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Spiegeln und Schweben: Goethes autobiographisches Schreiben
(review)

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(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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Simon Richter

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—

but he falls prey to his own liking for well-turned phrases and “interesting” concepts to such an extent that he overuses them, unfortunately inducing an early satiety in the willing reader.

Having learned in the introduction, for example, that *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* belongs to those “stellvertretende Lebensläufe” (12) of the romantic writers, one soon finds oneself longing for a different formulation after encountering multiple repetitions of the phrase. The same is true of many other phrases, sometimes even used to characterize whole segments of Goethe’s life and work, when in fact they remain overlaid, unexplained, and at times inappropriate. One such phrase, for example, is the heading of the first part of the book: “Symbolisches Dasein” (29–103), whose source, revealed only much later, is to be found in a letter of 10 December 1777 to Charlotte von Stein, in which Goethe writes: “Sie wissen wie symbolisch mein daseyn ist” (73). As a result we encounter variously and repeatedly “ein symbolisches Jahr,” “symbolische Reisen,” “der symbolische Überschuß,” etc., etc.—nearly everything of the early period becomes “symbolic” in an effort to add to the impact of Rohde’s assertions, but unfortunately the opposite tends to happen, with less rather than more meaning being conveyed because of the deadening effect of undifferentiated reiteration.

Rohde aims to examine the inner links between those works that are overtly autobiographical and those that are not, beginning with the first decade in Weimar, which is where he places the origin of Goethe’s autobiographical writings. It is his contention that existing scholarship has assumed a teleological perspective based on *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and the *Italienische Reise* that leads to a misjudgment of the earlier oeuvre. He notes the lack of consensus regarding the autobiographical content of Goethe’s work as well as its first origins and sets out to offer a persuasive alternative. In his view there are four distinct phases marking out the whole oeuvre: (1) “Symbolisches Dasein,” (2) “Stellvertretende Lebensläufe,” (3) “Dichtung und Wahrheit,” and (4) “Wiederholte Spiegelungen.” Each of these phases is tied to specific works and periods as follows: (1) 1775–88: *Tagebücher*; *Briefe*; *Harzreise im Winter* [29–103]; (2) 1788–1811: *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*; “Benvenuto Cellini”; “Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert”; “Philipp Hackert”; *Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre* [107–201]; (3) 1809–17: *Dichtung und Wahrheit*; *Die italienische Reise*; “Kunst und Altertum am Rhein und Main” [205–336]; (4) 1817–32: *Tag- und Jahreshefte*; *Campagne in Frankreich*; *Belagerung von Mainz*; “Konfession des Verfassers” in *Zur Morphologie*; *Zur Naturwissenschaft überhaupt*; “Urworte. Orphisch”; “Um Mitternacht”; “Der Bräutigam”; Goethe-Schiller correspondence; the preparation of the Goethe-Zelter correspondence; *Gespräche mit Eckermann*; Biographische Einzelheiten [339–427].

But while the designated works are by and large unambiguously autobiographical, Rohde does not restrict himself to these. Rather, in each of the four phases he provides a multiplicity of short segments under headings which, while at times interesting and even arresting, permit the introduction of a great deal of other material that tends to lead repeatedly to a puncturing of the train of thought the reader believed s/he was pursuing. The immensely discursive and associative footnotes of which the author seems to be so fond merely compound the problem. Just a few examples of the segmentation process facilitated by the use of headings may perhaps help to illustrate the point: “Das Dämonische” (284–90); “Das ‘Wollen’ ist ‘der Gott der neuen Zeit’” (290–94); “*Tedium Vitae*” (294–96); “Freiheit vs. Notwendigkeit oder: Entsagung” (296–98). A similar fragmentation is

to be found throughout the book, so it is not to be wondered at that no real conclusion is reached, with the final section ("Fausts Ende, Goethes Ende," 418–27) being broken up as follows: "Faust als Prototyp der neuen gesellschaftlichen Ära" (418–21); "Fausts Tod: Wiederbringung aller und Entelechie" (421–22); "Goethes Vorstellung vom Tod" (422–23); "Die Briefe aus Dornburg 1828" (424–26), and lastly "Staunen" (426–27).

And yet it would be wrong to discourage potential readers with an interest in Goethe's autobiographical writings from taking up this book. The knowledge and scholarship it displays are considerable, while many of the questions posed or assertions made can give rise to certain stimulating reflections. It is a book, however, that is to be enjoyed with caution, a book that requires its reader to be steeped in the details of Goethe's whole oeuvre so that Rohde's often random use of Goethean sources may be accepted or rejected in terms of their true validity. Well-written, well-presented, and a pleasure to read in terms of style, the book would have benefited from a greater rigor in the structure of its task. As it is, the main questions remain unanswered and the phenomenon of Goethe's immense autobiographical output continues to need greater attention, as before.

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Werner Frick, Jochen Golz, and Edith Zehm, eds., *Goethe-Jahrbuch 2005*. Volume 122. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006. 570pp.

At the close of his stimulating article entitled "Ruine oder Monument? Goethes Lebenswerk im Spiegel seiner Gotik-Studien," Peter-Henning Haischer cites a statement by Goethe as recorded by Frédéric Soret on 17 February 1832: "mein Lebenswerk ist das eines Kollektivwesens, und dies Werk trägt den Namen Goethe" (229). The *Goethe-Jahrbuch 2005* documents a particularly productive year for the "Dombauhütte Goethe." In addition to four longer and eight shorter essays and/or documentary accounts, thirty-one informative and well-arranged book reviews, extensive reports on memorable events for the International Goethe Society in 2005 as well as listings of the previous year's activities within local and national Goethe Societies (including the GSNA), and an extensive Goethe bibliography and name index for 2004, the first two hundred pages of this yearbook record the proceedings of the May 19–20, 2005 conference in Weimar that commemorated the two hundredth anniversary of the death of Schiller. For purposes of providing some "classical" unity to what otherwise could easily become a enumeration of "Go(e)thic" incidentals, the remainder of this review will focus on the fifteen essays dealing with the conference theme, namely *Goethes Schillers—Schillers Goethe*.

The opening talk by Rainer Safranski provides an overview of the development of a friendship and working partnership in the years between Goethe's return from Italy in 1788 and Schiller's death in 1805. In "eine Annäherung, die nicht erfolgte? Die schwierigen Anfänge eines Dichterbundes," Gesa von Essen makes effective use of Erwing Goffmann's and Pierre Bourdieu's respective categories of role-playing and literary field in order to analyze the social framework that led not only to the initial tension between Goethe and Schiller, but also to their first meaningful conversations and letters in the summer of 1794, as the two writers became aware of deficiencies in their own life and creativity that the other could help to fill. This talk, in turn provides a fine supplement to Andreas Beyer's account of the reassignment of Christian Daniel Rauch's projected