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Goethe Yearbook, Volume 17, 2010, pp. 117-132 (Article)

Published by North American Goethe Society

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/gyr.0.0077>



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FREDERICK AMRINE

## **The Unconscious of Nature: Analyzing Disenchantment in *Faust I***

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IN *GÖTTERZEICHEN, LIEBESZAUBER, SATANSKULT*, Albrecht Schöne argues that Goethe has engaged in a self-censorship of *Faust I*, offering in the end only a highly condensed, elided version of the full Satanic ritual he initially intended for the “Romantische Walpurgisnacht.”<sup>1</sup> I agree that Goethe engaged in self-censorship, but Goethe’s self-censorship in *Faust I* is actually more extensive, and profounder, even than that claimed by Schöne. More important, Schöne has him trying to cover up the wrong heresy: Goethe is not a closet Manichaeon, and Gretchen is not in any sense a witch. Quite the contrary: I will argue that she represents a lost Hermetic consciousness of nature that has been demonized as the heretical “other” both of orthodox religion, and of science.

There is an uncanny affinity between Goethe’s *Faust* and Freud’s *Traumdeutung*: Freud deservedly won the Goethe Prize, but Goethe also should have won the Freud Prize. In chapter four, Freud famously compares the “dream-work” of the unconscious to the conscious stratagems of displacement and disguise employed by the dissident artist in order to defeat the censor. In the same passage, as a kind of embedded epigraph, Freud quotes Mephisto’s displaced hint (“Das Beste, was du wissen kannst / Darfst du den Buben doch nicht sagen”)<sup>2</sup> that there is a latent argument lurking behind Goethe’s “manifest” text. And indeed there is.

Unlike Schöne, I prefer to interpret the “Romantische Walpurgisnacht” as a dream that employs precisely the same distorting devices—condensation, displacement, elision—Freud will later elaborate in his *Traumdeutung*. Although it is disguised as an ascent of the *Brocken*, what we are really given is a descent into Faust’s personal unconscious: the doors through which we enter are Gretchen’s swoon, and the onomatopoetic initial description of the landscape that induces vertigo. We see Mephisto working as the dream-censor, whose *modus operandi* (here as elsewhere) is *Entstellung zum Zweck der Verstellung*; as the Sphinxes reveal in part two, he is the anti-Oedipus, himself the riddle. And Mephisto’s response to the *Trödelhexe* is especially revealing: he drags Faust away, criticizing her story as too thinly disguised, fearing that Faust might wake up inside his dream, interpret it, and achieve the precious self-knowledge that is one goal of his striving.<sup>3</sup>

In the “Romantische Walpurgisnacht,” Faust’s personal unconscious censors his repressed knowledge of his own guilt, offering up the dream of a witch’s sabbath. But the author of *Faust* is Freud’s crafty, intentional censor, a

dissident artist masking his critique of orthodoxy and hiding his illicit knowledge. Even more important for our purpose, other scenes of *Faust I* take us into realms beyond even Freud's ken—specifically, into what I would like to call “the unconscious of nature.” *Goethe's heretical knowledge is the notion that nature has an “unconscious”; that it is not only alive, but “enchanted”; and that this “enchantment” is not a black, but rather a white or hermetic magic.* Moreover, I want to argue that the Freudian personal unconscious and the Hermetic “unconscious of nature” are not merely juxtaposed: they are intimately related.

A good way to understand the relationship is Max Weber's notion that modernity is the result of an “Entzauberung der Welt.” In *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, Weber argues that what science has given us is *not* a better understanding of the world: Indians and Hottentots understand their pre-scientific worlds far better than we our own, he claims.<sup>4</sup> Scientific knowledge is too specialized for that. We leave understanding to the specialists; what we really care about is “daß man vielmehr alle Dinge—im Prinzip—durch *Berechnen* beherrschen könne. Das aber bedeutet: die Entzauberung der Welt” (Weber 488). Modernity is about *control of nature*. Weber gives us a Nietzschean genealogy of this “will to power,” tracing it back to the Socratic discovery of logic as an instrument of compulsion, “ein Mittel . . . womit man jemanden in den logischen Schraubenstock setzen konnte. . . .” (Weber 491); then to the Renaissance discovery of the experiment as “zuverlässig kontrollierte Erfahrung” (Weber 491); and eventually joining Nietzsche in dismissing as hopelessly naive the idea that science as “Technik der Beherrschung des Lebens” can be a “Weg zum Glück” (Weber 493). As in Euripides' last drama, *The Bacchae*, denial of the subconscious inevitably leads to a return of the repressed: “Die alten vielen Götter, entzaubert und daher in Gestalt unpersönlicher Mächte, entsteigen ihren Gräbern, streben nach Gewalt über unser Leben und beginnen untereinander wieder ihren ewigen Kampf” (Weber 502). Weber is thinking of the turn of the twentieth century, of course, but I will argue that this “return of the repressed” begins simultaneously with the first stirrings of *Entzauberung*, in the sixteenth century at the latest.

Together, Freud and Weber allow us to approach a great riddle that bears directly upon our understanding of *Faust I*: if it is “disenchantment” that defines modernity, how does one account for the other great cultural phenomenon of the early modern period, the witch craze? For, not only are they contemporaneous: modern science and witchcraft seem strangely linked. Francis Bacon and King James are the *Urphänomene* of this paradox: Bacon calls on us to smash the mental “idols” keeping us from realizing that “knowledge is the same thing as power,” while in the next room, James scribbles his “philosophical” dialogue on *Daemonologie*. Bacon courts James shamelessly, and James embraces Bacon. How can either have wanted the other as a bed-fellow? Because, as I will argue, witch trials are *disenchantment by other means*.

In the *fable convenue* of conventional historiography, Bacon is styled as the paladin of a modern, skeptical materialism, but Bacon described himself as only the “herald” of a fight to be waged in the future, and despite dismissing holdovers of the older consciousness as “idols,” his own worldview is

anything but “disenchanted.” Bacon’s late compendium of materials for his supposedly empirical natural history, *Silva Silvarum*, was largely cribbed from della Porta’s and others’ treatises on natural *magic*,<sup>5</sup> and even in the *Novum Organum*, Bacon lists “magical” as the last of the twenty-seven types of “prerogative instances.”<sup>6</sup> According to Lynn Thorndike’s magisterial history of science, Bacon “had no doubt that the moon in Leo had more power over terrestrial bodies than when in Pisces, or that a planet was more active when in its apogee, and more communicative when in its perigee”;<sup>7</sup> and in *The Advancement of Learning*, he expresses the wish that “contemplation and action may be more nearly and straitly conjoined and united together than they have been; a conjunction like unto that of the two highest planets, Saturn the planet of rest and contemplation, and Jupiter the planet of civil society and action.”<sup>8</sup> Bacon embraced sympathetic magic, believing that “the guts or skin of a wolf would cure colic,” because “the wolf was an animal ‘great edacity [voraciousness] and digestion’” (Thorndike 76). He held “that in all tangible bodies there are very fine, rarefied, subtle and invisible spirits. . . . They govern nature principally, and in animate bodies vital spirits are added to those found in inanimate bodies. Gems have in them fine spirits, as their splendor shows, and they may work upon the spirits of men to comfort and exhilarate them. . . .” (Thorndike 77). “*Historia Densi et Rari*” features a discussion of “pneumatic bodies” (Bacon, *Works*, 5:354), and explains the effects of heat upon bodies in terms of the indwelling spirit’s “excitement,” “agitation,” “hatred,” “stubbornness,” and “endeavors to escape” (Bacon, *Works*, 5:384–85). “In short,” as Thorndike concludes, “Bacon uses material spirits within bodies to explain anything and everything” (Thorndike 79).

Bacon’s world is alive with magic, but his stance towards nature is unmitigably hostile. In Bacon’s malignant imagination, the goddess has become a witch harboring secrets that must be tortured out of her. Nor should this come as a surprise. As Lyndal Roper has demonstrated so eloquently in *Oedipus and the Devil*, witchcraft is an essential component of early modern consciousness.<sup>9</sup> We have met the Devil, and he is *in us*. Viewed in this light, Schöne’s list of maladies supposedly elicited by the black magic of witches—bad weather, hail, frost, avalanches, poisoned wells and rivers, diseases of grains and fruits, dry cows, death of livestock, impotence, infertility, birth defects, sickness, and death (Schöne 126)—starts to sound like a catalogue of resentments, of things science cannot, or cannot yet, control. And what is beyond our control, will be demonic. Even Goethe cannot resist entirely the pull of this kind of unconscious association: he associates the witch mania with, of all things, magnetism. Like the Romantic physicists, he associates this “subterranean” power with the unconscious of some *anima mundi*, writing to Frau von Stein in 1797: “Wie mir die Hexen beim Magnetismus einfallen, ist eine etwas weite Ideen Association, die ich auf diesem Blättchen nicht ausführen kann” (Schöne 136).

In 1589, James VI of Scotland came to suspect that witches had conspired against him and his new Queen by entering into a covenant with the Devil, sticking pins into wax effigies, and thereby raising storms during their voyage home from the royal wedding in Denmark. During the trials that he instituted during 1590–91, James actively and harshly interrogated the accused himself,

openly exhorting the jurors to convict.<sup>10</sup> We will never know how many of the 100 suspects examined were executed, but there is no doubt that by “[i]ntroducing the concepts of demonic pact and sabbat into Scotland,” James “launched the witchcraze there, a persecution that eventually took the lives of over a thousand persons, about 85 percent of them women.”<sup>11</sup>

James was defiantly proud of his role. Already in 1591 he published *Newes from Scotland*, describing in detail his active participation in the trials, and he followed it in 1597 with a “learned” theological treatise on *Daemonologie*.<sup>12</sup> The latter was aimed to refute specifically Reginald Scot’s skeptical *Discovery of Witchcraft* (1584). Like his continental counterpart Johann Weyer, author of *De Praestigiis Daemonum* (1563), Scot had correctly seen that the witch craze was a product of fantasy and coercion,<sup>13</sup> arguing “Witchcraft is a cousening [cozening] art. . . . It is incomprehensible to the wise, learned, or faithful, but a probable matter to children, fools, melancholic persons and papists.”<sup>14</sup>

In 1603, James VI of Scotland was crowned James I of England. Before his ascension to the throne, torture was illegal in England, and English witches were rarely tortured in fact, but James saw to it that within two weeks, Parliament passed a new Witchcraft Act, in which the death penalty was prescribed for a much wider range of offences, including the mere intention to harm another (Barstow 39). James also ordered the hangman to burn in public all copies of Scot’s book (Monter 32). The man Bacon would call “the wisest and most learned of kings,” comparing him to Solomon (Bacon, *Selected*, 427), argued “[L]oath they are to confess without torture, which witnesseth their guiltiness” (*Daemonologie* 30), and so the torturing of witches began. Confessions were obtained through starvation or beating [Thomas 517], or after long sessions of “walking” or “ducking” (in contemporary parlance, through sleep deprivation and waterboarding) (Barstow 175).

The fabled iconoclast should have run the other way, but Bacon leapt right into bed with James, dedicating to him almost immediately a major, programmatic work, *The Advancement of Learning* (1605). Of course, Bacon was a notorious time-server, who was not above the basest kinds of pandering, and Bacon openly advocated such dissimulation,<sup>15</sup> arguing among many other sophistries in his *Essays* that “divinity maketh the love of ourselves the pattern,” whereas “the love of our neighbours [is] but the portraiture.”<sup>16</sup>

Having failed to win favor from the sagacious Elizabeth, Bacon staked all on James, and won, rising steadily through a series of ever-greater offices until he became second in power only to the King himself. But Bacon’s relationship to James was more than just a desire for personal advancement. It turns out that Bacon genuinely shared James’s interest in witchcraft. In *The Advancement*, Bacon includes witchcraft with heresy and idolatry as one of the three great “declinations from religion,” then immediately praises James for having labeled witchcraft (adoring “false gods, knowing them to be wicked and false”) the worst of the three (Bacon, *Selected*, 391). Bacon accepts uncritically accounts of widespread use of the spell of ligature in Gascony (Bacon, *Works*, 2:634), and he corrects claims that witches prepare their ointment “of the fat of children digged out of their graves” not by debunking the superstition, but rather by speculating that “soporific

medicines” such as opium, henbane, hemlock, and moonshade “are likest to do it” (Bacon, *Works*, 2:664). (Bacon would know about such things: he most likely died of an overdose of “physic”—the polite contemporary euphemism for opium.<sup>17</sup>)

Bacon has been criticized sharply by feminist historians of science such as Susan Merchant, Sandra Harding, and Evelyn Fox Keller, for describing his new experimental methods in metaphorical terms that “strongly suggest” the interrogation of witches using torture.<sup>18</sup> I do not join them in asserting that modern science is inherently sexist. But their case against Bacon is, if anything, grossly understated. In *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon praises his new patron for conducting his inquisitions in Scotland because from them “light may be taken, not only for the discerning of the offences, but for the further disclosing of nature” (Bacon, *Selected*, 232)—not “science should as it were torture nature’s secrets out of her,” but rather: “Bravo, James; the actual torturing of witches might contribute directly to the cause of science.”

After this direct and unmistakable reference to James’s avid prosecution of witches, Bacon continues immediately: “Neither ought a man to make scruple of entering and penetrating into these holes and corners, when the inquisition of truth is his sole object—as you Majesty has shown in your own example.” Why might one “make a scruple,” except if Bacon means by “entering and penetrating” the “holes and corners” exactly what we suspect he must mean by this cryptic allusion: the violation of women’s private parts by violent forensic examination?<sup>19</sup> James’s *Newes from Scotland* had proudly reported just that: witches’ bodies had been inspected by male inquisitors, who shaved all their body hair, including the privates, looking for a secret mark (any mole or birthmark or welt would do) signifying that the Devil had copulated with the witch and branded her as his own. Such marks function as a Baconian “instances of the finger post”—crucial evidence legally dispositive of the case. But even when such damning evidence is available, it is always preferable to avoid the bother of arguing in court by procuring a confession. So the witches were tortured—“thrawn [twisted] with a rope”—until they admitted to having done everything of which they had been accused.

No Goethean “zarte Empirie” for Bacon. Scientific investigation is to be conducted as an “inquisition” with no holds barred: “[Men] should omit no way of vexing and working it, if they would detect and bring out its ultimate powers of resistance” (Bacon, *Selected*, 427). We are told that nature is “by all proper methods vexed” only “when every way of escape is cut off” (Bacon, *Selected*, 429). If we want to know nature’s secrets, Bacon advises us to treat her like Proteus: “the only way was first to secure his hands with handcuffs, and then to bind him with chains” (Bacon, *Selected*, 425). Even where Bacon’s language is not directly that of the torture chamber, it is one of violence. We are to “hound nature in her wanderings” (Bacon, *Selected*, 232); and we are advised that “[T]he secrets of nature reveal themselves more readily under the vexations of art than when they go their own way” (Bacon, *Novum*, 123). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “vexation” meant in the sixteenth century “the action of troubling or harassing by aggression

or interference" and "the action of subjecting to violence or force." It was a strong word: Bacon's contemporary, Ben Jonson, equates "vexation" with "martyrdom"; elsewhere, a plow is described as "vexing" the earth (*OED*).

In *The Advancement of Learning*, three possible relationships to nature are laid out, all exploitative and demeaning: we should treat her not "as a courtesan, for pleasure and vanity only, or as a bond-woman, to acquire and gain to her master's use; but as a spouse, for generation, fruit, and comfort" (Bacon, *Selected*, 194). That these three relationships are effectively equivalent is revealed in Bacon's late essay "The Masculine Birth of Time," where "the speaker comes to his 'dear, dear son,' 'leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave.'"<sup>20</sup> Nor is it enough to enslave nature: Bacon will have his way with her as well. He brags that his method "closes with nature, and comes to the very brink of operation, if it does not actually deal with it," extracting secrets "out of [her] very bowels" (Bacon, *Selected*, 442–43). Earlier science wasn't man enough to do the deed; for Bacon, it represents "the boyhood of knowledge, and has the characteristic property of boys: it can talk, but it cannot generate" (Bacon, *Selected*, 429). The object of knowledge, Nature, is like the pagan witch Scylla, "who had the head and face of a virgin, but her womb was hung round with barking monsters, from which she could not be delivered." Earlier science was made impotent by this witch, and hence it remained "barren of works."<sup>21</sup>

On a literal reading of the Bible, Bacon claims that humanity had been given a divine right to dominate nature, and then lost it in the Fall (Bacon, *Novum*, 333). Bacon pleads to be allowed to take back that right, assuring us that the treatment of nature "will be governed by sound reason and true religion" (Bacon, *Novum*, 148). But elsewhere it is clear enough that his aim is sheer domination and exploitation. In the "Plan" of *The Great Instauration* (1620), Bacon boasts, "I do not propose merely to survey these regions in my mind, like an augur taking auspices, but to enter them like a general who means to take possession"; his "arts" will "command nature in action" (Bacon, *Selected*, 440). One of the main groups of scientists collecting data for the Solomonic academy imagined in *The New Atlantis* he terms the "Depredators"—the "pillagers." Everywhere we see the language of violence and violation.

Schöne's many quotes from the records of inquisitions might lead one to think that there had indeed been a vast epidemic of Devil-worship. But the reality of the situation is far different. Keith Thomas' definitive study concludes on the contrary: "The truth is that acceptable evidence for the literal reality of ritual devil-worship, whether in England or on the Continent, is extremely scanty. The few modern attempts to get behind the assertions of the demonologists and the fictitious "confessions" extracted by torture in response to a fixed set of interrogatories, suggest that even on the Continent ritual devil-worship was probably a myth" (Thomas 516). James estimated the proportion of female to male witches at 20:1; others set the figure as high as 100:1. "Learned authorities never had any doubt that the weaker sex was more vulnerable to the temptations of Satan,"<sup>22</sup> and pervasive misogyny was surely a contributing factor, but the scholarly consensus is that the main

drivers of the phenomenon were poverty, a felt loss of ecclesiastical protections as a result of the Reformation, and a perverse alliance between the Church and nascent scientific materialism.

*Pace* Schöne, as Thomas has demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt, accusations of witchcraft were nearly always the result of tensions between the “fairly poor” and the “very poor” (Thomas 564). Social superiors had “legitimate” means of getting their way and settling scores; indeed, the subaltern status of the accused was one of the main criteria used to establish the presence of witchcraft (Thomas 561). Chief among the “very poor” were widows who had lost feudal protections; forced to maintain themselves by begging, many cursed those who refused them (Thomas 562). Some surely did bear grudges against the community who had abandoned them, and some may have tried desperately to translate villagers’ fear into a means of grudging support (Thomas 523, 565). None of this helps us to understand Gretchen. Nor will Thomas’s second thesis, that Protestantism denied the reality of the Church’s “white” magic, leaving legal action as the only option to fight *maleficium* (Thomas 501), help us understand Goethe’s *Faust*, as Gretchen clearly lives as a Catholic among Catholics. In neither case does she fit the profile.

Magic had been endemic in all earlier cultures, but the novel notion of the “witch” as a heretic who has forged a deliberate alliance with the Devil was manufactured in the late Middle Ages by the Roman Catholic Church in the aftermath of the Albigensian crusade against the Cathari (Thomas 439; Schöne *passim*). “The modern myth of devil-worship, with its night-flying and its sabbaths, was a gross invention of ‘friarly authors,’ an amalgam of Papal fabrication with ancient pagan superstition” (Thomas 571).

Paradoxically, the Church and the nascent “mechanical” philosophy end up in bed together on the issue of witchcraft. The Church was eager to replace astrology and other forms of hermetic “magic” with theological explanations of misfortune, while nascent mechanistic science wanted to replace “natural magic” with “natural law.” Indeed, there is a revealing sequel to Bacon’s dalliance with James: many of the founding members of the Royal Society in the second half of the seventeenth century follow Bacon’s lead in this regard as well. Even Boyle insisted that witchcraft was a dangerous threat. The great publicist for the Royal Society and cheerleader for the “scientific revolution,” Joseph Glanvill (1636–80), dismissed Reginald Scot as “too ridiculous to answer” (Monter 32). Feeling no tension between scientific skepticism and religious fundamentalism, Glanvill also occupied high positions in the Church, and ended his career writing vehement attacks on what he called “Sadducism” (after the Hebrew sect who supposedly denied the reality of “spirits”) that were collected and published posthumously as *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1681) (Monter 32). Glanvill’s book would go on to exert a profound and direct influence on Cotton Mather’s *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693), in which he defended the Salem Witch Trials of that same year.

The skeptics with regard to witchcraft (Goethe’s ancestors) were not Bacon and his later admirers, but the neo-Platonists (Thomas 578–79), and for a reason that is only apparently paradoxical: for them, magic was *natural*;



*"enchantment" was the normal state of affairs.*<sup>23</sup> They saw Nature herself as a white magician. If one wanted to subdue and control nature, but continued to believe in magic (as everyone, including Bacon, still did), *the pagan goddess had to be demonized as a witch.* One recognizes this strategy immediately as the program of the early Fathers of the Church to combat Gnosticism and other competing remnants of pagan wisdom.

The real paradox runs in the opposite direction: by effectively siding with the medieval Church against the Renaissance, Bacon and the early Baconians fail to participate in the greatest *scientific* developments of their age. As Thorndike, Yates, and Thomas among many others have shown, the greatest scientists among Bacon's contemporaries were—the hermetic white magicians.<sup>24</sup> Yates seconds Garin's assertion that Leonardo, who cited "Hermes the Philosopher" and defined force as spiritual essence, was accurately described by Vasari as a magus.<sup>25</sup> Although her assessment of Bacon is more positive than mine, Yates also criticizes him as a scientist, arguing that the "Magus" John Dee's little-known work is "greatly superior," and that Bacon's "inductive method did not lead to scientifically valuable results" (Yates, 1967, 262). She invites us to compare Bacon with Dee and Fludd, arguing that the latter pair "might come out of such an examination with better marks" (Yates, 1967, 269). Others she does not mention would fare even better, for example Thomas Harriot (1560–1621), like Marlowe a member of Raleigh and Northumberland's "School of Night," and who (among many other things) invented the telescope simultaneously with Galileo; helped design Raleigh's ships, accompanied him on his expedition to Virginia, learned Algonquin, and reported on the new colony; contributed important discoveries to the new science of navigation; founded the "English School" of algebra; "improved the theory of equations, noting the relation between coefficients and roots, and also improved notation, introducing the signs > (greater than) and < (less than) . . . studied sunspots and comets and corresponded with Kepler on the refraction of light."<sup>26</sup>

An even more revealing juxtaposition would be Bacon and Johannes Kepler. Kepler the neo-Platonic hermeticist was inarguably one of the very greatest scientists who ever lived, whereas Bacon "achieved no new results in science"; indeed, E. J. Dijksterhuis has (if anything, too generously) compared Bacon to "the lame Greek poet Tyrtaeus," who "could not fight, but [whose] war-songs brought inspiration to those who could."<sup>27</sup> It was Kepler, not Bacon, whose understanding of scientific method anticipated Newton's definitive synthesis of "conceptualism" and "empiricism."<sup>28</sup> Bacon rose to become the second most powerful man in England by flattering a persecutor of witches, only to disgrace himself and his judicial offices by accepting bribes; Kepler was kept from his scientific studies in the last years of his life by traveling from court to court, trying to collect the modest stipend that was owed him, and by having to defend his mother against charges of witchcraft. For years, the great mathematician fought in vain against Tycho de Brahe's heirs for access to the empirical evidence he needed and sincerely wanted; Bacon preached empiricism, while cribbing the materials for his "natural history" out of old books of natural magic. "Look here, upon this picture, and on this."<sup>29</sup>

Recent apologists have attempted to explain away Bacon's language as "dead metaphors"<sup>30</sup> or mere "literary embellishments,"<sup>31</sup> but the major figures in the subsequent history of science understood Bacon to mean what he wrote: science should assault nature violently, to the end of controlling it. In 1696, Leibniz praised "the art of inquiry into nature itself and of putting it on the rack—the art of experiment which Lord Bacon began so ably" (Pesic 82). Goethe's position on these issues could not be clearer. It is just this notion of science as the torture and violation of nature that Goethe's *Faust* explicitly rejects in the first scene of the drama:

Geheimnisvoll am lichten Tag,  
Läßt sich Natur des Schleiers nicht berauben,  
Und was sie deinem Geist nicht offenbaren mag,  
Das zwingst du ihr nicht ab mit Hebeln und mit Schrauben. (672–75)

Anticipating Weber by more than a century, Goethe rightly identifies Baconian *Entzauberung* as the dominant paradigm of modernity, and he rejects that project so radically that he felt the need to devise an entirely new, alternative scientific method.<sup>32</sup> Both in his scientific work and in *Faust*, Goethe's striving is to rediscover the lost "enchantment" of nature. In reading Goethe as a Baconian, and Gretchen as a witch, one succumbs to the disease of which *Faust* was meant to be the cure.

Harold Jantz got it right: Goethe's *Faust* is a Renaissance Man,<sup>33</sup> and Jantz rightly describes the "nature" evoked in *Faust*'s opening monologue in hermetic/neo-Platonic terms, as "a living being furnishing the environment for man, as the teacher of man, the unfold of the powers of the soul, and the revealer to him of the colloquy of the spirits" (Jantz 61). Goethe's sources, Augustin Lercheimer's *Christlich bedencken vnd erjnnern von Zauberey* (1585) via Spies's *Historia*, had sided with the inquisitors by demonizing both *Faust* and the "enchantment" he seeks.<sup>34</sup> But there can be no doubt about Goethe's allegiances: he sides with the Hermeticists and the neo-Platonists against the Church and mechanistic science. Goethe's Faustian "heresy" is his belief that nature is alive, conscious, divine, filled with meaning. By the same token, Gretchen is in no way a witch, and it was never Goethe's intent, repressed, self-censored, or otherwise, to present her as such. Precisely the opposite: she is latently allied with the lost "enchantment"—with *unfallen* nature. In part two, *Faust* fairly swims in this element, but it is revealed to him already in part one, in at least two different epiphanies that are closely related: the appearance of the *Erdgeist* in the opening scene, and *Faust*'s contemplative reverie in "Wald und Höhle."

It is Gretchen who leads *Faust* back to the unfallen nature he had sought in the opening monologue. This mysterious connection between *Faust* and Gretchen is underscored by a surprising turn in the monologue that begins "Wald und Höhle." *Faust*'s love for Gretchen has transformed him, but note that his reverie is not erotic nor even romantic: it is about her having brought him the ability to see into *the life of nature*. In his meditations, *Faust* has rediscovered the lost *alma mater*<sup>35</sup> for whom he had longed in "Nacht" and is, for one privileged moment at least, able to peer deeply into her breast, as into the soul of a friend. He becomes Adam in Paradise again, watching his "brothers" file past, one by one:

Du führst die Reihe der Lebendigen  
 Vor mir vorbei, und lehrst mich meine Brüder  
 Im stillen Busch, in Luft und Wasser kennen. (3225–27)

Goethe may even have in mind here, and be turning against him, Bacon's own reference in the "Preface" to the *Instauratio magna* to "that pure and uncorrupted natural knowledge whereby Adam gave names to the creatures according to their propriety" in Genesis, before the Fall (Bacon, *Selected*, 436). Faust inherits Nature as a "Königreich" not because he can dominate it, but, expressly, because he has developed the ability to commune with it [3220–21].

"Wald und Höhle" is linked directly to Faust's earlier epiphany: his monologue begins with a prayer thanking the *Erdgeist* for giving him exactly what he had wanted in "Nacht": not romantic love, but colloquy with nature as living spirit. The veil had parted, and Faust had been granted an experience beyond normal consciousness, *a fleeting revelation of the unconscious of nature* (501–9). Faust's colloquy with the *Erdgeist* is a moment of recovered pre-lapsarian Gnosis in the strictest historical sense. "Du gleichst dem Geist, den du begreifst, / nicht mir" (512–13), he is told; one becomes only what one truly understands. Appropriately, Goethe's archetypal Renaissance protagonist refers to the same text Pico della Mirandola's "Renaissance manifesto," the *Discourse on the Dignity of Man*, had quoted in its opening paragraph, the Hermetic *Aesclepius*: "Accordingly, the man who, in virtue of the mind in him, through which he is akin to the gods, has attached himself to them by pious devotion, becomes like to the gods; he who has attached himself to the daemons [*daemonum*] becomes like to the daemons; those who are content with the intermediate station of their kind remain mere men and nothing more. . . ." <sup>36</sup> If he could sustain the Gnosis, he would be saved: in the language of the "Gnostic" Gospel, he would know the truth, and the truth would set him free (John 8:32). But Faust cannot sustain yet such a high level of consciousness.

The *Erdgeist* may be grammatically male, and we know that, decades after writing this scene, Goethe suggested using a projection of a male head resembling the Zeus Otricoli to represent the *Erdgeist*, but we should not be misled by such typical Hermetic gender-bending, and the chthonic deity [*Erdgeist*!] Asclepius was typically depicted as "a mature, bearded man, similar to Zeus." <sup>37</sup> The *anima mundi* is a hero/ine with a thousand faces:

I am she that is the natural mother of all things, mistress and governess of all the elements, the initial progeny of worlds, chief of the powers divine, queen of all that are in hell, the principal of them that dwell in heaven, manifested alone and under one form of gods and goddesses. At my will the planets of the sky, the wholesome winds of the seas, and the lamentable silences of hell be disposed; my name, my divinity is adored throughout the world, in divers manners, in variable customs, and by many names. For the Phrygians that are the first of all men call me the Mother of the gods at Pessinus; the Athenians, which are sprung from their own soil, Cecropian Minerva; the Cyprians, which are girt about by the sea, Paphian Venus; the Cretans which bear arrows, Dictynnian Diana; the Sicilians, which speak three tongues, infernal Proserpine; the

Eleusians their ancient goddess Ceres; some Juno, other Bellona, other Hecate, other Rhamnusia, and principally both sort of the Ethiopians which dwell in the Orient and are enlightened by the morning rays of the sun, and the Egyptians, which are excellent in all kind of ancient doctrine, and by their proper ceremonies accustom to worship me, do call me by my true name, Queen Isis.<sup>38</sup>

In *Faust*, the *Erdgeist* sits at a loom, weaving the text of meaning into the tissue of nature: as Elizabeth Wayland Barber has argued so persuasively in *Women's Work*, for “the first 20,000 years” (her subtitle), to be a woman was to weave.<sup>39</sup> The guise she has chosen for herself here is that of the most common allegorical figure of the Middle Ages by far, the goddess Natura.<sup>40</sup> Like Dante’s teacher, Brunetto Latini, in his *Tesoretto* (ca. 1265), Faust’s first encounter on his spiritual journey is Natura Naturans, weaver of “der Gottheit lebendiges Kleid.”<sup>41</sup> Latini was surely inspired in turn, via the School of Chartres, by Hermetic texts such as *Aesclepius* 34c: “And if you consider the whole, you will learn that in truth the sensible Kosmos itself, with all things that are therein, is woven [*contexta*] like a garment [*vestimentum*] by that higher Kosmos” (Scott 326–27).

Goethe’s *Erdgeist* describes herself as “Geburt und Grab, ein ewiges Meer”; likewise, Latini sees “a great crowd / Of different living things . . . End and begin / Die and be born” (Latini 13), a teeming *matrix* who can “In air and earth and sea, / Make and unmake / And produce anew” (Latini 17). No demonic temptress, Natura figures prominently in the theological allegories of the School of Chartres as “*vicaria Dei*”—God’s own emissary and representative.<sup>42</sup> It is no accident that the “tissues” of nature and the texts of her meaning are, etymologically, both woven fabrics. And one recalls that Goethe came from a line of Textors on his mother’s side—the mother who had shaped his imagination. Freud would surely confirm: this dream-like epiphany is, like all dreams, also about the dreamer himself—also about Goethe’s own creative unconscious. Again we see that the Freudian personal unconscious and the Hermetic “unconscious of nature” are intimately related.

In the chapter on “Göttin Natura” in his classic study *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, Ernst Robert Curtius adduces as a key text the Orphic Hymn to Nature [*Physis*], which Goethe surely knew.<sup>43</sup> There we find the spirit of the *Erdgeist*, clothed in the same grammatical ambiguities. “*Physis*” is grammatically feminine in Greek, but s/he is also addressed explicitly as “Father,” and given the masculine epithet “all-spermatic”:

All-wise, all bounteous, provident, divine,  
A rich increase of nutriment is thine.  
And to maturity whate’er may spring,  
You to decay and dissolution bring.  
Father of all, great nurse, and mother kind,  
Abundant, blessed, all-spermatic [πολυσπορος] mind:  
Mature, impetuous, from whose fertile seeds  
And plastic hand this changing scene proceeds.  
All parent pow’r, in vital impulse seen,  
Eternal, moving, all sagacious queen.<sup>44</sup>

(Similarly, in Bernardus Silvestris' *Cosmographia* [ca. 1147], directly influenced by the Hermetic *Aesclepius* (Curtius 120), Natura complains to God that Silva (matter) lacks form, addressing "Noys [Νοῦς], the unfathomable mind"—grammatically masculine in Greek—as "my true Minerva."<sup>45</sup>) Moreover, Curtius claims that the famous "Fragment über die Natur," probably written by Tobler, is actually a loose translation of this same Orphic hymn, expanded somewhat to include ideas by Shaftesbury. Goethe acknowledged that the spirit of the "Fragment" was very close to his own thinking at the time—so close that he was not sure whether he had written it himself (Curtius 115).

As Goethe famously reports in Book 20 of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, at the time when *Faust* was taking shape in his mind, Goethe was actively exploring a deeply paradoxical force "das sich nur in Widersprüchen manifestierte"; he decided to follow the Ancients in calling it "dämonisch."<sup>46</sup> In the Orphic hymn, Physis is referred to as *daimon* [δαίμων; Goethe's *Dämon*] no less than four times in 30 lines. The *Erdegeist* is clearly meant to represent a neo-Platonic/hermetic *daemon*, an ontologically, theologically, and sexually contradictory "middle spirit" hovering between divinity and humanity.

Schoene tries to reconcile the paralipomena from the "Romantische Walpurgisnacht" with rest of *Faust* by way of a Manichaeian reading of the "Prolog im Himmel"; he has Goethe suppressing the full extent of Gretchen's fallenness, and self-censoring to cover up his "sympathy for the Devil." This reading feels forced to me, and alien to the spirit of the rest of the work. It is far more persuasive, I think, to read Gretchen within the long tradition of archetypal goddesses to which Goethe refers via the Hermetic tradition, who are then also recuperated explicitly in part two: the Mothers, Demeter, Persephone, Helen, Leda, Galatea, Juno, Aphrodite, and the Biblical Penitent Women. She correlates better with the mythic enchantments of "Felsbuchten," with the "white magic" of "Bergschluchten," and with the vision of the world as a parable suffused with meaning in the *Chorus Mysticus*.<sup>47</sup>

Gretchen represents Natura as the *alma mater*, the lost enchantment of nature that Faust longs to regain. But all knowledge of this unconscious is heretical; its possessors must be demonized, tortured, and killed. Marlowe also interpreted the dream, affirming the reality of the "middle spirits," and dismissing hell as a fable: he died for his indiscretion. The voice of the dream censor is that of King James, mocking those who do not believe in witchcraft; but the author of the latent wish is Bacon. One can't just tell it to the boys, but one can hide this deep truth on the surface, as Goethe has done.

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## NOTES

1. Albrecht Schöne, *Götterzeichen: Liebeszauber: Satanskult: Neue Einblicke in alte Goethetexte* (München: C. H. Beck, 1982).

2. Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* (n.p.: G. B. Fischer, 1961) 99.

3. This interpretation will be worked out more fully in a monograph I am preparing.

4. Max Weber, "Wissenschaft als Beruf," in his *Schriften: 1894–1922*, ed. Dirk Kaesler (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2002) 488.
5. Robert Leslie Ellis, "Preface to the *Sylva Sylvarum*," in Francis Bacon, *Works*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1963) 326. A list of 1000 unconnected paragraphs divided arbitrarily into ten "centuries," the *Sylva Sylvarum* could hardly be less methodical.
6. Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, trans. R. Ellis and James Spedding (London: Routledge / New York: Dutton, n.d.) 330.
7. Lynn Thorndike, "Francis Bacon," in his *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, Vol. 7 (New York: Columbia UP, 1958) 74.
8. *Selected Writings of Francis Bacon*, ed. Hugh G. Dick (New York: The Modern Library, 1955) 193.
9. Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994).
10. Christina Lerner, "James VI and I and Witchcraft," in *The Reign of James VI and I*, ed. Alan G. R. Smith (London: Macmillan, 1973) 81.
11. Ann Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts* (San Francisco: Pandora, 1994) 174.
12. King James the First, *Daemonologie (1597): Newes from Scotland declaring the Damnable Life and death of 'Doctor' Fian, a notable Sorcerer who was burned at Edenbrough in January last (1591)*, Elizabethan and Jacobean Quartos, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966).
13. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in popular beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1971) 517.
14. Quoted in William Monter, *Ritual, Myth and Magic in Early Modern Europe* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983) 32.
15. "Of Simulation and Dissimulation," Francis Bacon, *Selected Writings* 20. See also his essay "Of Cunning," *Selected Writings* 60–63, *passim*.
16. "Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature," *Selected Writings* 35.
17. Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune: The troubled life of Francis Bacon* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1998) 507.
18. Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991); Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985); Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper, 1980).
19. Alan Soble ("In Defense of Bacon," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 25 [1995]: 192–215) tries to defend Bacon here by arguing that "[t]he three purported offenders, 'drive,' 'penetrate,' and 'holes,' are missing" from the version of *De Augmentis* published in 1623, after Bacon "had already been stripped of his official positions" and thus no longer had anything to gain from flattering James (Soble 201). This defense might work if Bacon's writings were not saturated by misogyny from beginning to end, and Bacon's applause at the torture of defenseless women would be no less reprehensible if it were merely craven. Soble's aggressive defense of Bacon against Harding et al. is disturbing in its own right: e.g., he includes a gratuitously violent and graphic description of an imaginary rape (Soble 196), and he defends one of Bacon's blatantly sexist passages with the breathtaking gloss: "Bacon is, like Calvin, a rascal. He would much rather dissect bugs and chase snakes than play house or have an afternoon tea with Suzie" (Soble 199).

20. Peter Pesic, "Wrestling with Proteus: Francis Bacon and the 'Torture' of Nature," *Isis*, 90 (1999): 92; Keller (n. 18) 36.

21. Bacon, "Proemium," *Selected Writings* 429. The figure of Scylla the "witch" who causes impotence was a great favorite with Bacon. I have found four other allusions to the same image: in "Valerius Terminus or The Interpretation of Nature" (Bacon, *Works*, 3:232–33); in the *Redargutio* (Bacon, *Works*, 3:577); in "Cogitata et Viva" (Bacon, *Works*, 3:604); and in *The Advancement of Learning* (Bacon, *Selected*, 185). Tellingly, Bacon elsewhere describes earlier scientists as "dancing within little rings, like persons bewitched" ("Preparative towards a Natural and Experimental History," *Works*, 4:257).

22. Thomas (n. 13) 520; see also Schöne (n. 1) 134.

23. Cf. Harold Jantz, *Goethe's Faust as a Renaissance Man: Parallels and Prototypes* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1951) 6: "It must be clearly understood that Faust's going over to magic implies his going over to nature."

24. Frances A. Yates, "The Hermetic Tradition in Renaissance Science," in *Art, Science, and History in the Renaissance*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967) 258: "And if, as I believe, the Renaissance magus was the immediate ancestor of the seventeenth-century scientist, then it is true that 'Neo-Platonism' as interpreted by Ficino and Pico was indeed the body of thought which, intervening between the Middle Ages and the seventeenth century, prepared the way for the emergence of science." Thorndike and Frances Yates produced the pioneering—and, to my mind, still definitive—scholarship on this relationship. The body of such scholarship has become vast, but the latter's *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964) is still the classic study.

25. Eugenio Garin, *Scienza e vita civile nel Rinascimento italiano* (Bari: Laterza, 1965) 57–108, quoted at Yates 1967, 260–61.

26. "Harriot, Thomas" in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. 11 (Chicago: William Benton, 1962) 218. Yates rightly concludes her "history of the Renaissance Hermetic tradition in its relation to science" by asking "whether the seventeenth century discarded notions from the earlier tradition which may have been actually nearer to the views of the universe unfolded by the science of today than the movement which superseded it" (Yates, 1967, 273).

27. John Losee, *A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980) 61. My own view is that Bacon's attempts to establish an "inductive" method were thoroughly misguided, hence detrimental to the advancement of science. Only after last-ditch efforts by William Whewell and John Stuart Mill in the mid-nineteenth century failed to establish scientific induction was the philosophy of science liberated from this Baconian idolatry and freed to pursue more sophisticated models.

28. See the splendid essay by Ernan McMullin, "Empiricism and the Scientific Revolution," also in Singleton's collection *Art, Science, and History in the Renaissance* (n. 24) 331–69.

29. *Hamlet* act 3, scene 4.

30. E.g., Iddo Landau, "Feminist Criticisms of Metaphors in Bacon's Philosophy of Science," *Philosophy* 73 (1998): 47–61.

31. Soble 212. Pace Soble, I take Bacon's metaphors "very seriously" as "smoke signals of his seething unconscious."

32. I have written on this extensively elsewhere. See especially "The Metamorphosis of the Scientist," *Goethe-Yearbook: Publications of the Goethe Society of North*

*America* 5 (1990): 187–212 [rpt. In *Goethe's Way of Science*, ed. Arthur G. Zajonc (Ithaca: SUNY Press, 1988)], and *Goethe and the Sciences: A Reappraisal*, ed. Frederick Amrine, Francis J. Zucker, and Harver Wheeler, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science 97 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1987). In *Goethe in the History of Sciences*, 2 vols. [third volume in preparation] (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), I have sought to establish the existence and trace the history of a continuous "Goethean" research paradigm that runs parallel to reductionism as a "perennial alternative."

33. Among many other fine studies that could be cited here, see also Jane K. Brown, "The Prosperous Wonder Worker: Faust in the Renaissance," in *Faust through Four Centuries: Retrospect and Analysis*, ed. Peter Boerner and Sidney Johnson (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1989). The occasion for which this piece was originally written was a conference on *Faust I*. My characterization of Faust as a "Renaissance man" would have to be qualified, of course, in a comprehensive interpretation of *Faust*, which greatly exceeds the scope of the present essay. In a sentence: I recognize that, by the beginning of Part Two, act 4 at the latest, Faust has fallen, tragically, into the "disenchanted" mentality of the post-Renaissance.

34. Frank Baron, *Faustus on Trial: The Origins of Johann Spies's "Historia" in an Age of Witch Hunting* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992) 2.

35. Cf. Goethe's fascinating letter to C. G. Voigt of 16 January 1795: "Da man doch einmal nicht in seiner Mutter Leib zurückkehren kann, so ist es wenigstens manchmal vernünftig, in den Uterus der Alma mater sich wieder zurückzugeben." Warmest thanks to Clark Muenzer for bringing this letter to my attention.

36. *Aesclepius* 5, in *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings which Contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus: Introduction, Texts, and Translation*, ed. Walter Scott (Boston: Shambhala, 1993) 294–95.

37. "Asclepius," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd edn., ed. N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1970) 130. See also C. Kerényi, *Asklepios: Archetypal Image of the Physician's Existence*, trans. Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series LXV.3 (New York: Pantheon, 1959), esp. ch. 1, "Asklepios in Rome," 3–17. The Romans had turned the whole of Tiber Island into a temple to Asclepius in the form of a great stone ship, with a large bust of Asclepius and his caduceus carved into the prow. Kerényi reproduces on p. 3 a drawing by Piranesi in which it is clearly visible; hence, Goethe surely viewed it often during his stay in Rome, especially since the story of Asclepius' move from Epidaurus to Rome was narrated in one of Goethe's favorite books, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

38. Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. William Aldington, rev. Stephen Gaslee, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1935), XI.5, quoted in George D. Economou, *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1972) 42.

39. Elizabeth Wayland Barber, *Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years: Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times* (New York: Norton, 1995). Every humanist should know this wonderful study.

40. Economou, *The Goddess Natura*, passim.

41. "Brunetto then meets the figure of Natura, who is described like Boethius' Philosophy and Alain's goddess, and who in the manuscript drawings is shown very much as Natura Naturans (Creating Nature), out of whose robes emerge snails, grasshoppers, dragonflies, and countless other creatures," Julia Bolton Holloway, "Introduction" to *Brunetto Latini: Il Tesoretto (The Little Treasure)*, ed. and trans. Julia Bolton Holloway (New York: Garland, 1981) xxii. "Alain" is of course Alain de Lille or Alanus ab Insulis, a leading figure in the 12th-century School of Chartres.



42. Likewise in the *Tesoretto*, she describes herself as “sua [God’s] vicaria” (Latini 19).

43. Ernst Robert Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1948) 114–35.

44. “The Orphic Hymn to Nature [Physis],” ll. 25–34, trans. Thomas Taylor, quoted at Economou (n. 38) 41.

45. Bernardus Silverstris, *The Cosmographia*, trans. Winthrop Wetherbee (New York: Columbia UP, 1973) 67.

46. FA 14:839. A striking detail from this same passage connects Faust’s striving with the concept of the *daemonic*: “Nur im Unmöglichen schien es sich zu gefallen und das Mögliche mit Verachtung von sich zu stoßen” [FA 14:840], echoed by Manto’s vatic utterance: “Den lieb’ ich, der Unmögliches begehrt” [7488]. For a fuller treatment of this topic, esp. in light of more recent thought, see Angus Nicholls, *Goethe’s Concept of the Daemonic: After the Ancients* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006).

47. A line from *Poimandres* 3, “Holy are you, from whom all nature was born as image” (Brian P. Copenhaver, ed. *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation with Notes and Introduction* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992] 7), might well be the source of the most important lines in all of *Faust*: “Alles Vergängliche / Ist nur ein Gleichnis” [12104–5].