International Faust Studies: Adaptation, Reception, Translation (review)

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in one monograph makes *Seeking Meaning for Goethe’s Faust* stand out as exemplary even in the wealth of *Faust* scholarship.

Additionally, van der Laan’s work participates in the analyses emphasizing the play’s irony and ambiguity rather than reading it as either a warning tale or a model of modernity. Beyond the ironies resulting from the science/technology tension, he also addresses how Faust’s endless quest to grasp order and meaning in the universe, or to know “the mind of God,” is itself ridden with irony. Faust rejects human reason and religious faith, for example, even while he assumes—believes—that he could somehow know the “unseen ultimate reality”: Faust “concludes that he is unable to know or believe anything. Paradoxically, he continues to believe that he can know, even though he has rejected both knowledge and faith. . . . Ironically, he has no faith except in the reality of a knowledge he cannot possess” (54). Van der Laan repeatedly highlights these tensions, noting also that Faust’s apparent self-assertion may be a mere shadow of his actual dependencies: “In *Faust*, the scenes following his death reveal that the great, independent, and powerful individual is not the author of his own salvation, but is rather a dependent creature, if not on God, on love and on grace. . . . It is a most unsatisfactory and unacceptable conclusion for those who claim to be in control of their lives and destinies” (149).

Finally, van der Laan outlines the ironies not only inherent in the play itself but also surrounding the two-hundred-year scholarship that posits Faust as everything from the Übermensch or model of German ingenuity to the harbinger of the technological horrors of modernity. The quest to attribute meaning to Goethe’s *Faust* itself resembles Faust’s own search and it follows similarly paradoxical and troubling paths. While “meaning” may “appear naive and benighted or worse banal and trite,” van der Laan still concludes, “Nevertheless, meaning is what *Faust* is all about. The absence of meaning is the source of Faust’s immeasurable frustration and unceasing dissatisfaction with life. . . . Even as Faust seeks meaning, we seek to give meaning to *Faust*” (160). Fulfillment of both, according to van der Laan, can come only when we recognize that “It all depends. . . .” (142). This is a fine book, one of great interest to Goethe scholars, *Faust* experts, and those seeking an introduction to the breadth of Faustian themes.

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The challenge of Goethe’s *Faust*, writes Jane K. Brown, is not its “resistance to interpretation, but rather its incorrigible responsiveness to any question posed to it” (4). Lorna Fitzsimmons quotes Brown in her introduction to underline the enduring power of Faust to resonate with people, and in turn to provoke a wide and diverse variety of responses. These range over literature, art, music, and other performance media, and across national and cultural borders. With this in mind, Fitzsimmons brings together fifteen essays by a number of well-known scholars, not only in literary fields, but performance media in a global context. The result is a stimulating survey of contemporary work in Faust studies, especially in areas that have otherwise often been neglected or marginalized. Fitzsimmons divides the essays into five broad categories.

The first part, “Anteriorities,” groups two essays that explore two neglected sources of material that contribute to *Faust*. Arnd Bohm focuses on the figure
of Alexander the Great in *Faust*, especially Goethe’s use of Hellenistic satire and medieval romance, relating these to Faust’s obsession with power and domination, a theme that also resonates with various postcolonial treatments of the Faust tradition. By contrast, Jane Curran is interested in the persistence of the puppet tradition, and how the comic figures of Hanswurst, Kasperle, and Pickelherring are surreptitiously evoked by Goethe’s use of language and byplay.

The second part, “Faust: In Context,” offers three readings. Alan Corkhill looks at both Parts I and II in terms of their use of “sound related words” and “sound images” and the way that these link Goethe’s scientific, linguistic, and philosophical preoccupations. Claudia Brodsky, on the other hand, dwells on the treatment of building and technology in Part II, taking Heidegger as her starting point. By contrast, Ehrhard Bahr focuses on Part I, tracing the conflicting concepts of the devil.

The next part, “Faust: Romantic Intertexts” looks at the transactions between Goethe and his British contemporaries. Fred Parker writes on Byron’s familiarity with and use of Goethe’s *Faust*, while Frederick Burwick surveys and discusses Coleridge’s translation of *Faust*. Both Parker and Burwick provide good summaries of the early English translations of Goethe as well as his reception.

Part four takes a dramatic turn, looking at the reception of Faust in Asia, bringing together three essays. Adrian Hsia sketches an overview of the reception of Goethe in the Middle East, Asian Subcontinent, China, and Japan, focusing on translation, and influence. He is especially interested in the problem of translation and interpretation in cultures that do not share cultural concepts. Thus for instance, while Islamic cultures have a concept of the devil and can relate Mephistopheles to the figure of Iblis, Hinduism does not, thereby fundamentally altering the relationship between Faust and the devil. Similarly in Hindi versions, Faust’s “act” (*Tat*) becomes “karma.” The next two essays bore in on specific adaptations. Thus David G. John discusses Krishna Kaimal’s adaptation of Faust into Kathakali, the highly stylized dance-narrative tradition in southwestern India. Antje Budde discusses both the adaptation of Faust in Chinese theater, and her own work with director Lin Zhaohua, and his production of Meng Jinghui’s *Bootleg Faust*.

The final part brings together essays on Faust in the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Britain. While this range seems conventional enough, the treatments seek to cast light into the neglected margins. Richard Ilgner writes on the magus tradition in Canadian novelist Robertson Davies’s *The Rebel Angels*. Paul M. Malone looks at the treatment of the Faust theme in rock musicals, especially Brian De Palma’s *The Phantom of the Paradise*, the Canadian stage musical *Starboy*, the *Randy Newman’s Faust* album, and Rudolf Volz’s *Faust: Die Rockoper*. By contrast, Gabriele Becheri treats the opera *Faust. Un Travestimento (Faust. A Disguise)*, based on a libretto by Edoardo Sanguineti and music by Luca Lombardi. Katharina Keim looks at the appropriation of Faust from a postcolonial perspective, first tracing Faustian links with colonial themes of domination, then discussing Bahian director Mircio Meirelles’ adaptation, *Fausto Zero*, and South African William Kentridge’s *Faustus in Africa!*, a production that uses Faust to critique colonialism. It also plays on the origins of the tradition by its use of puppets. The book concludes with Bree Hadley’s essay on British playwright Mark Ravenhill’s *Faust is Dead*. Ravenhill, an exponent of the so called “in-yer-face theatre,” offers an ambivalent postmodernist response that links Faust with themes drawn from
Baudrillard and Foucault and the question of commitment in a postmodern world.

Lorna Fitzsimmon’s *International Faust Studies* vividly illustrates the enduring legacy and the seminal qualities of Goethe’s *Faust*, a reminder that it truly represents a work of world literature, resonating far beyond the canonical boundaries of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German literature. The essays are well written, sophisticated without becoming opaque. The volume as a whole is well put together and supplied with an excellent index. This collection of essays is a refreshing and valuable contribution to Faust studies.

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The pages of Jill Anne Kowalik’s posthumous *Theology and Dehumanization* swim in grief. Afloat with the mourning rituals of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Germany, the book sketches a rising tide of unresolved grief, its waters teeming with repressed affect, rage, and trauma. The editors’ preface—co-authored by Gail Hart, Ursula Mahlendorf, and Thomas P. Saine—reminds us that Kowalik refused “to evade the personal issues her research raised and she used the intellectual task she set for herself to confront her own traumatic illness, the knowledge and fear of her own impending death, and her grief” (9). One senses that the editors too adroitly used this intellectual task to do their own mourning work. They have had to navigate treacherous waters, creating a scholarly monograph *cum memoria*.

In *Theology and Dehumanization*, lead editor Hart and her collaborators—Ursula Mahlendorf, Thomas P. Saine, and Hans Medick—have gathered nine essays authored by Kowalik over some fifteen years. Four have appeared previously as journal articles, two in these pages. The first introduces the book Kowalik had planned to write had she but world and time enough, a work which would have included a final chapter on “the meaning of dehumanization” intended to “clarify the impact of early modern forms of grief on the development of modern pathologies” (22). The editorial preface elucidates, “the finished work as she visualized it would have encompassed the loss and grieving of all the centuries from Homer to the Vietnam War” (11). While that goal ultimately eluded Kowalik, the eight subsequent chapters suggest the quality of what has been lost with her death.

Varied in length and polish, the essays range ambitiously: from Achilles’s rage at Patroclus’s death (in chapter two) to twentieth-century German scholars’ “profoundly judgmental approach to emotional experience” (117). Tracing a genealogy of grief beginning with Homer, Kowalik asks how Paul’s frequently cited suggestion in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14—grief may be remedied by the belief in resurrection—came to entail its proscription altogether. Grief, Kowalik argues, was not banned by Augustine, nor with Luther. Instead, it was outlawed in the seventeenth century, although not by Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (52–54). Grief’s “demonization,” Kowalik argues, was a particularly German phenomenon, one bound inextricably with the intense and prolonged reception of Johann Arndt’s bestselling *Vier Bücher vom wabren Christentum* (1606–).  Pietism, and particularly Francke, Kowalik’s argument continues, bears responsibility for a host of