

During the Third I.V.G. Congress at Amsterdam in 1965, Katharina Mommsen presented a paper on *Tradition und Ursprünglichkeit in Goethes Fabulieren* (cf. abstracts in the transactions of the congress: *Tradition und Ursprünglichkeit*, ed. W. Kohlschmidt and H. Meyer. Bern-München. Francke, 1966, p. 177/8) which was widely acclaimed (cf. H. S. Reiss in GLL XIX, 1965/66, p. 319). In her recent book, she presents an enlarged version of this paper which is in fact, an application of earlier source studies to particular problems of interpretation in *Faust II*.

Objectives and method of her work are clearly stated: firstly to show how Goethe had received important stimuli to his second part of *Faust* from *Tales of the Thousand and one Nights*, and how this sheds new light on the much discussed question of Helena's mode of existence and her relationship to the preceding *Homunculus*-part. Secondly, she wishes to demonstrate that the connexion between great poetry and the tradition is not of an inferior material nature but of a genuinely spiritual one; furthermore, she attempts to prove that the much neglected philological methods of investigation into the sources and tradition can open new avenues to arrive at the *Sinn* and *geistige Bedeutung* of a work of art.

The question as to whether Helena exists in the tragedy as a figure of dream and fiction or in reality has puzzled scholars since the publication of *Faust II*. The thirteen chapters of KM's book are devoted either to this problem directly, or to minor questions which in turn help to elucidate the whole of the second and the third act of the drama.

The first chapter introduces the theme of the book: Is Helena conceived as a living person in her native Greece? or On which level of reality does she exist? A quick historical survey of Faust studies with regard to these questions puts the reader right in the middle of a controversy. Thus KM formulates two questions which she is then trying to answer in connexion with the historical process of Goethe's writing of acts two and three.

Firstly, how far did Goethe go in making the whole action of the Helena act appear fictitious and phantasmagoric, and which sources did serve him as a guidance? Secondly, how does the action in *Klassische Walpurgisnacht* help the reader understand the Helena act, and what importance do we have to attribute to the different ways of Faust, Mephistopheles, and Homunculus? The first part of her answer not only shows how Goethe relied heavily on poetic elements from *One Thousand and one Nights*, but that, in fact, the whole descent of Faust into the underworld of the *Klassische Walpurgisnacht* to regain Helena has its structural prefiguration in *Asem and the Fairy Princess* and *Aly Dschohary*, two Scheherazade story cycles which Goethe read in 1825 during his work on the Helena part. The surprising details of hitherto unnoticed correspondence between the oriental tradition and *Faust II* are presented meticulously in KM's earlier book *Goethe und 1001 Nacht* (Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1960) rendering many speculations on obscure symbolism redundant. The results are now summarized for a different purpose. The emphasis is more on the structural correspondence. In *Faust II* and the Scheherazade stories a man has heard of or fallen in love with a fairy-princess whom he wishes to redeem from the queen of the underworld. The similarity in structure and details down to literal borrowings (from the Breslau edition) is so striking that it is amazing to find it discovered only so late. It is surprising in this context that in the *Walpurgisnacht* act Homunculus, whose way into existence was thought to be a symbolic prefiguration of the way in which Helena could be brought to life again, has a more important function in this act than Mephisto or even Faust.

We learn that Homunculus acts as a structural counterpart to the Faust-Helena action. Homunculus progresses to a real birth, while Helena, remains a fiction, as phantasmagoric and artificial existence in the realm of poetry and not of nature, Goethe's composition method of *Spiegelung* is shown in its most complex effectiveness.

This result is further supported in the longest chapter dealing with the Helena act where KM scrutinizes all elements that give the impression of irreality. It is shown that the whole third act is a play in a play in which Helena appears as the main character, with Mephisto as author, producer and commentator of this ›psychische Kur‹ for Faust. This interpretation has been suggested before, but never was it linked in its dramatic function with the *Walpurgisnacht*. KM's findings provide the missing link and show how the difficulties incurred during writing were overcome by Goethe's reception of the oriental motives.

The following ten chapters are further and partly independent investigations into details (*Die neue Sirene; Fausts Weg zu Manto; Mephistopheles' Weg zu den Phorkyaden; Mephisto als neuer Perseus*). They have little connexion with the oriental tradition but return to the Greek myth as a source. In blending both, Goethe achieved the ›incommensurability‹ of the symbolic structure. It is in this chapter that attention is drawn to the similar Orpheus myth. Other parts (*Homunculus' Weg zum naturhaften Sein; Homunculus und Helena*) link the new findings to Goethe's philosophy of nature and history. The contrast of the two modes of coming into existence – Faust's quick and ephemeral way of bringing Helena into a phantasmagoric being as opposed to the slow and natural growth of Homunculus to achieve a lasting reality – bears out Goethe's deep conviction about the slow development of life in nature which is represented allegorically by Thales and his *Neptunismus* who fights Anaxagoras and his rebellious *Plutonismus*.

Consequently, the historical past cannot be brought back in a revolutionary manner; it is living only as long as its tradition is continued in present culture.

A third group takes up the problem of *Schein und Sein* concentrating on Goethe's theory of art and the revival of classical antiquity in the present. In the corresponding actions of Homunculus and Helena Goethe seems to give his answer. In spite of all remaining obligations to revive the norms of antiquity in art, the results will remain artificial and ephemeral.

It is obvious that KM draws on the whole tradition of Faust-philology when interpreting the two crucial acts in *Faust II* from the perspective of her new findings. These remain still to be incorporated into the commentaries and the consciousness of scholars. The results should have a sobering effect on all concerned. The following remarks are, therefore, no reflection on the great value of the book, but a few additions that come to mind. Firstly the reader has to peruse the relevant chapters of KM's in detail. Secondly, the present arrangement of chapters necessitates many repetitions to stress cohesion, particularly when the original philological investigation is brought to an end. A more systematic presentation – admittedly very difficult under given circumstances – would have done more justice to the splendid accomplishment. It would have brought about a more lucid and consistent use of certain essential concepts like *Tradition, Realität, Wirklichkeit, Schein*, and particularly *Fabulieren*. They are all interrelated and one might call them the conceptual stratum of Goethe's *Spiegelungen*. Occasional stylistic clumsiness could lead to misunderstandings.

Moreover, it seems worth mentioning that the discernible gap between the first and the later chapters is effected by the historical-genetic method itself. While we witness at first a brilliant example of source study in connexion with the oriental tradition, the later parts introduce an analogy approach without being aware of it or saying so. It is not made clear why Goethe chose the Scheherazade stories when the Orpheus myth provided a structural equivalent, as did the *Zauberflöte*-theme which KM does not consider at all, although it was at times very much on Goethe's mind. Or, the other way round, why did Goethe find both strains of tradition compatible? Thus the structural identity is one of the silent premises in the interpretation. I am sure that if it were clarified it would make clear, that a structural analysis is well worth considering even for source studies. It would also result in a deeper understanding of tradition and its dialectic counterpart, originality, in Goethe.

With regard to her approach KM does not think *werkimmanente Interpretation* worth mentioning. Her opinion in this matter must be drawn *ex silentio* since she has chosen to make reference only to a few

co-workers in the field. The *Symbolinterpretation* is mildly criticized although he acknowledges the fact that the Helena-phantasmagory is essentially a ›sign, symbol, metaphor for poetry‹.

This attitude seems justified in view of the many wild speculations. On the other hand, scholars like W. Emrich, E. Staiger and others have made most profitable use of alternative methods. It would be, in fact, most interesting to see how the new findings accord with the old interpretations and how much they would change them. Similarly, it would be desirable to have them incorporated into an interpretation on the whole *Faust*. We see the significance of the test and trials before the hero regains his fairy-princess for the difficulties Faust has to encounter on his way to Persephone. They belong essentially to the structure of the fairy-tale.

But they belong also to the structure of the double wager that governs the entire *Faust* drama.

Perhaps KM will tie up these few loose ends in another book which we should be grateful to receive in due course. In the meantime her last one is a ›must‹ for those interested in Goethe and comparative literature.

*Monash University*

WALTER VEIT