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Light, Darkness and Colours (review)

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Goethe Yearbook, Volume 17, 2010, pp. 373-374 (Review)

Published by North American Goethe Society

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/gyr.0.0047>



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mask and with contemporary engravings showing the prevalence of phrenology in the early nineteenth century. *Goethe in seiner Lebendmaske* is at its best when Hertl contextualizes the creation of Goethe's life mask. The medical imaging is interesting to look at and read about, but it is unclear what we truly gain by knowing Goethe's face was asymmetrical. Nevertheless, one can say this book provides a new way to look at Goethe.

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Henrik Boëtius, Marie Lousie Lauridsen, and Marie Louise Lefèvre. *Light, Darkness and Colours*. Brooklyn, NY: Icarus Films, 2000.

The focus of the video "Light, Darkness and Colours" is Goethe's *Farbenlehre*. Although the video in no way examines Goethe's theories in a systemic way, it does replicate many of his experiments and situates them within the context of Newton's experiments, theories of objectivity/subjectivity, and aesthetics, broadly understood. I received the video a week before I was to teach the *Farbenlehre* in a mixed graduate/advanced undergraduate class and was therefore able to try it out in the classroom. While the video has much to recommend it, I would only show parts of it in future classes. In some ways, an academic assessment of this video may be unfair. It was created for a broad European audience and not specifically for the classroom.

In the preface to his treatise on colors, Goethe tells us that ideally we would experience his work on color as a staged play: we would not content ourselves with merely reading it, but we would do the experiments and view the phenomena within nature so that we could experience the book from multiple perspectives. In many ways, the video provides such a staging. It replicates for the viewer a number of Goethe's experiments, including many of the technically more difficult ones. When I teach the *Farbenlehre*, I always have my students replicate experiments, but some are simply impossible to do without particular pieces of hard-to-get equipment or in some cases, replicas of the instruments that Goethe used. By showing us the more complex experiments, the video thus provides a much more complete view of Goethe's theory than would otherwise be possible in the normal classroom setting. For example, the various experiments that were done with a *camera obscura* were excellent and demonstrate to students the power and the functioning of this device. Similarly, the juxtaposition of Goethe's interpretation of several prism experiments against those of Newton visually displays how different the two men's approaches were to color and what was at stake for both. Newton wanted to have an objective understanding of light and color and Goethe a subjective one. These examples are an excellent way for students visually to experience what sorts of issues are at stake in Newtonian versus Goethean or quantitative versus qualitative science.

I thought the video was also very successful in its treatment of complementary colors, especially those created by colored shadows. By replicating many of Goethe's experiments that create optical illusions (e.g., the creation of complementary colors that arise in the shadows when a light shines through colored glass), the creators of the video were able to discuss issues of subjectivity and objectivity in science. Newton and his followers, for example, would dismiss these shadows as illusions and hence unworthy of discussion. These colors do, however, appear to the viewer and do so according to set principles. For Goethe, they were thus as real as other colors. Similarly, in showing the difference in

Newton's and Goethe's color spectra, the video was able to show how Goethe's understanding of colors was based upon the dynamism between light and darkness: colors would only arise in those areas in which light and shade interacted.

The video, however, has decided weaknesses and ones that would prevent me from using it—at least its entirety—ever again in the classroom. (One should note the high price of the video: \$390 to purchase; \$100 to rent.) The pacing is slow (many long, drawn-out silences), the music is overblown and hokey (new age horns and a female chorus that ah ahhs throughout), many of the visual examples are corny (close up images of flowers and fields, people walking on the beach and in parks, sunsets, butterflies, park landscapes in changing seasons, etc.), but most objectionable of all was the predominance of truisms: “colors tell us about seasons and cycles of life”; “When daylight disappears the darkness of night takes over”; “Darkness is one half of our lives . . . in the darkness we find peace and quiet”; etc. In the end, I think the overall feel of the video serves more to trivialize Goethe's text and approach to color rather than to enhance the understanding of them. (My students, who in general were very excited about the *Farbenlehre* and the experiments within it, disliked the video and even asked me why I had shown it to them.) Although they probably learned more from the video than they may have realized, it was for them a painful way to gain such knowledge. (It seems like a very long fifty-two minutes.) Were I to use the video again, I would use only selected extracts, i.e., those that replicate the experiments and leave out the more new age and romanticized aspects. It would be great if the creators of the video were to make an edited version for the classroom that would focus on the more directly pertinent parts of Goethe's theories.

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Steven Ritz-Barr and Hoku Uchiyama, *Faust*, Classics in Miniature, 2008. DVD, www.classicsinminiature.com. Home edition: \$19.90.

The connection between the Faust material and puppetry is legendary. Goethe references the puppet play in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and throughout the nineteenth century attempts were made to recreate the connection. The advent of cinema may have eclipsed the popularity of the puppet play medium. We recall that Georges Méliès, the magician turned filmmaker, produced and starred in an array of short film adaptations of Faust in the first decade of cinema, among them *Faust et Marguerite* (1897). *Der Student von Prag*, directed by Paul Wegener in 1913, one of cinema history's first feature-length films, was a version of the Faust legend. And we certainly cannot forget Murnau's silent classic, *Faust: Eine deutsche Volkssage* (1926). It was not until the Czech surrealist filmmaker Jan Svankmajer tried his hand in 1994 that puppetry and cinema were joined in adapting Faust. For Svankmajer it was an opportunity to offer critical commentary on the cultural situation in post-communist Eastern Europe. Mixing puppetry, live actors, clay animation, and stop-motion, Svankmajer artfully and humorously adapted the Faust material, particularly Marlowe and Goethe. If the fortunes of Faust across the centuries mark the arc of the concept of the modern individual, by the time we hit Svankmajer, all we are left with is a cruel Faust machine that daily pulverizes its anonymous victims.

Puppet master Steven Ritz-Barr's *Faust*, a thirty-minute “classic in miniature,” is more restrained in ambition and scope. Confining himself to a very small set