

DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

V O L U M E

20





DRAMA

C R I T I C I S M

Criticism of the Most Significant and Widely Studied
Dramatic Works from All the World's Literatures

VOLUME 20

Janet Witalec
Project Editor

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132

ISBN 0-7876-5949-5

ISSN 1056-4349

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

D*rama Criticism (DC)* is principally intended for beginning students of literature and theater as well as the average playgoer. The series is therefore designed to introduce readers to the most frequently studied playwrights of all time periods and nationalities and to present discerning commentary on dramatic works of enduring interest. Furthermore, *DC* seeks to acquaint the reader with the uses and functions of criticism itself. Selected from a diverse body of commentary, the essays in *DC* offer insights into the authors and their works but do not require that the reader possess a wide background in literary studies. Where appropriate, reviews of important productions of the plays discussed are also included to give students a heightened awareness of drama as a dynamic art form, one that many claim is fully realized only in performance.

DC was created in response to suggestions by the staffs of high school, college, and public libraries. These librarians observed a need for a series that assembles critical commentary on the world's most renowned dramatists in the same manner as Gale's *Short Story Criticism (SSC)* and *Poetry Criticism (PC)*, which present material on writers of short fiction and poetry. Although playwrights are covered in such Gale literary criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, *DC* directs more concentrated attention on individual dramatists than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries in these Gale series. Commentary on the works of William Shakespeare may be found in *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*.

Scope of the Series

By collecting and organizing commentary on dramatists, *DC* assists students in their efforts to gain insight into literature, achieve better understanding of the texts, and formulate ideas for papers and assignments. A variety of interpretations and assessments is offered, allowing students to pursue their own interests and promoting awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Approximately five to ten authors are included in each volume, and each entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that playwright's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's literary criticism series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a *DC* volume.

Organization of the Book

A *DC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** consists of the playwright's most commonly used name, followed by birth and death dates. If an author consistently wrote under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the introduction. Also located at the beginning of the introduction are any name variations under which the dramatist wrote, including transliterated forms of the names of authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.

- The list of **Principal Works** is divided into two sections. The first section contains the author's dramatic pieces and is organized chronologically by date of first performance. If this has not been conclusively determined, the composition or publication date is used. The second section provides information on the author's major works in other genres.
- Essays offering **overviews and general studies of the dramatist's entire literary career** give the student broad perspectives on the writer's artistic development, themes, and concerns that recur in several of his or her works, the author's place in literary history, and other wide-ranging topics.
- **Criticism** of individual plays offers the reader in-depth discussions of a select number of the author's most important works. In some cases, the criticism is divided into two sections, each arranged chronologically. When a significant performance of a play can be identified (typically, the premier of a twentieth-century work), the first section of criticism will feature **production reviews** of this staging. Most entries include sections devoted to **critical commentary** that assesses the literary merit of the selected plays. When necessary, essays are carefully excerpted to focus on the work under consideration; often, however, essays and reviews are reprinted in their entirety. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- A complete **Bibliographic Citation**, designed to help the interested reader locate the original essay or book, precedes each piece of criticism.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by the Gale Group, including *DC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

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A **Cumulative Title Index** lists in alphabetical order the individual plays discussed in the criticism contained in *DC*. Each title is followed by the author's last name and corresponding volume and page numbers where commentary on the work is located. English-language translations of original foreign-language titles are cross-referenced to the foreign titles so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing.

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When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume in *Drama Criticism* may use the following general formats to footnote reprinted criticism. The first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to materials reprinted from books.

Susan Sontag, "Going to the Theater, Etc.," *Partisan Review* XXXI, no. 3 (Summer 1964), 389-94; excerpted and reprinted in *Drama Criticism*, vol. 1, ed. Lawrence J. Trudeau (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991), 17-20.

Eugene M. Waith, *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden* (Chatto & Windus, 1962); excerpted and reprinted in *Drama Criticism*, vol. 1, ed. Lawrence J. Trudeau (Detroit: Gale Research, 1991), 237-47.

Suggestions are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Project Editor:

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Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

1749-1832

(Surname also rendered as Göthe and Göethe) German poet, novelist, playwright, short story and novella writer, essayist, critic, biographer, autobiographer, memoirist, and librettist.

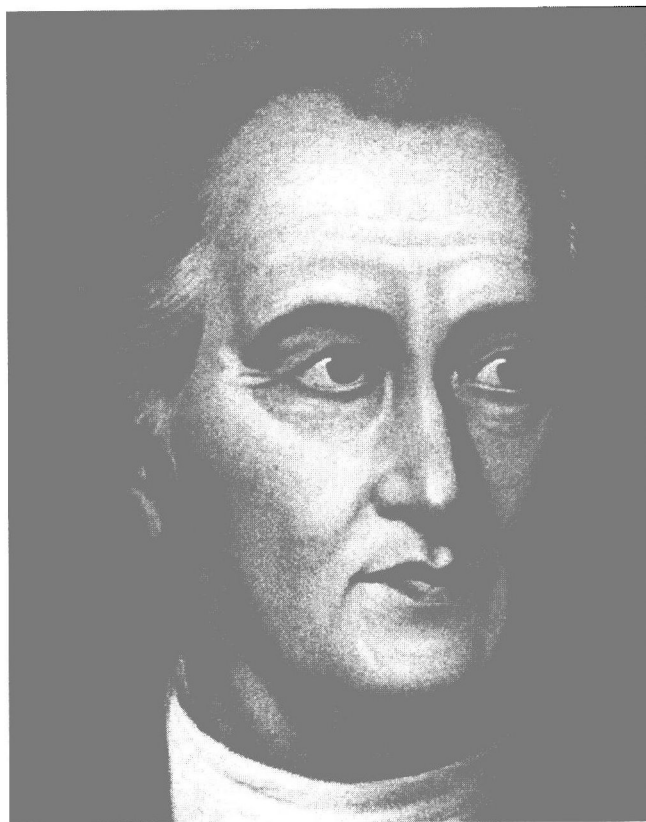
The following entry presents criticism of Goethe's dramatic works through 2001.

INTRODUCTION

Goethe is considered one of Germany's greatest writers. He distinguished himself in several literary genres; moreover, he was a botanist, physicist, biologist, artist, musician, and philosopher. Excelling in all areas, Goethe was a shaping force in the major literary movements of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Germany. His drama *Faust* (1808) is considered the greatest monument to nineteenth-century Romanticism. The result of a lifetime's work, *Faust* is ranked beside the masterpieces of Dante and William Shakespeare.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Goethe was born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1749 and had a happy, middle-class upbringing. By the time he was eight years old, he had composed an epistolary novella in which the characters correspond in five different languages. He studied law at the university in Leipzig, but spent most of his time pursuing drawing, music, science, and literature. Forced by illness to leave school, he spent his convalescence studying alchemy and chemistry, subjects that reverberate throughout *Faust*. When he returned to school at the University of Strausberg, he met Johann Gottfried von Herder, who helped him focus his literary interests. Herder taught Goethe a reverence for Shakespeare, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and German folk songs, as well as an appreciation for classical literature, especially Homer and Russian literature. For several years after graduation, Goethe practiced law in Frankfurt. In 1774, his novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*) created a sensation throughout Europe and is thought to have inspired the *Sturm und Drang* movement in Germany. The following year, one of Goethe's patrons, the Duke Karl August of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenbach, invited Goethe to visit him in Weimar. The author's intended short stay became a lifelong residence,



during which he occupied various official positions and served for more than twenty-five years as director of the ducal theater. Goethe's creative life was enhanced when he became friends with Friedrich von Schiller. Goethe found in Schiller a mind of the breadth and intensity of his own, and during their ten-year friendship the two eagerly probed questions of art, science, and philosophy. During the last decades of his life, Goethe became something of a European sage, and writers and artists from Europe and America traveled to Weimar to visit him. Goethe remained an active artist until his death in 1832.

MAJOR WORKS

Early in his career, Goethe wrote *Götz von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand* (1773; *Goetz of Berlichingen with the Iron Hand*), which is thought to exemplify his work during that period. The play revolves around the conflict between two knights, Götz and Weislingen, and

the Bishop of Bramberg, who attempts to manipulate them both. Shakespearean in form, the drama was popular in its day for its action and emotion, but modern critics generally consider it superficial. Goethe's 1787 play, *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (*Iphigenia in Tauris*), is based on Euripides's play of the same name. *Egmont* (1788), which was first produced in 1789, chronicles the rule of Count d'Egmont in the Netherlands during the revolt against Spain. Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* (1790) has been described as a psychological drama inspired by the life of the famous Italian Renaissance poet. Goethe had begun his best-known work, *Faust*, while a student in Strausberg, and in 1790 he published an incomplete version. In 1808, three years after Schiller's death, the complete version of the first part appeared. The subject continued to absorb Goethe throughout his life, and *Faust II* was published posthumously in 1832. Romantic, spirited, and egocentric, the first part is viewed as a dazzling reflection of Goethe's youthful mind, while *Faust II* is considered the product of his mature intellect. The play focuses on an elderly necromancer, Faust, who sells his soul to the devil for youth, knowledge, and magical powers. For its language, form, and complex philosophical reverberations, *Faust* was recognized immediately as a masterpiece, although *Faust II* was not fully analyzed or appreciated until the twentieth century.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Following his death, Goethe's critical reputation plummeted in Europe and in America. The twentieth century saw a renewal of his reputation, particularly in Germany. Elsewhere critics often share T. S. Eliot's view that Goethe is more noteworthy for his genius than for his literary ability. His plays are viewed as remote to the modern reader, and often as flawed. Although his works, excepting *Faust*, aren't popularly read outside Germany, they have been the subject of intensive study, and the body of Goethe criticism continues to grow.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Plays

Die Laune des Verliebten 1767
Goetz von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand [Goetz von Berlichingen] 1773
Clavigo [Clavidgo] 1774
Stella [Stella] 1776
Die Geschwister [The Sister] 1787
Iphigenie auf Tauris [Iphigenia] 1787

Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit 1787
Egmont [Egmont] 1789
Toquato Tasso [Torquato Tasso] 1790
Der Gross-Kophta 1792
Der Bürgergeneral 1793
Die natürliche Tochter 1804
Faust [Faust] 1808
Pandora (unfinished drama) 1810
Des Epimenides Erwachen 1815
Faust II 1832
**Goethes Faust in ursprünglicher Gestalt nach der Göchenhausenschen Abschrift* 1887

Other Major Works

Von deutscher Baukunst (criticism) 1773
Die Leiden des jungen Werthers [The Sorrows of Werther; also translated as *Werter and Charlotte*, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and *The Sufferings of Young Werther*] (novel) 1774
Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre [Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship] (novel) 1795-96
Hermann und Dorothea [Herman and Dorothea] (poetry) 1798
Die Wahlverwandtschaften [Elective Affinities] (novel) 1809
Zur Farbenlehre [Theory of Colours] (essay) 1810
Italienische Reise [Travels in Italy] (travel essay) 1816
Zur Morphologie [On Morphology] (essay) 1817-23
Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre; oder, Die Entsagenden [Wilhelm Meister's Travels; or, The Renunciants] (novel) 1821
Novelle [Goethe's Novel; also translated as *Novella*] (novella) 1828
Annalen; Tag-und Jahreshefte (journal) 1830
Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens: 1823-1832 [with J. P. Eckermann; *Conversations with Goethe in the Last Years of His Life*] (conversations) 1837-48
Goethes sämtliche Werke 30 vols. (poetry, drama, essays, novels, novellas, short stories, criticism, history, biography, autobiography, letters, librettos) 1848
Goethes sämtliche Gedichte (poetry) 1869
Werke 14 vols. (poetry, drama, novels, novellas, short stories, autobiography, biography, criticism, essays, history) 1961-64

*This work is generally referred to as *Urfaust* and is the manuscript version of *Faust*.

GENERAL COMMENTARY

Donald H. Crosby (essay date 1987)

SOURCE: Crosby, Donald H. "The German Stage-Image of Goethe, 1969-1981." In *Goethe in the*

Twentieth Century, edited by Alexej Ugrinsky, pp. 29-35. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987.

[In the following essay, Crosby considers some contemporary interpretations of Tasso, Iphigenie, and Faust on the German stage in order to "provide at least an outline of the current stage image of Goethe."]

"As you know, the German stage lets each one try what he may."

—Goethe, *Faust*

The words of that ever-quotable pragmatist, the Theater Director of *Faust*, are if anything truer today than they were in Goethe's own time. After a postwar period of reconstruction, the German stage over the past two decades has once again become a proving ground for directorial innovation. Spawned from the political and social ferment of the 1960s, an impressive cadre of fresh directorial talent has succeeded in reviving the tradition of creative, interpretive direction associated with the names of Max Reinhardt and Bertold Brecht. Taking advantage of the temper of the times, which had mandated the reexamination of all traditional values, these artists have imposed their directorial egos not only on contemporary plays but on the traditional masterpieces of dramatic literature as well. Thus the "classics" of Shakespeare and Schiller, of Buchner, Kleist, and of course Goethe have been turned inside out, as it were, in an attempt to explore their relevance to our own times.¹ In reshaping these texts, the directors have inevitably also reshaped the perception of their authors, so that the current stage image of, say, Schiller and Goethe differs from what it was twenty, forty, or sixty years ago. Surely this is as it should be: one does not play *Hamlet* as it was performed in Shakespeare's time, or even in Goethe's; it would be considered bad taste to play the music of Franz Liszt the way Franz Liszt played the music of Franz Liszt; and even in Bayreuth, where the Holy Grail of tradition was so zealously guarded for decades, the operas of Richard Wagner may now be seen in controversial but resolutely contemporary interpretations.

Since the very flux of time itself reshapes the image, or perception, of every creative artist, be he painter, poet, or composer, it seems fair to examine just how the recreative artists—the conductors and soloists in the world of music for example, and the stage directors and actors in the theater—have responded to their interpretative mandates. In the case of Goethe, the sheer number of productions of his works on the German-language stage precludes a comprehensive discussion of the many interpretations—and reinterpretations—of his works in recent years. Although Goethe's major plays are limited in number, the broad compass of their themes, the variety of their forms, the power of the poet's dramatic conceptions and the often matchless language have as-

sured these plays a place in the permanent repertoire of the German stage. This report on some recent stagings of three major dramas—*Tasso*, *Iphigenie*, and *Faust*—is offered in the hope that it will provide at least an outline of the current stage image of Goethe.

Although Goethe's current stage profile has been shaped by many hands, no single personality in the theater world has contributed more to its configuration than the director Peter Stein. In the year 1969, three years after Peter Zadek had "modernized" Schiller's *Die Räuber* by presenting the play as a sort of comic-strip version of an American Western, and two years after Stein himself had ventured a strictly nontraditional staging of *Kabale und Liebe* in Munich, the gifted young director evidently felt that it was Goethe's turn. Seizing upon *Tasso*, that inward, almost introverted play that is normally prized more by philologists than by playgoers, Stein and his Bremen ensemble offered a reinterpretation of this "classic" that shook the German theater "establishment"—and Goethe traditionalists—to the core. Looking back at the "legendary Bremen *Tasso*," as it is often called, the student of the stage might not find the production to have been quite as revolutionary as the critical reaction at the time indicated; over the intervening thirteen years, after all, directors have shown us Hamlet leaping into bed with his mother, Othello chasing a nude Desdemona across the stage, Franz Moor urinating on his father, and the Prinz von Homburg standing stark naked in a potato field. To evaluate the impact of the Stein production, however, the critic of the 1980s need only recall the time when German professors were being hounded out of their lecture halls, collections for the Vietcong were being taken in the Munich *Kammerspiele*, and German youths—like their American counterparts—were sounding like that prescient baccalaureus in *Faust II* who urged the slaying of everyone over the age of thirty. In an era in which all traditional values were being reappraised, it was inevitable that even so venerable a "classic" as *Tasso* would be plumbed for its relevance to contemporary ideas and contemporary problems.

And, indeed, that was the main thrust of Stein's production: to draw a parallel between an effete, luxury-loving, caste-conscious Renaissance clique and Stein's own perception of the elitist, power-drunk capitalist society of today. To underscore the encapsulated artificiality of Belriguardo, Duke Alfons' stately pleasure dome, Stein had the stage covered with green cloth suggestive of a lush lawn; its boundaries were formed by transparent plastic curtains. Within this hothouse sphere of idle privilege moved deliberately devitalized impersonations of Duke Alfons, the two Leonores, Antonio and Tasso. Gliding about in ballet-like choreography, the players drifted in and out of the action as required by the plot; when not actually "onstage," they hovered on the periphery of the action, which evolved out of a heavily

cut text. In the midst of the action, of course, was Tasso himself, that neurasthenic, hypersensitive poet whom Goethe once called "an intensified Werther." Stein's own description of Tasso, as one reads in his notes to the production,² was that of an "Emotional clown." Stein, a committed Marxist, projected Tasso as a lap dog of the aristocracy who makes himself ridiculous by trying to adapt himself to ridiculous norms. Although Tasso was at one point costumed to resemble Tischbein's Goethe, he behaved more like a refugee from Thomas Mann's gallery of artist-misfits. Tripping over his own feet, his laurel wreath askew, Tasso was more of a Detlev Spinell than a Goethe *redivivus*. Even the famous metaphor which closes the play: "Thus the seaman finds himself firmly clinging to the very rock on which he was to founder," was concretized in such a way as to underscore Tasso's total helplessness: the poet did not merely cling to Antonio—as the text suggests—but rather clambered up onto his shoulders, whereupon he was borne, kicking like a toddler, from the stage. Although a dispassionate observer might well find such a conclusion tragic, critics noted that Tasso's pathetic exit drew guffaws from the audience.³

Whether or not one agrees with Stein's interpretation of *Tasso*—and devotees of textual fidelity would find much to carp about—one cannot deny the impact of the production. For months German critics hardly discussed anything but the Bremen *Tasso*; Stein and his ensemble became famous beyond Germany's borders; and more than a decade would pass before another major staging of the play would be mounted. More important; Stein's production proved that even so remote and delicate a dramatic subject as *Tasso* was robust enough to survive an ideological transplantation into the twentieth century and that its basically static plot could, in the hands of a dedicated ensemble, be turned into arresting theater. Finally, Stein's iconoclastic approach to *Tasso* dissipated, at least temporarily, than nimbus of reverence which had come to surround Goethe's plays. Like Faust's old academic gown, *Tasso* had gathered a few cobwebs and moths over the decades; Peter Stein deserves credit for taking the play out of the closet—or more accurately the seminar room—giving it a good shake, and putting it back into circulation.

Like its companion in classicism, Goethe's *Iphigenie* is a drama which, one might think, would be more likely to thrive in the carefully controlled atmosphere of a graduate seminar than before the unsparing footlights of the stage; yet *Iphigenie*, like *Tasso*, has in recent years staked a claim to a life beyond the walls of academe and to a place in the standard repertoire. Among recent stagings, the acclaimed production at the Munich *Kammerspiele* (1981-1982) deserves close attention both on its artistic merits and because of its substantial contribution to Goethe's current stage image. Although the main outline of Dieter Dorn's staging had been well publi-

cized in advance, neither the public nor the critics seem to have been prepared for what they experienced at the premiere in January 1981 a "new staging" that seemed more like a "nonstaging," at least in the sense that the director had dispensed with most of the scenic-visual complements to a stage production. Defying tradition, Dorn confronted his public with a curtain which remained closed throughout the performance. Almost all the action took place on a small area of the stage apron, which was demarcated by a large white screen serving as a backdrop; a few raised platforms in front of this backdrop served as the only scenery. Missing from this sparse *mise en scene*, inevitably, were Diana's Temple and the Sacred Grove: they were present only in the text and in the imagination of the spectators. Costumes, as such, were dispensed with: the male actors wore nondescript street clothing; Iphigenie, a rather subdued hostess gown. Scene changes—the play was performed without act breaks or an intermission—were effected by means of "blackouts": while the brightly illuminated white screen went dark for a few seconds, and the audience blinked in the darkness, the actors quickly rearranged themselves before the backdrop.

This severe pattern was broken only once, during the climactic scene in that Orestes is seized by the hallucinatory trance that purges him of guilt. This rite of exorcism took place amidst the audience, and members of the premiere public seated in the eighth row, left, of the orchestra were startled to find a descendant of Tantalus bustling down their row like a harried latecomer, scattering programs right and left and sending the paying guests scampering self-consciously to their feet. Although some might argue that it is alienating to have a scion of the House of Atreus haranguing the Furies from an aisle seat, one must admit that the intimacy engendered both by the physical proximity of the players and their normal dress made it seem almost natural to have a demigod as a seat neighbor.

Since Dieter Dorn set out to demythologize Goethe's text in this production, it was only consistent with his interpretation that the ending of the play lacked that dimension of conciliation and enlightenment so germane to Goethe's adaptation of the ancient drama. There was no sense of "annunciation," of a "new order," in King Thoas' "*Lebt wohl!*"—those famous words that bless the Greek captives on their way. The words were spoken grudgingly, chillingly, by a Thoas whose face was a frozen mask of bitterness. By setting a limit to the efficacy of Iphigenie's "pure humanity," Dieter Dorn added a jarring dissonance to Goethe's harmonious conclusion. The image of Goethe that emerged from this production reflected that of Thoas, who in the final analysis has little to smile about: it was the image of a psychological realist unwilling to gloss over human frailties in the name of benign conciliation. Seeing a Thoas frozen in bitterness and disappointment, one

somehow felt closer to him—and to Goethe—than ever before. If to forgive is divine, as Shakespeare instructs us, perhaps *not* to forgive is almost human—or may one say with Goethe, “devilishly human?”

Turning to *Faust*, one notes that after a strange hiatus from the stage—at least in West Germany—both *Part I* and *Part II* have had a high performance incidence over the past decade. Although no single production has captured the favor of critics and audiences as did the Gustav Gründgens’ stagings of the late 1950s, there has been no dearth of competent and occasionally provocative performances of Goethe’s most famous play. Following in the wake of Peter Stein’s *Tasso*, directors have felt free to make drastic cuts in the text, to reorder dramatic sequences, to poke fun at Goethe, and to make the conclusion of the play a good deal less ambiguous than Goethe himself might have wished it to be. In 1976, at the hallowed Burgtheater in Vienna, a performance of *Part I* was mounted in which the *Prolog im Himmel* was merged with the *Vorspiel auf dem Theater*; Faust’s monologues were cut to the bone, and the first scene of *Part II* was grafted on to the final scene—the “dungeon scene”—of *Part I*. In 1977 Claus Peymann directed a production of the complete *Faust* in which virtually the entire Second Part of the tragedy was treated as a gigantic masquerade, a colorful spectacle of theatrical effects. For a diametrically opposite interpretation, however, the theater-goer only had to wait a few months, that is until Hansgunther Heyme presented what one critic claimed was “the most complete *Faust II* ever staged”—a sobersided, virtually uncut version that took almost seven hours to perform over two successive evenings.⁴ The reasons for the resurgence of *Faust* productions still await definitive scholarly exegesis, but to judge by recent trends in West Germany, the sheer theatricality of *Faust* seems to be outweighing ideological considerations, at least for the moment: directors such as Peymann and Heyme, who yield nothing to Peter Stein as far as political commitment is concerned, have been remarkably restrained about imparting a political coloration to their *Faust* interpretations. For whatever reason, there is much truth in the critic Eo Plunien’s witty observation: “It’s ‘Fausting’ everywhere.”⁵

One place it is “Fausting” is in the German Democratic Republic, where major stagings of both parts of *Faust* are so frequent as to make them unremarkable. In general Goethe’s plays, taken as a whole, appear about as frequently on East German stages as they do in the Federal Republic; a recent survey of performances of German “classics” on the GDR stage over a five-year period found Goethe in a respectable third place after Schiller and Lessing, which is just about where one would expect to find him in a survey of West German theaters.⁶ Thanks to generous state support, and to almost unlimited rehearsal time, GDR directors can

bend their minds and their talents to mounting lavish productions of Goethe’s plays, even in theaters that by West German standards might be deemed provincial. The director Fritz Bennewitz, who staged a *Faust* production in New York in 1979, has directed three different productions of *Faust* in recent years at the Deutsches Nationaltheater in Weimar, including a production of the complete *Faust* drama in 1982. A few years earlier, the director Christoph Schroth tested the endurance of his ensemble—and of the public—by presenting both parts of *Faust* in one long evening, an enterprise that perhaps began the current trend toward marathon performances. Nor was length the sole innovation: Christoph Schroth not only called upon four different actors to portray *Faust*, but made a Mephisto out of Mephisto by casting the devil as a woman—surely a new twist to the “eternal feminine!”

Remarkably enough, directors thus far seem to have been able to resist the politicization of *Faust* and other Goethe plays, despite the fact that the purse strings of the GDR stage are firmly held by a government that makes no secret of the fact that it regards the theater as an instrument for the propagation of socialist ideas.⁷ To be sure, Faust has yet to recite his Utopian soliloquy in *Part II* under the roseate glow of the hammer and sickle; the dike protecting his realm from the sea has not yet appeared as a prettified version of the Berlin Wall, and Mephisto has not tread the boards to date costumed as an evil Uncle Sam. Nevertheless, without compromising the textual integrity of *Faust*, the East German government, acting through its spokesmen both in the state-controlled press and in the theater hierarchy, has made it clear that it regards Goethe’s masterpiece as a sort of showpiece of socialism, and that the frequent stagings of the play serve a political as well as an aesthetic purpose. The ideological thrust behind the *Faust* productions becomes clear when one reads both the handsome program brochures that accompany the productions and the critical reviews in the press. Program commentaries, for example, are heavily laced with quotations from the writings of Brecht, Adorno, and Lukács shaped to underscore the argument that Goethe’s *Faust* represents the evolution not of Faust alone but of all mankind: Faust / Jedermann is seen striving against the confines of a benighted feudal-renaissance society, succumbing temporarily to the curse of capitalism—that is, the pact with the devil—and finally being liberated by a vision of socialist equality. The 1980 Yearbook of the Weimer National Theater supplies an excellent example of what one might call the “co-opting” of Goethe by the East German propaganda machine: emblazoned on the first page are excerpts from an address by General Secretary Erich Honeker in which he extols Goethe for his contribution to the cultural heritage of Weimar “because in Socialism the grand vision of a ‘free people on free soil’ has found realization through revolutionary deeds.”⁸ This famous

line of verse in fact appears with Orwellian insistence in East German theater commentary; the obvious insinuation is that the quotation aptly describes the lot of the 17 million GDR citizens currently penned up behind the Iron Curtain.

No less politicized are the critical reviews of theater productions, including *Faust* productions, where expert analysis of a staging may have to compete with doctrinaire political observations. The literary editor of the newspaper *Das Volk* prefaced his critic's review of Bennewitz's recent *Faust* staging as follows: "What this production is about is humanistic responsibility in war and peace, plus social progress evolving out of our historical and revolutionary optimism."⁹ The word "responsibility" was duly taken up by the reviewer himself, who noted approvingly that the production reflected a "high degree of social responsibility" and who admonished the public not to forget its own "responsibility." Politics, like beauty, can sometimes be in the eye of the beholder, so one cannot quarrel with the reviewer when he claims that Wagner's visit to Faust's study in *Part I* reminded him "of Germany's fascist past," since Gestapo visitations and interrogations often took place in the black of the night; but surely one may reject his pretentious comparison of Wagner with the late Dr. Robert Oppenheimer, an equation which made Faust's famulus a "mad scientist" who "in the climate of escalating rearmament in the USA" would be capable of manufacturing not only homunculi, but also weapons more fearsome than the H-bomb.¹⁰ Sorting through the propaganda, one can also find a few observations about the production itself, which was generally praised for its textual fidelity and the freshness of ideas Bennewitz brought to his current production.

Hence the East German stage image of Goethe is unclear, with its focus blurred by conflicting perspectives. On the stage itself, the familiar plays unfold with a textual fidelity that often exceeds that of West German productions; surrounding these texts, however, is a penumbra of propaganda which, in greater or lesser degree, lends its coloration to the plays themselves. As older directors such as Bennewitz are replaced by younger, less cosmopolitan and more ideologically oriented directors, the East German stage image of Goethe may well emerge in sharper focus, but not necessarily to the poet or to this poetic intentions.

Looking back on this turbulent decade, one may express the fervent hope that German directors on both sides of the Iron Curtain have, like Orestes, been purged of the furies of self-doubt, social guilt, and political cynicism. Yet had the author of the dictum "Die: then live again!" been witness to the arbitrary and even irreverent treatment of his dramas, his reaction might well have been marked by that spirit of tolerance and conciliation that

informs his major works. Himself a man of the theater, to the core a passionate amateur actor, and a seasoned *Regisseur*, Goethe well knew that there exists no infallible formula for conjuring up the magic of the theater, that short-lived triumph of illusion over reality. Skeptical of binding political dogmas, he probably would reject attempts to fit his multidimensional texts to the Procrustean bed of any given ideology; but his innate wisdom, fortified by the "wisdom of the Ages," would surely console him that "this, too, shall pass."

What future trends will bring to the interpretation of Goethe's dramas, how his image will be reflected from the German-language stage, is of course uncertain, but in looking ahead one might take heart from an observation by the late pianist Artur Schnabel, who once described the music of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert as being "greater than it can be performed." Surely plays such as *Tasso*, *Iphigenie*, and above all *Faust* constitute literature which is greater than it can ever be interpreted.

Notes

1. Among recent articles see: Ferdinand Piedmont, "Tendenzen moderner Schiller-Aufführungen" *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 21 (1977), pp. 247-273, and Donald H. Crosby, "The Fragmented Schiller: *Welttheater* or *Regietheater*?" *Friedrich Schillerein Symposium*, ed. Wolfgang Wittkowski (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1982), pp. 341-350.
2. In *Goethe u.a.: Torquato Tasso. Regiebuch der Bremen Inszenierung*, ed. Volker Canaris (Suhrkamp Verlag 1970), p. 135.
3. See the remarks by Joachim Kaiser and Hellmuth Karasek in *Theater*, 1969, p. 22.
4. Eo Plunien in *Die Welt*, May 28, 1977.
5. *Ibid.*
6. See Manfred Nössig, *Die Schauspieltheater der DDR und das Erbe* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1976).
7. For a comprehensive discussion of the East German theater see Herbert Lederer, "Theater in the German Democratic Republic," in *Perspectives and Personalities: Studies in Modern German Literature*, Beiträge zur Neueren Literaturgeschichte, Third Series, vol. 37 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1978), pp. 214-221. Professor Lederer has been most generous in sharing both his expertise and his substantial collection of theater materials with me, for which I express my gratitude.
8. In *Klassik im Blickpunkt*, Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar, 1980.

9. Editorial in *Das Volk*, October 14, 1981.
10. Dr. Klaus Hammer, in *Das Volk*, October 14, 1981.

GÖTZ VON BERLICHINGEN (GOETZ VON BERLICHINGEN)

CRITICAL COMMENTARY

Horst Lange (essay date 2001)

SOURCE: Lange, Horst. "Wolves, Sheep, and the Shepherd: Legality, Legitimacy, and Hobbesian Political Theory in Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen*." *Goethe Yearbook* 10 (2001): 1-30.

[In the following essay, Lange provides a historical reading of *Götz von Berlichingen* and asserts that "the play is to a large extent a reflection upon the difficulties Enlightenment social contract theory faced in accounting for the legitimacy of the modern state."]

Goetz de Berlichingen . . . est heureusement choisi pour représenter quelle étoit l'indépendance des nobles avant que l'autorité de gouvernement pesât sur tous. Dans le moyen âge, chaque château étoit une forteresse, chaque seigneur un souverain. . . .

Mme. de Staël, *De l'Allemagne*

I

Traditional interpretations hold that Goethe became enamored of *Götz von Berlichingen*'s autobiography because he discovered in the historical figure of *Götz* the perfect embodiment of the ideal *Sturm und Drang* character, the *Kraftkerl*. Frequently they cite the report of Henry Crabb Robinson, who after a visit with Goethe's mother disseminated the following anecdote:

He came home one evening in high spirits. Oh mother, he said, I have found such a book in the public library, and will make a play of it! What great eyes the Philistines will make at the Knight with the Iron-hand! That's glorious—the Iron-hand!

According to this account, the discovery of the indomitable knight not only provided the spark which kindled Goethe's creativity—it also instilled in the unknown and ambitious poet the desire to achieve in the field of drama what *Götz* had accomplished on the battlefield: clearly the Goethe of the anecdote sets out to rattle his narrow-minded age just as *Götz*'s iron fist supposedly unnerved his contemporaries. If we further-

more recall, as a number of interpretations do, the aphorism by Matthias Claudius that the play attacks Aristotle's three unities "wie sein edler tapftrer Götz . . . die blanken Esquadrons feindlicher Reiter,"² a particularly seductive model for the play's interpretation emerges, seamlessly tying the play's content (rebellion against a corrupt world), its form (rebellion against literary conventions), and the intention of its author (rebellion against his age) into one compact and defiant aesthetic statement.

Such a reading no doubt suggests itself, not least because it squares so nicely with the conventional view of the *Sturm und Drang* as a revolt against the cold rationalism of orthodox Enlightenment and an expression of the political frustrations of the *Bürgertum* of eighteenth-century Germany. However, the important presupposition it makes, namely that Goethe's *Götz* was meant to be a positive hero and a role model for his feeble age, may very well be called into question by a sober look at the play.

It is quite conspicuous, for example, how much *Götz* seems to love violence for its own sake. This is perhaps best illustrated in the scene where the newly arrived Lersé offers his services to *Götz* and the two bond by vividly recalling a previous military engagement in which they faced each other as enemies (603-5).³ Far from expressing any regret over having met in battle, Lersé and *Götz* warmly relive this encounter, and Lersé even rejoices at having had the opportunity to prove his mettle against *Götz* (605). They both engage in rather smug mutual admiration for each other's skill and valor, recalling Lersé's feat of injuring *Götz* with particular fondness. Any regret over the fact that violence and death are so commonplace in the lives they lead is strikingly absent in their nostalgic celebration of past skirmishes: "Fünf und zwanzig gegen acht! Da galts kein feiren. Erhard Truchses durchstach mir einen Knecht, dafür rannt ich ihn vom Pferde" (604).

If *Götz* had an aversion to violence, it would be hard to explain why he never regrets the fact that his life of endless warfare prevents him from enjoying a peaceful life on his estate. Indeed, when the emperor effectively places *Götz* under house arrest, *Götz* does not enjoy the peacefulness of his existence, but develops such a severe form of cabin fever that for the first time in his life he breaks his word and enters the fray of the *Bauernkrieg* (incidentally not to end it, but to steer its violence in a more productive direction). And during the "last supper" with his men just before his surrender to the imperial troops, *Götz* envisions an ideal society, in which, despite its general peacefulness, he and his followers can nevertheless engage in violence:

Wir wollten die Gebürge von Wölfen säubern, wollten unserm ruhig ackernden Nachbar einen Braten aus dem Wald holen, und dafür die Suppe mit ihm essen. Wär