination. Neither method is wrong, and either demand is a valid one for the director to make of his audience, but to make them both, to constantly force his watchers to swing from one form of aesthetic appreciation to another, can only result in confusion and failure.

The actors were little more successful in their efforts than Mr. Settle was in his. Mr. Griffin, bringing at times some real life and humor to the play and displaying, if nothing else, gusto, seemed to find it necessary to telegraph every truly funny or dramatic line well in advance, and delivered some of them so heavily that their effect was totally lost. I invite his attention to the recording of the New York production, that he may see that underplaying can be a very potent dramatic weapon indeed. Mr. Dews and Miss Hetkin were more or less adequate as the Statue and the Young Woman. Mr. Tilles, especially in the second act, was most effective, I think because

he was called upon to perambulate less than the others and was thus permitted to build an illusion by means of his voice alone. Miss Hsu appeared briefly in the beginning of the evening, and I in all honesty can only say that I noted her presence. Miss Schloss narrated, and did what she was called upon to do with no visible embarrassment.

The technical problems of the KWP are much too well known to be dwelt on here. Some interesting lighting effects were obtained at the cost of many strange noises from the upper regions, and really seemed to do nothing except provide some contrasts of color on the stage. The sound effects, done by Messers. Alexander and Ronquist were in excellent taste, and extremely well done.

The production was an interesting experiment, and, I hope, will not discourage others in the notably tradition-bound Players. And, bad as it was, at least we had a play this year -- for that, if nothing more, I think we owe Mr. Settle and his companions a warm round of applause.

E. H. Mini

On Going to War -- by Joel Herman

Only the storms

I but vaguely acknowledge,

The hearts in hungry words

In blasphemous discontent.

I must leave

This country of green sounds

And exquisitely

Disturbed feelings,

And go to

The land of malfortune

Where impunity

Is only air

And hunger seeks

The breasts of blood.

I heard only

The testimony of guns at my trial,

And the chains

That held me made noises like death.

Our sullen voyages run aground,
As wine spilled from the bleeding urn,
Upon the rocks, the barren heart,
The seed sown in a stony ground.

As children with their games of joy
Spin onward in relentless course,
Our hearts, it's solid form accrues
Those glacial layers of polar light.

Our world when young took joyous sail,
Imagination like a sparkling stone
Set flame to images of faith.

But now the seas of innocence are run,
The ashes in the quiet vessel
Smoulder once or twice and perish.

-- by Joel Herman

Child's Death at Birth -- by Joel Herman

Night springs from the curving arc,
The formless flesh of child is born.
Luxurious breasts of swollen love
Transfigure the forgotten thorn.

Love encircles even Death
Though Death configures love's delight.
Passion, envy, lovely child
Confounded in the bitter night.

The pitiless eye of circumstance
Devouring a mother's tear,
The scowling wind, the bleeding moon,
The indifferent hand upon the thigh
Make secret council to expire
That lovely bursting out of flame.

Hobbes -- by T. Yoon

The universe being a vast absurdity,

Deafening, discordant sound,

I cannot not close my eyes.

Credo quia absurdum est.

My last appetite moves

Toward His domain smoothly.

Heavy appetite would have fallen,

Because of gravity.

O altitudo!

Light going -- by T. Yoon

Where are you going, my fair butterfly?

You leave me unhappy shadow. Though my black

Night was intolerable, you'll find no place brighter.

Your diligent efforts discovered lack

Of light in me? You entered this darkness,

Exploring was before you. You swim through the

Vast flow free from all conscious.

Pass the pathless flow! Jubilee cannot be missed.

Though you disdain my dark, a moon's glory shines

Upon my luckless night. A moon still bright.

I look for you, I endeavor; you leave

Me unhappy shadow.

The Thief of Youth -- by T. Yoon

The thief of youth has stolen
My dream of spring in its calm,
Scorned my being fruitless.

Time urges, "On!"
But my fruits aren't ripe;
Are my deeds far from His will?

Space too is a fleeting thing.
For my talent is bound by Him,
And cannot not lose.

Let time be slow and postpone, and yet
My late fruit follows it not.
Endeavored, my effort useless, too.
Youth -- less fruits with it --
Was compelled to jump ahead again.

Please forgive me, my mother.

Nightbeach -- by Jerry Costello

Light lingers, yet night is met

In fingers flying an icy night;

Sparse grass crying...windspice.

Great engulfing spay seamed chasm

Inhaling spasm, it gulps of spasm;

Gleaming grasstems reel.

Bristling peers this vented crotch

And I amok to clutch and shred the vestment

of black,

Dreading paltry lack of reach,

falter and turn back,

Then weep,

praying light will bring you...

The Key -- by Henry Braun

Fetters of steel were never forged
So strong that they could bind
A secret deep in safety from
The onslaught of the Mind.

Yet chains from artful Nature's forge
Have bound the Truths in dark
Shrines shrouded so to indicate
That man has missed the mark.

But keys there are to all that's locked;
As in all else, in this.
The Key will ope the Chamber where
Dark Death sweet Life doth kiss.

Well-guarded is the Treasure-house,
Well-guarded is the Key
That lies within the veiled pale
Awaiting you and me.

Loosen the power of Intellect
To search, disrobe and pry
In Self's dark cypt, sight-source unto
Unfailing Mind's keen eye.

For this is All and All is this --
No more can mortal know --
Man is a Lock, Mind is the Key,
The Treasure is the Soul.

A Natural Tree, To Be Sat In

Stretch up the sinews of your hands,
And grasp the bough;
Shout the convulsive, flickering commands
To calves and thighs
And back and arm, from unremembered lives
A million times reborn:
Pull up, suspend !
Feel the sure bend
Of slick green muscle oiled with amber sap
Replying, thew to unfamiliar thew.
And there, far out,
Thick, in the small dark leaves that hang,
Listen, with the ear that owns a mind,
Hear the tree murmur: Brother?
Brother, I am blind.

David Jones

Nightsong -- E. H. Mini

Moonlight. Yellow paint on still streets. No sound.
My feet, brittle as bricks,
Ring like stars falling.
Light from sleeping houses
Loud on the sidewalks.

I should be sleeping now.
But there are more important things to do.
I cannot dream of starlight.
The moon does not shine on stormy seas.
And I must make the most of calm to see.

This town sleeps well, and I walk among its dreams
Soft-fotted, not to waken but to share
And be gone by morning.

Few come to watch the dawn.
All things wake in thunderclapping day
And walk their time on earth in sunlight.
Not I. I take my pleasure unobserved.
Intruder in the sleeping country...
Homer, dweller in darkness, would not approve.

The night is an end to question, so question not my walking.
The day is an end to singing, so question not my song.
For the night is warm as a woman's arms,
Stars are bright like a woman's eyes,
Moons will glow like the dying fire
And I am one with darkness.

The light will drive me far from shadows.
No reminders needed now of weakness,
Walking being only for the strong.
Still town, dream your ancient dreams in silence,
Forget me,
Sleep.

The Lover -- by Jack de Raat

The lover leaves his tale untold,
That many a lass he might enfold
With arms entwining, hands caressing,
Lips upon her cheek impressing
her with constancy he woos;
But 'lows no soul to know he sues
For many loves he's had and has
and shall as well,
But never could if he would tell.