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Faust, *Classics in Miniature* (review)

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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

(over which he toiled as puppeteer for hours at a stretch) and a handful of sharply drawn marionettes, Ritz-Barr offers a reinterpretation of the Gretchen story. While snatches of Goethe's text (in the original German, English, or French) serve as intertitles, the real accomplishment of Ritz-Barr's film is to marry puppetry with the visual and musical qualities of silent film. With faces frozen in a single expression and the limited motions of their marionette limbs, the puppets nonetheless achieve a remarkable and compelling vitality. One can't help but think of Kleist's musings on "Das Marionettentheater." Searching close-ups of Gretchen, Faust, and Mephisto are astonishing for their ability to convey intense emotion. The haunting musical score by John Greaves, bass player for Henry Cow in the 1970s and avant-garde jazz composer, heightens the intimacy of the film, as does the powerful cinematography of Hoku Uchiyama.

As an adaptation, Ritz-Barr's film shows a strong affinity with Murnau's *Faust*. In both cases, we are presented with a Faust who dies with Gretchen and vanquishes Mephisto in a triumphant display of redemptive love. After a harrowing scene in which the specter of death strafes Gretchen, Faust, and their child, leaving them dead on the snowy set, the hands of the puppeteer lovingly remove the puppets from their confines and pose them in eternal embrace. The film closes on words taken from "Nacht": "Dass ich erkenne, was die Welt / Im Innersten zusammenhalt" (382–83), / "Wie alles sich zum Ganzen webt, / Eins in dem andern wirkt und lebt!" (447–48). The reassignment of these verses is a further indication of the self-imposed constraints of the miniature. Whereas the gestures of Goethe's *Faust* are expansive and reach to the far stretches of time and space, Ritz-Barr, like Murnau, zeroes in on self-sacrificing love as the linchpin of the universe. Goethe's *Faust* this is not. But as a visually and musically arresting adaptation, it's a gem.

I should add that Ritz-Barr was on hand for a screening and informative discussion of his film at the GSNA Conference in Pittsburgh in November 2008. He's an engaging and able interlocutor who delighted his scholarly audience with his practical creativity and unabashed devotion to *Faust*.

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Carsten Rohde, *Spiegeln und Schweben: Goethes autobiographisches Schreiben*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2006. 444pp.

No great surprises here: Goethe, it seems, was an autobiographical writer from beginning to end. In 444 pages Carsten Rohde makes this point and backs it up with considerable scholarship. However, much of the scholarship, with its exceedingly lengthy footnotes, is placed in the service of one digression or expansion after another that is not altogether necessary for the exploration, or even illumination, of points being made. One has the impression here of an author who is wholly devoted to Goethe, is thoroughly familiar with his works, and aims to encourage others to revel in them also. Nothing wrong with that, of course, but the book, while ostensibly seeking new insights and offering the reader a new approach to Goethe's whole oeuvre, as well as uncovering new links among the acknowledged pieces of his autobiographical writing, seems to tend towards covert biography involving excessively detailed description of the various works, rather than towards literary analysis. With this one tends to lose patience, alas! despite the book's breezy tone and eminent readability; despite the fact too that it is clearly a labor of love. Rohde writes well—of that there can be no doubt—