ENGLISH RESPONSE TO GOETHE, 1824-1865

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, concerned with critical response and not with influence, examines British opinions of Goethe's works and life as expressed in review articles, prefaces to translations, creative works, memoirs and correspondence, and biographical studies. The period is divided into two sections, before and after 1845, and in each section there is one chapter on a Goethe-critic of outstanding importance (Carlyle and G.H.Lewes, respectively), followed by two chapters on the general critical response. The aim is to discover types of response to Goethe and to show how they are related to each other.

Chapter one examines the successive stages of Carlyle's intellectual relationship to Goethe, and shows the unbalanced and essentially transient nature of his adherence. Chapters two and three deal respectively with reception of individual works by Goethe and with more general opinions, showing a rapid increase in the interest and respect inspired by Goethe in Britain, but also a strong distrust in many quarters, normally centred on the moral deficiencies of Goethe's works and life. Chapter four studies in detail G.H.Lewes's intellectual development up to the 1850s, and connects the various features of his biography of Goethe (1855) with other aspects of his thought. Chapters five and six consider separately negative and positive attitudes to Goethe from 1846 to 1865. Moralistic distrust persists among an older generation of critics, but the general tendency is more towards adverse criticism on artistic grounds and unworried pity for an incomplete moral character, or appreciation of the freshness and healthiness of Goethe's art and an admiration of the breadth of his wisdom which stops short of the messianic claims for Goethe as a potential moral and religious leader made by Carlyle and a few others inspired by Carlyle.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

Letters - Collected letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle - see ch.1, note 2.

Essays - Carlyle's Critical and miscellaneous essays, Centenary edition - see ch.1, note 37.

Essays and tales - Essays and tales, by John Sterling, ed. J.C. Hare - see ch.3, note 6.

Life - G.H. Lewes's Life of Goethe - see ch.4, note 9.

P.M.L.A. - Publications of the Modern Language Association of America.

PREFACE

The research for this thesis was done in the Bodleian and Taylorian Institute libraries, Oxford, Manchester Public Library, Edinburgh University Library and the National Library of Scotland, Dr.Williams's Library, London, the British Library Reference Division, and the British Libr ary Newspapers Division at Co lindale. I am grateful to the staffs of all of these libraries. I would like to thank Dr.Ian Campbell of Edinburgh University for useful suggestions at an early stage of my research, and Dr.Rosemary Ashton of Unìversity College, London, in general for lively and stimulating discussion of the subject, and in particular for allowing me to see photocopies of sections of her book The German idea before its publication. My thanks are above all due to my supervisor, Dr.Stephen Gill of Lincoln College, Oxford, for his unfailingly helpful and commonsensical guidance.

Introduction

This is a reception study and not an influence study. The texts I am primarily concerned with are writings and remarks that are explicitly about Goethe, and the relationships I try to establish are relationships among readers of Goethe rather than between them and him. The bulk of the material can be loosely classified as either literary criticism or biographical commentary, and comes in various forms, from isolated comments in letters or journals, through references to or representations of Goethe in works of creative literature, prefaces to translations, and review articles short and long, to a book-length critical biography. It is obvious enough what the fruits of such a study are. In particular, it simply gives a comprehensive picture of what British attitudes to Goethe were from the 1820s to the 1860s, how the general tone changed over that period, what common types of response can be identified, and how some opinions influenced others. More generally, the critical response to a recent author of great stature reveals much about what was expected of art and the artist in the nineteenth century, and how different sorts of expectation were related to each other. The greater the artist under examination, the weightier are the questions he raises. Goethe's reputation as a literary genius of the very highest order, to be placed alongside Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare, began in Germany during his lifetime, and spread rapidly, though by no means universally concurred in anywhere or at any time. There are also a number of ancillary reasons why nineteenth-century responses to Goethe are particularly interesting and revealing. A large amount of biographical information about him was available from an early stage. His literary output and his own statements about himself and his art are of a distinctively complex and teasing kind, revealing much but leaving much

to be guessed. He held no set of beliefs, religious or otherwise, which can be readily defined by reference to traditions external to himself. Above all, perhaps, his life and works present a spectacle of success, of continually renewed achievement and positive evolution, right up to his death at the age of eighty-two, and this in a life-span that covers a period of profound upheaval in western civilization. Hollow and dubious though this success has appeared to many, it is there as a challenge or inspiration to his readers, and the challenge was a particularly significant one to those readers who followed shortly after his own time.

Of other writings with a bearing on English response to Goethe in this period, the only ones that relate at all closely to this study are those of Jean-Marie Carré and Rosemary Ashton. Carré's Goethe en Angleterre, published in 1920, is a combination of influence study and reception study covering the period 1780 to 1855. At its centre is a long and very impressive analysis of Carlyle's relation to Goethe, and it is partly because of the existence of this study that my own remarks about Carlyle and Goethe are brief in relation to the magnitude of the subject. In the other parts of the book where Carré's period overlaps with mine, however, much space is taken by consideration of Goethe's literary influence, and the sections about periodical reviews and about Lewes's Life of Goethe (apart from the fact that Carré was without such aids to scholarship as the Wellesley index to Victorian periodicals and Morgan and Hohlfeld's German literature in British magazines 1750-1860) are too short to give more than a superficial treatment. Carré has also, in my view, a tendency to over-simplify by looking for a progress towards better and better comprehension of Goethe in England rather than following the complex patterns of different kinds

of partial interpretation and judgement. Rosemary Ashton's doctoral thesis The reception of German literature in England from the founding of Blackwood's Magazine (1817) to the time of Carlyle and his disciples (1975) does overlap with the early part of my period, and her book The German idea: four English writers [Coleridge, Carlyle, G.H. Lewes, and George Eliot] and the reception of German thought 1800-1860, published in 1980, overlaps still further. Both, however, though they necessarily deal with English response to Goethe, are centrally concerned with the absorption of the recent German literature in all its variety into English culture of the nineteenth century, and this is not only a broader subject than the English critical debate about Goethe, but essentially a different kind of subject. I refer many times to Carré and to Ashton in my text, and fully acknowledge my debt to these and to other critical studies. It is the combination of concentration on the figure of Goethe and a comprehensive coverage of both major and minor writers that makes this thesis different from other work on related subjects.

Some oddities in the way I have allocated space to the different parts of my subject ought to be explained. The two most important British critics of Goethe in the nineteenth century, both for the volume of criticism they produced and for the extent to which their criticisms were read and absorbed by others, were Carlyle and G.H. Lewes, and this study naturally devotes a closer attention to the respective involvements of these two with Goethe - in particular, putting their writings about Goethe in the context of their general intellectual development - than to that of any of the other writers discussed. Carlyle and Lewes are my central points of reference, and I frequently link the statements of other critics to features of Carlyle's essays and Lewes's biography,

speaking either of direct influence or antithetical reaction or of looser kinds of affinity or significant contrast. There is much that is interesting, also, in the relationship between Carlyle and Lewes as critics of Goethe, a relationship which is far less a matter of clear-cut contrast than has often been assumed. The reasons why my chapter on Lewes is much longer than that on Carlyle should be obvious enough, despite the fact that the latter is clearly a figure of incomparably more intrinsic magnitude than the former. Not only has more work been done on Carlyle's interpretations of Goethe - by Carré, by Ashton, and particularly also by C.F. Harrold in his Carlyle and German thought (1934) - than on Lewes's, but more generally, Carlyle's characteristics and preoccupations have been widely discussed in a way Lewes's have not. More striking, perhaps, is my relative neglect of Matthew Arnold, who by virtue both of his complex and frequently evidenced interest in Goethe and of his general stature as a Victorian critic must be a significant figure in any study of English reactions to Goethe in this period. My brief remarks about Arnold present his key statements about Goethe in poetry and prose, and their chief aim is to suggest the ways in which those statements can be related to such other types of opinion and interest as I have established. The principal reason for their brevity is limitation of space - a full and detailed examination of Arnold's relation to Goethe simply could not have been fitted in with all the rest. Another difficulty with Arnold is that he could not be introduced on the same footing as Carlyle and Lewes - frequently though he mentioned Goethe, he positively refrained from stepping forward as an authority on Goethe and seeking to modify public opinion about him as Carlyle and Lewes did. A study of Arnold and Goethe points more interestingly towards an understanding

of Arnold than towards an understanding of English response to Goethe, and fortunately an excellent study with such an orientation has recently appeared, James Simpson's Matthew Arnold and Goethe (1979), to which I happily refer those who wish to know more.

1824 was the year when the first instalment of Carlyle's Wilhelm Meister was published, a highly significant date in relation to English reception of Goethe. 1865 was the year Palmerston died, and my only justification for using it as a closing date is that it facilitates a convenient division into two periods of approximately twenty years each.

Chapter One

CARLYLE AND GOETHE

Dean Stanley reports Carlyle as saying to him, in the autumn of 1876, "The first book that made me desire to know German was Madame de Staël's 'Allemagne.' She did not make it clear what it was that she thought so important in Germany, but she made me feel that there had been something which would solve all the questions with which I was tormented".[1] Carlyle's retrospective comments on his involvement with German literature are often misleading. This statement, however (irrespective of whether it assigns too much, or too little, importance to the influence of Madame de Staël's book), is accurate and revealing in the picture it gives of how, at the outset, Carlyle approached the Germans. German culture is a vague entity, infinitely promising but indistinct, a 'new Heaven and new Earth', as Carlyle spoke of it in a letter to Thomas Murray.[2] It is Carlyle's questions, and the torment they occasion, that are sharply focused and in the foreground. So, essentially, the case remained, even after Carlyle had learnt the language and made a detailed and wide-ranging study of German writers. The result of this kind of approach to a foreign literature is, almost necessarily, misinterpretation. Carlyle in fact succeeded, or thought he had, in finding the answers he required in Kant, Fichte, Novalis,

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1. A.A. Adrian, "Dean Stanley's report of conversations with Carlyle," Victorian Studies, i (1957-1958), p.73.

2. "TC to Thomas Murray," 4 August 1820, The collected letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, general editor C.R. Sanders (Durham, North Carolina: Duke Univ. Press, 1970-), i. 268. These volumes are hereafter referred to as Letters.

Schiller, and above all Goethe, but the questions, and hence in some sense the answers also, had been framed not by these writers but by Carlyle himself. The more important a German writer is to Carlyle, and the nearer his life and writings seem to Carlyle's central concerns, the more likely that writer is to be distorted and re-formed. The likelihood is increased if there is a combination of closeness in some respects with remoteness in others - Carlyle's excitement at discovering the former tends to blind him to the existence of the latter. Goethe is, as Carlyle sees him, 'my near neighbour',[3] but he is also, in Leslie Stephen's words, 'diametrically opposed to him in many ways'[4] (ways of which Carlyle himself is never more than partially aware). The view Carlyle forms and presents of Goethe, of his life as well as his works, is accordingly a heavily distorted one.

Carlyle's reference to Goethe as his 'near neighbour' is part of a statement of the community of spirit he feels with the Hebrew scriptures; apart from Goethe, it is these Hebrew prophets, with their 'Earnestness of Soul', who speak most powerfully to him. Carlyle could not have highlighted more clearly the dubiousness and partiality of his near neighbourhood to Goethe. Carlyle is, in Matthew Arnold's terms, predominantly a Hebraic type, Goethe a Hellenic,[5] and Carlyle's failure to see clearly this fundamental difference accounts in large measure for the distorted view of Goethe he presents. The unbalanced character of Carlyle's appreciation of Goethe has been commented on by many writers,

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3. "TC to John A. Carlyle," 2 December 1832, Letters, vi. 271.

4. L. Stephen, "The importation of German," in his Studies of a biographer, 4 vols. (2 series) (1898, 1902), ii.71.

5. See A.A. Ikeler, Puritan temper and transcendental faith: Carlyle's literary vision (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1972), p.201.

and very well treated in particular by Jean-Marie Carré[6] and Charles Frederick Harrold.[7] Carlyle's idea of Goethe, however, made public in a number of articles and in statements about Goethe throughout his writings, was one well calculated to arouse interest in English readers, though there were very few who failed to notice that (to use Arnoldian terms again) Carlyle was not seeing the object as in itself it really was. Rosemary Ashton is undoubtedly right to oppose, in her recent studies,[8] the popular view, enthusiastically propagated in the first place by Carlyle himself, that Carlyle was the only introducer and advocate of German literature in England in the early nineteenth century who was remotely competent for the task. It is nevertheless true that Carlyle occupies a dominant position among interpreters of Goethe in nineteenth-century England, and he occupies that position to a large extent because he failed to understand Goethe properly, because his reading of him was directed throughout by his own pre-occupations, and because he consequently presented to the British public a hebraised Goethe, an apostle of work and duty, a struggler and strenuous renunciant.

Earlier, Coleridge had approached modern German literature with expectations similar to the young Carlyle's. Like Carlyle, Coleridge felt the inadequacy of eighteenth-century empiricist thinking, and turned to German culture for a more satisfactory account of the world;

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6. J.-M. Carré, Goethe en Angleterre (Paris, 1920), pp.101-187.
7. C.F. Harrold, Carlyle and German thought: 1819-1834 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale Univ. Press, 1934), passim.
8. R.D. Ashton, "Carlyle's apprenticeship: his early German criticism and his relationship with Goethe (1822-1832)," Modern Language Review, lxxi (1976), pp.1-18. See also her The reception of German literature in England from the founding of Blackwood's Magazine (1817) to the time of Carlyle and his disciples, Ph.D. thesis presented to Cambridge Univ. (1975), and The German idea: four English writers [Coleridge, Carlyle, G.H. Lewes, and George Eliot] and the reception of German thought 1800-1860 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980).

like Carlyle, he expected the Germans to answer vital questions for him.[9] Coleridge, however, found his answers primarily in the German metaphysical philosophers, particularly in Kant and Schelling. He did also read widely in German imaginative literature, but his opinion of Goethe, as reported by Henry Crabb Robinson, indicates clearly enough why Goethe could never have occupied the central position for him that he did for Carlyle: 'He conceded to Goethe universal talent, but felt a want of moral life to be the defect of his poetry.'[10] Coleridge is certainly significant as an importer of German ideas into England, but his German studies led to nothing resembling the clear, easily digested, apparently coherent philosophy of life which Carlyle constructed with Goethe as his chief helper. The same is true of De Quincey, another student of German literature, and of German metaphysical philosophy, who granted Goethe some artistic talent but denied him all moral qualities, both as a man and as a writer.[11] The history of English attitudes to German literature prior to Carlyle can be found in Carré's book and Jaeck's,[12] in the statistical survey edited by B.Q. Morgan and A.R. Hohlfeld,[13] and in Rosemary Ashton's thesis and book.[14] The pattern, as far as Goethe is concerned (and English attitudes to Goethe run loosely parallel to English attitudes

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9. See Harrold, pp.50-54.

10. Diary, reminiscences, and correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson, ed. T. Sadler, 3rd ed., 2 vols. (1872), i. 160. See also E.G. Jaeck, Madame de Staël and the spread of German literature (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1915), pp.151-162.

11. See Jaeck, pp.168-171. See also ch.2, pp.68-71, below.

12. See notes 6 and 10, above.

13. B.Q. Morgan and A.R. Hohlfeld (eds.), German literature in British magazines 1750-1860 (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1949).

14. See note 8, above.

to German literature in general), is one of instant and enormous celebrity, occasioned by the great popular success of Werther, followed by a violent reaction, in the years around 1800, against his supposed immorality and atheism, a reaction led by the Conservative review The Antijacobin, and then a slow and unsteady return to limited favour in the late 1810s and early 1820s. Early positive response to Goethe in England falls broadly, as R.M. Lovett expresses it,[15] into three categories - the original, and ephemeral, adoration of Werther; the imaginative sympathy among certain of the romantics, specifically Byron and Shelley, for the first part of Faust and some of Goethe's lyrics; and the discovery of solid worth in Goethe, centred around the study of Wilhelm Meister and headed by Carlyle.

It is difficult to realise fully the remoteness of Goethe, and the rest of German literature, from the British reading public in the early nineteenth century. Only exceptionally was German taught in schools or universities, and a knowledge of the language was only to be acquired through special circumstances such as residence in the country, or through individual industry and persistence. At the time when Carlyle was announcing the importance of Goethe, in the 1820s and early 1830s, English translations of Goethe's works were very scarce, and the translations that did exist were mostly inaccurate and incomplete. Goethe was, of course, alive and writing until 1832, the corpus of his works unfinished. It was not until 1848 that Bohn's Standard Library started to publish an authoritative and mostly very well translated complete works of Goethe. Taking as an example the first part of Faust,

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15. R.M. Lovett, "Goethe in English literature," The Open Court, xlvi (1932), pp.217-233.

the most frequently translated of Goethe's works, the first remotely adequate presentation in English of the whole work was Abraham Hayward's prose translation of 1833.[16] Previously, extracts had been translated in periodical articles[17] or in other forms of publication,[18] but the only pretence at a complete translation was that by Lord Francis Gower in 1823,[19] whose many and gross inaccuracies are exposed in Hayward's preface to his own translation (pp.x-liii). Even Die Leiden des jungen Werthers, despite its immense popularity in the 1780s, was first properly translated into English in 1854, by R.D. Boylan.[20] The translation most used during the work's vogue was made from the incomplete French version of 'C. Aubry'.[21] As an evangelist, therefore, Carlyle was very well placed. He was writing, with an urgency and enthusiasm unlike anything shown by previous British commentators on Goethe, to a public the majority of whose acquaintance with the subject must have been extremely slight compared to his own.

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16. Faust: a dramatic poem (Pt.1), 'translated into English prose...by the translator of Savigny's "Of the vocation of our age..." ' (1833). For more information about translations of Goethe, see B.Q. Morgan, A critical bibliography of German literature in English translation 1481-1927, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1938).

17. e.g. J. Anster, "The Faustus of Goethe," Blackwood's Magazine, vii (1820), pp.235-258.

18. e.g. Faustus (Pt.1), 'from the German of Goethe' (1821). This is the volume reviewed by Carlyle in his first article on Goethe. Its introduction (p.vii) describes it as an 'abstract' of Faust, meant to accompany Retzch's famous Outlines.

19. Faust: a drama (Pt.1), with Schiller's "Song of the bell", translated into English verse by Lord F.L. Gower (1823).

20. In Novels and tales, by Goethe (Bohn's Standard Library), mostly translated by R.D. Boylan (1854).

21. The sorrows of Werter [sic], translated by R. Graves, from the French of 'C. Aubry', 2 vols. (1779).

His translation of Wilhelm Meister was not merely the best but the only one until 1855. It is a competent and faithful translation, but the character of the translator necessarily modifies the text to some extent, as I shall show later,[22] and it was Carlyle's Wilhelm Meister that the majority of English readers in the nineteenth century would know if they knew the work at all. By the time good translations of Goethe were widely available, Carlyle's individualistic interpretation had already made its impact. It was that interpretation, indeed, that had partly created the climate in which the new translations could flourish, even if his personal importance was not as great as he implies when writing to Eckermann in 1834, pointing at the appearance of three new translations of Faust in the past year as evidence that 'my task in that direction, so far as it was my task, may be considered amply done'.[23]

I have no wish to prolong the life of the myth attacked by Rosemary Ashton.[24] The point I am making is a different one - not that Carlyle was Britain's first able interpreter of Goethe, but that he exercised a greater influence on British conceptions of Goethe in the Victorian period than any other writer. George Henry Lewes's writings about Goethe have been regarded as having provided a much-needed balanced appraisal, a correcting of the imbalance created by the distorted view of Goethe that Carlyle presented.[25] This is undoubtedly a sound characterisation

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22. See p. 38 , below.

23. "TC to Johann Peter Eckermann," 6 May 1834, Letters, vii. 143.

24. See p. 8 , above.

25. Carré, pp.260-275; Ashton, "Carlyle's apprenticeship," p.18; S. Howe, Wilhelm Meister and his English kinsmen: apprentices to life (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1930), p.91.

of Lewes's achievement, but it is nevertheless true that Lewes's presentation of Goethe is very heavily influenced by Carlyle. The emphasis he places on Goethe's capacity for and dedication to work is only one obvious instance of the tenacity of Carlylean dogma in the area of Goethe study. The dogma was, of course, tenacious in all areas. Carlyle's influence within the Victorian period was enormous, and whether accepted or rejected, he was unavoidably present to Victorian thinkers, as George Eliot's famous remark indicates: 'there is hardly a superior or active mind of this generation that has not been modified by Carlyle's writings; there has hardly been an English book written for the last ten or twelve years that would not have been different if Carlyle had not lived'.[26] Part of the reason for the power of this influence was that Carlyle explicitly dealt in his writings, and with at least the appearance of strength and authority, with one of the outstanding problems of his age, the problem of finding an alternative to scepticism, a world-view which could accommodate the religious instinct in man but which could dispense with worn-out and unacceptable religious dogma. All Carlyle's doctrines, metaphysical, ethical, and social, start from this problem, and have their roots in the well-documented crisis of faith he passed through between 1815 and 1825. It is because Goethe became so important to Carlyle in this crisis, because he became part of the way Carlyle tackled the problem, that Carlyle created for Goethe a prominence in English letters that he could not otherwise have gained at that time.

Carlyle's crisis of faith and his learning of German are intimately connected. The period between his leaving Edinburgh University in 1814

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26. G. Eliot, review of Passages selected from the writings of Thomas Carlyle, ed. T. Ballantyne, The Leader, vi (1855), p.1035; reprinted in Essays of George Eliot, ed. T. Pinney (1963), pp.213-214.

and his marriage to Jane Welsh in 1826 was one of unrest and uncertainty, and frequently of illness, misery, and a hypochondria that heightened both. In 1817 he finally gave up any intention of joining the ministry. He earned money by teaching (which he hated), tutoring, and writing and translating for the periodicals or for Brewster's Edinburgh Encyclopaedia. He was reading Madame de Staël's L'Allemagne in 1817,[27] and by 1819 he was keen to pick up a 'slight [tinc]ture of the German language' from Robert Jardine, a private pupil / tutor to whom he was in turn imparting some tincture of the French.[28] In a letter to Goethe of 1829, Carlyle refers to his short-lived interest in mineralogy as the cause of his desire to learn German (he wanted to read Werner's works on this subject in the original),[29] but there is little doubt that the energy with which he worked at the language was principally produced by his belief that German literature might supply the answers to the agonising questions of his sceptical period. Carlyle's linguistic powers were exceptional, his capacity for concentrated study still more so. The German lessons with Robert Jardine are first mentioned in February 1819. By the end of March he is reading a play by Kotzebue with a dictionary.[30] By the winter of 1820 he is translating a portion of Schiller's Thirty-years war,[31] and the Faust article of spring 1822, with its linguistic criticisms of the translated extracts he is reviewing, shows a command of the language that enables him to understand, interpret, and translate the literature

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27. "TC to James Johnston," 25 September 1817, Letters, i. 109.

28. "TC to Robert Mitchell," 15 February 1819, Letters, i. 160.

29. "TC to Goethe," 3 November 1829, Letters, v. 28.

30. "TC to Alexander Carlyle," 29 March 1819, Letters, i. 173.

31. "TC to Alexander Carlyle," 23 December 1820, Letters, i. 299.

with little difficulty. In autumn of 1821 he began to teach German to Jane Welsh. By the time he started translating Wilhelm Meister, in spring 1823, the worst of his youthful struggles were over, and he was fast gaining confidence, encouraged both by the practical wisdom he was learning from that book and by his developing romance with Jane Welsh.

Goethe, and German literature as a whole, helped Carlyle in two very important ways. In the latter part of his long and agonising crisis of faith, the Germans not only helped him overcome the torments of doubt and formulate a new set of beliefs and principles, but also gave him something to do. That is, they both taught him the value of work and provided him with work. Carlyle's description, in his Reminiscences, of his response to a first complete reading of Wilhelm Meister, shows both aspects of his indebtedness to that novel at an early stage; he walked out in the streets of Edinburgh, saying to himself:

> "Grand, surely, harmoniously built together, far-seeing, wise and true: when, for many years, or almost in my life before, have I read such a Book?" Which I was now, really in part as a kind of duty, conscientiously translating for my countrymen, if they would read it. (32)

Carlyle's translations of and essays on German literature form a bridge between his early hack-work for Brewster's Encyclopaedia and the beginnings of his original writing; like Scott's translating of Götz von Berlichingen (which he mentions in his first large-scale essay

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32. Carlyle, Reminiscences, ed. C.E. Norton, 2 vols. (1887), ii. 115 ("Edward Irving").

on Goethe),[33] Carlyle's German work was partly a way into a full literary career. The essays, particularly those on Goethe, accordingly have a mixed character. In them Carlyle is partly a conscientious mediator, introducing German literature to the British public and providing the competent appraisal which he believes has so far been wanting, but partly also he is (as G.B. Tennyson[34] and A.J. La Valley[35] have shown) an apprentice creative writer trying his literary powers in the form of the review article and preparing for the time when he will be able to write his own literature. There is more of personal involvement in these writings than is normally found in literary criticism. In the essays on Goethe, the personal importance Goethe had for Carlyle is always present behind his statements about the importance of Goethe to the age. It is because Carlyle both wanted the job of writing about Goethe (since he felt it was his duty and since it was a suitable form of work for an early stage of his literary career), and was inclined to use that job as a means of preliminary and partial self-expression, that his contribution to British thought about Goethe was such an influential and distinctive one.

Three statements about Goethe (which I shall use as headings), all made in the 1830s and hence long after the crucial period of Goethe's influence on him, show different aspects of Carlyle's relation to

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33. All references to Carlyle's works (except to such as are not included in that edition) are to The works of Thomas Carlyle, ed. H.D. Traill, Centenary edition, 30 vols. (1896-1899). In that edition, this "Goethe" essay is prefixed to vol. i of Wilhelm Meister (the reference here is to p.15). The essay first appeared in 1827, as the biographical introduction to Carlyle's translation of Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre in his German romance, and I shall hereafter refer to it as the 1827 "Goethe" essay.

34. G.B. Tennyson, Sartor called Resartus (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965).

35. A.J. La Valley, Carlyle and the idea of the modern (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1968).

Goethe. The first is from a letter to John Sterling, written in 1837: 'the sight of such a man was to me a Gospel of Gospels, and did literally I believe save me from destruction outward and inward'.[36] Carlyle is trying to persuade Sterling to be more sympathetic to Goethe, and in this effort he exaggerates the importance of the part played by Goethe in his recovery from the torments of unbelief. Nevertheless, the assertion is there, strengthened by the melodramatic 'literally' and hinting at a part of the developing doctrine of Heroes. Goethe (the man rather than his works) is presented as a personal saviour to Carlyle, a man whose life expresses divine truth and comfort, and who can save others, Sterling included, who suffer as Carlyle did from the peculiar torments of the age. The second statement is a public one, part of Carlyle's highly rhetorical article on the death of Goethe. He says of Goethe's Works, 'The corner-stone of a new social edifice for mankind is laid there; firmly, as before, on the natural rock'.[37] Again, the context leads to an inflated claim, the largest Carlyle ever made for Goethe. Goethe is of central importance not only in the personal struggle for belief but also in the parallel struggle for Palingenesia or new-birth of society, which at this time (1832) has just been elaborated in Sartor Resartus and is becoming a more and more central pre-occupation in Carlyle's writing. The third statement, however, made in the following year in a letter to his brother, shows Carlyle's increasing awareness that in fact there is little, in a direct or tangible way,

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36. "TC to John Sterling," 25 December 1837, Letters, ix.381.

37. "Death of Goethe," New Monthly Magazine, xxxiv (1832), p.511; also in Critical and miscellaneous essays (Centenary edition), ii. 381. These volumes of the Centenary edition are hereafter referred to as Essays.

that Goethe can do for society, or for the individual once he has conquered his doubts and is looking for real work. Carlyle is suggesting that in these days art must give way to prophecy, and as an artist Goethe too must be brushed aside: 'What was the great Goethe himself? The greatest of contemporary men; who however is not to have any follower & should not have any'.[38]

'the sight of such a man was to me a Gospel of Gospels, and did literally I believe save me from destruction outward and inward.'

Carlyle's own intense experience of a young man's loss of childhood belief and restless searching for a way in life gave him a picture of an archetypal modern man's progress through life which remained a central element in his thinking. In his first essay on Goethe, in 1821, he writes about Faust as a work conceived 'while its author was passing from youth to settled manhood, - a period of inquietude in every life, - frequently, as in his case, of a darkness and despondency but too well suited to furnish ideas for such a work'.[39] In his late works, not only in Reminiscences but in Frederick the Great also, he continues to write about this vital period of 'apprenticeship'[40] (the term, of course, along with many of Carlyle's ideas on the subject, is brought over from Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre). As G.B.

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38. "TC to John A. Carlyle," 1 October 1833, Letters, vii. 9.

39. "Faustus: from the German of Goethe," New Edinburgh Review, ii (1822), p.318.

40. Reminiscences, ii. 179 ("Edward Irving"); History of Frederick the Great, ii. 100, iii. 158.

Tennyson points out,[41] Carlyle's biographies - most obviously the Life of Schiller and the Life of Sterling - always follow the same pattern. The hero, especially if he is an intelligent modern man, is bound to pass through this painful and dangerous period, what Keats called the Chamber of Maiden-thought, and the quality of his life will depend on whether he finds an acceptable way out into proper manhood, without falling into unbelief or, like Coleridge as presented in the Life of Sterling, accepting a false solution.[42] In the Life of Sterling (1851), Carlyle emphasises the special difficulties offered by the present time in this respect - 'No fixed highway more; the old spiritual highways and recognised paths to the Eternal, now all torn-up and flung in heaps'.[43] These are the problems of an age that is too conscious, the present age as Carlyle portrays it in "Characteristics".[44] The apprenticeship stage, and especially the struggle between belief and doubt which is central to that stage, becomes doubly important to Carlyle because it is not only a vital stage for every intelligent young man, but also symbolic of the general predicament of the age, an age which has lost its old, secure beliefs and needs the stability that could be found in genuine new beliefs. The apprentice of early nineteenth-century Europe is hampered and tormented by the restlessness and unhealthy self-consciousness which are incident both to that stage in a man's life and to a particular stage in the progress of society.

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41. Tennyson, p.88.

42. The life of John Sterling, p.60.

43. Ibid., p.96.

44. "Characteristics," Edinburgh Review, liv (1831), pp.351-383; Essays, iii. 1-43.

The importance of Goethe in Carlyle's own grim struggle for maturity and mature belief should not be overstated. As Teufelsdröckh says in Sartor Resartus, "the fearful Unbelief is unbelief in yourself".[45] It is after the "Baphometic Fire-baptism" in the Rue Saint-Thomas de l'Enfer, the counterpart of Carlyle's famous experience in Leith Walk, Edinburgh in (probably) August 1822,[46] that Teufelsdröckh begins to be a man,[47] and that experience, the most intense and the most crucial in his fictional presentation of his own apprenticeship, is a matter of the young man gaining, unaided from without, a belief in his own powers which will take him triumphantly through the struggle for maturity. He does need help from outside - and it is Goethe and the other Germans who mostly provide it - to formulate a set of beliefs which will substantiate and secure the strong but vague positive attitude to life which he has gained in the Leith Walk episode.[48] It is because Goethe performs this function so well for him (and at the right time), both supporting his new hopefulness and offering the rudiments of a new evangel for him to build on, that Carlyle credits him with saving his life and sanity, though in fact both were probably adequately protected by the defiance generated in the Baphometic Fire-baptism.

Goethe helps Carlyle in two ways. Firstly, he presents the spectacle, in both works and life, of a modern genius who has survived romantic discontent and the torments of unbelief and found his own way

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45. Sartor Resartus, p.132 ("The Everlasting No").

46. See J.A. Froude, Thomas Carlyle: a history of the first forty years of his life 1795-1835, 2 vols. (1882), i.101. Froude dates this experience June 1821, but the chronology prefixed to vol. i of Letters (p.lx) gives the later date.

47. Sartor Resartus, p.135 ("The Everlasting No").

48. See H. Plagens, Carlyles Weg zu Goethe (Berlin, 1938), p.9. Plagens considers in detail the relation between the Leith Walk experience and the formation of Carlyle's new beliefs. See also Carré, p.110.

in life, continuing to develop positively; a testimony that genius and continuity are after all not mutually exclusive in the modern world. This is why the sight of him is a Gospel of Gospels; he is Christ-like to Carlyle,[49] the Way, the Truth, and the Life, because in what he has said and done he communicates a divine message of hope to modern man. It is only after a while, however, when Goethe begins to be fitted into new developments in Carlyle's thought - the doctrine of heroes, the Phoenix theory of history, the mainly Fichtean notion of the genius as a Seer in touch with the divine idea of the world, Novalis's view of man as the revelation of the divine - that he acquires these grandiose properties in full. Carlyle's hero-worship starts with a feeling of community of spirit - Goethe has 'travelled the steep rocky road before me, - the first of the moderns.'[50] He 'seems to understand many of my own aberrations'.[51] His 'works have been a mirror to me'.[52] In short, he seems to have passed through all that Carlyle is passing through at the beginning of their acquaintance, and if there has been a way through for Goethe there must be one for Carlyle also. Secondly, Goethe, a naturally epigrammatic writer whose wisdom is often expressed in brief and seemingly incidental remarks or suggestions, provides Carlyle with several pregnant utterances of a kind which, throughout his writing career, he delighted in interpreting and expanding. As C.F. Harrold points out, Carlyle had a mental

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49. See E.M. Behnken, Thomas Carlyle: "Calvinist without the theology" (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1978), p.51, for a discussion of Goethe's significance to Carlyle as a holy man, model, and mediator with the divine.

50. Reminiscences, ii. 180 ("Edward Irving").

51. Two note books of Thomas Carlyle, ed. C.E. Norton (New York, 1898), p.32 (the entry belongs to early 1823).

52. "TC to Goethe," 20 August 1827, Letters, iv. 248.

recalcitrance which made him more susceptible to indirect than to direct teaching, and it is what Goethe suggests (its significance filled out by Carlyle's own mental powers), rather than what he says, that affects Carlyle most profoundly.[53] The most striking example of this process is in Carlyle's description, in a lecture of 1838, of the way light began to rise on his darkness when he meditated, after preliminary confusion, on the passage in Wilhelm Meister - in fact no more than a brief, dismissive sentence - which indicates the futility of the desire for 'recipes of happiness'.[54] The reversal of the normal idea - normal especially in the eighteenth-century empiricist philosophy Carlyle had been reading - that happiness is the greatest good, sets off a chain of reflection in Carlyle which ends with the fully-fledged 'work ethic' which was his largest single contribution to Victorian thought.

As these are the ways in which Carlyle gains strength and support from Goethe, and given that the two are fundamentally different characters, misinterpretation and re-creation are inevitable. Because Carlyle wants to see himself as one who has followed Goethe's own way through the horrors of youthful unrest and unbelief, he tends to re-form Goethe in his own image. Already in the 1822 Faust article, in the quotation given above,[55] he is giving a picture of Goethe's early sorrows which bears closer resemblance to Carlyle's own than to the original, and throughout his writings on Goethe he habitually darkens and exaggerates his sufferings under the 'spiritual perplexities

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53. Harrold, p.39.

54. Carlyle, Lectures on the history of literature (delivered 1838), ed. R.P. Karkaria (Bombay, 1892), pp.186-188 (Lecture 12, "Of modern German literature"). Carlyle is referring to Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, book 8, ch.5 (vol.ii, p.129 in Carlyle's Wilhelm Meister).

55. p.18, above.

of his time',[56] underestimates the amount of artistic detachment and irony that is present even in such a work as Werther, and inappropriately superimposes overtones of Christian puritanism on the doctrine of renunciation (Entsagen) which he sees as the centre of Goethe's triumphant emergence into maturity.[57] And because Carlyle takes isolated remarks or suggestions from Goethe, pays much closer attention to these than he ever does to the over-all character of his works, gives them seats of honour in his own developing systems of thought, and frequently reproduces them supplying his own context, he necessarily changes their meaning. Sometimes he even changes their substance, as in the often-cited and magnificently self-revealing misquotation from the poem Generalbeichte, perpetrated again and again by Carlyle, whereby das Wahre is substituted for das Schöne, so that we have the Carlylean rather than Goethean motto

> Im Ganzen, Guten, Wahren,
> Resolut zu leben. (58)

The value Carlyle set on the maxims he found in Goethe, particularly in Wilhelm Meister, as practical aids for modern man, can be seen from a letter of brotherly advice to his brother John in 1832, not long after he had finished Sartor. John is suffering from religious doubt, and Thomas prescribes for him the same medicines that had helped effect his own cure, quoting a string of precepts from Wilhelm Meister about duty and renunciation, precepts which by this stage are emphatically his own and not Goethe's.[59] Another example, more obviously significant

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56. Carlyle, "Goethe," review of 2nd portion of Goethes sämtliche Werke, Foreign Review, ii (1828), p.89; Essays, i. 210.

57. See Harrold, pp.214-230, and Carré, pp.143-144.

58. See Letters, v.289 and vi. 121, and Essays, ii. 173 and ii. 384. It is amusing that the first of these instances is from a letter to Goethe himself.

59. "TC to John A. Carlyle," 16 February 1832, Letters, vi. 122-123.

as regards the history of English response to Goethe, is Sartor itself, particularly the chapter "The Everlasting Yea", where all the same precepts occur, with others, taking their places in a philosophy which, for all its multiple indebtedness to Goethe, Jean Paul, Fichte, Kant, and Novalis, is thoroughly dominated by Carlyle's own character and convictions.

My subject at the moment, however, is the importance of Goethe to Carlyle on a personal level, and in that context the letter to John is most revealing. A.J. La Valley is no doubt right to see Goethe as in loco parentis to Carlyle in the early stages of Carlyle's literary career.[60] In this letter Carlyle uses Goethe when adopting the tone of a parental advisor to his younger brother. Carlyle sees his brother, rightly or wrongly, as passing through the stage he himself has already passed through, a stage at which the wise words of a Goethe are at their most valuable. Goethe is the first of a new kind of father-figure, 'the first of the moderns'.[61] Admirable as the unquestioning religious convictions of Carlyle's own father are, such a man can no longer perform the complete fatherly function for the intelligent, questioning youth of the present. James Carlyle was to his son the 'Ultimus Romanorum',[62] and this phrase expresses a gap in communication as well as high respect. Thomas is a non-Roman himself, and the first fully-developed example of a new kind of excellence - Goethe - is needed for a time to fill the gap left by his intellectual separation from his father. Carlyle may have been disappointed by the bland politeness of Goethe's letters to him, but he can speak approvingly

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60. La Valley, pp.32-33.

61. See p.21 , above.

62. Reminiscences, i.11 ("James Carlyle").

of the 'simple patriarchal style, extremely to my taste',[63] in which they are written - Goethe's epistolary style partakes of the calm strength, so unexpected in a present-day genius, which together with his aphoristic wisdom makes him an ideal literary parent for the unhappy and insecure Carlyle of the early 1820s. The influential novelty of Carlyle's presentation of Goethe stems from the personal support he derived from him. He accords him not only respectability but also authority, and gives, in his many accounts of and references to his own youthful crisis of faith, a model of his effectuality as a fatherly counsellor to troubled modern youth. '"Do the Duty which lies nearest"', Carlyle tells his brother in the letter I have referred to, quoting from his own translation of Wilhelm Meister.[64] It is the immediate, practical relevance of such adopted maxims, with their reversal of the hopeless romantic, Faustian longing for the vague and distant infinite,[65] which makes Goethe emotionally important to Carlyle in a way the German metaphysicians, with their 'frothy system',[66] never could be, for all his considerable linguistic indebtedness to them.

Carlyle's personal adherence to Goethe is, however, by nature temporary. Once Carlyle, admittedly with the help of Goethe and the other Germans, but mostly by his own strength, has worked out and consolidated his own scheme of salvation in the 'russet-coated Idyll'

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63. "TC to J[ane] B[aillie] W[elsh]," 20 December 1824, Letters, iii. 236.

64. Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister, ii. 2,11. The same maxim is quoted in Sartor Resartus, p.156 ("The Everlasting Yea"). Carlyle's 'Duty which lies nearest' is in the original (i.e. Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, book 7, chs. 1 and 3) simply 'das Nächste'. See pp. 38-39, below.

65. See H. Kraeger, "Carlyle's Stellung zur deutschen Sprache und Litteratur," Anglia, xxii (1899), p.193, for a comment on the special importance of this particular maxim to Carlyle.

66. Carlyle, Lectures (1838), p.189 (Lecture 12).

at Hoddam Hill[67] and afterwards, and is beginning to work at his own creative writing, he no longer needs the support of his life-saver, his teacher and literary father-figure, so that even when he quotes and refers to Goethe in these later times, as he uncountable times does, he is generally doing so, as I have already said, as part of statements that are really his own. As the Leith Walk experience is self-generated,[68] so the final recovery is self-generated. Both in Leith Walk, experiencing a sudden awareness of the almost supernatural power of his own defiant will while going to bathe during a period of illness, misery, and sleeplessness, and at Hoddam Hill, letting his thoughts wander over eternity and search for a workable philosophy of life, in an isolated farmhouse the year before his marriage, Carlyle is predominantly alone, experiencing in different ways the depth of his own resources. It is in between 1822 and 1825 that Carlyle needs strong support from outside and finds it pre-eminently in Goethe. Even within this period of closest relationship, however, there are signs of uneasiness. Carlyle's well-known remarks to James Johnston (made while he was translating Wilhelm Meister) reflect the irritability that always affected him when he was at work, but they also show a dim perception of how remote Goethe's mental world in fact is from his own: 'Goethe is the greatest genius that has lived for a century, and the greatest ass that has lived for three. I could sometimes fall down and worship him; at other times I could kick him out of the room'.[69] The same uneasiness is apparent in Carlyle's early impatience, in his note-book, with

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67. Reminiscences, ii. 179 ("Edward Irving").

68. See p. 20, above.

69. "TC to James Johnston," 21 September 1823, Letters, ii. 437.

Schiller's and Goethe's 'palabra about the nature of the fine arts',[70] and in his later struggle to explain and justify to himself their apparent preference of the aesthetic to the moral.[71] It is over questions like this - the relative importance of the Good and the Beautiful, and the connected question of the relation between good and evil - that Carlyle is bound to have difficulties reconciling the Calvinistic attitudes of mind which are the potent residue of his inherited religion with the pantheism and monism, the love of harmony and the fundamental optimism, which characterise the beliefs of his adopted spiritual teacher.[72] Adverse criticism as good as never appears in Carlyle's public writings about Goethe; in those writings he is too concerned to proclaim the Gospel of Gospels, and oppose ignorant hostility, to show anything other than high reverence. The public reverence is certainly sincere, and reflects a strong personal feeling of admiration and gratitude, but it is important to remember that it co-exists from the start with substantial reservations. It is partly as a result of the force of these reservations, only half-realised by Carlyle himself, that the quotation with which I began this section continues as follows: 'We are far parted now; but the memory of him shall ever be blessed to me as that of a Deliverer from death'.

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70. Two note books, p.41.

71. Ibid., pp.180, 188, 204, 227. See Hill Shine, "Carlyle's views on the relation between religion and poetry up to 1832," Studies in Philology, xxxiii (1936), pp.57-92, and his two other articles in the same series about Carlyle's early intellectual development, Studies in Philology, xxxiii (1936), pp.487-506, and xxxiv (1937), pp.438-466.

72. See Carré and Harrold, and Harrold's "The nature of Carlyle's Calvinism," Studies in Philology, xxxiii (1936), pp.475-486, for detailed examinations of the conflicts in Carlyle's early religious development. See also, for a dissenting view, Eloise M. Behnken's book, note 49, above.

'The corner-stone of a new social edifice for mankind is laid there; firmly, as before, on the natural rock.'

A new social edifice is needed because the old one is no longer resting on the natural rock and is hence rapidly collapsing. Carlyle's pre-occupation with the archetypal period of crisis in a man's life exercised a considerable influence on his developing social and historical theories, and the crisis he sees in society is naturally analogous in many ways to the crisis he has recently experienced and overcome in himself. In both cases, the centre of the crisis, as Carlyle sees it, is religious belief. Much of Carlyle's theory of history is based on a dictum of Goethe's, from "Israel in der Wüste", one of the notes to the West-Oestlicher Divan, which he quotes in his essay on Diderot: '"The special, sole and deepest theme of the World's and Man's History," says the Thinker of our time, "whereto all other themes are subordinated, remains the Conflict of UNBELIEF and BELIEF"'.[73] Similarly in Sartor Resartus, Teufelsdröckh speaks of "Church-Clothes', the different forms under which men embody the religious principle, as "unspeakably the most important of all the vestures and garnitures of Human Existence",[74] and later in the chapter he talks about the necessity of re-weaving these church-clothes when they are worn out, or when, as in the present time, they have become "mere hollow Shapes, or Masks, under which no living Figure or Spirit any longer dwells".[75] In the biographical section of the work, Teufelsdröckh has spoken about his own spiritual sufferings in language

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73. Carlyle, "Diderot," Foreign Quarterly Review, xi (1833), p.315; Essays, iii.248. See Harrold, pp.151-179, and particularly pp.174-176. See also R. Wellek, Confrontations (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), pp.82-113 (chapter 3).

74. Sartor Resartus, p.170 ("Church-Clothes").

75. Ibid., p.172.

which makes it clear that a similar process takes place on an individual level: "first must the dead Letter of Religion own itself dead, and drop piecemeal into dust, if the living Spirit of Religion, freed from this its charnel-house, is to arise on us, newborn of Heaven, and with new healing under its wings".[76] St. Paul's letter-spirit metaphor is used in exactly the same way as the clothes metaphor, and in both personal and social contexts Carlyle speaks of new-birth; Teufelsdröckh will shortly expand his remarks on church-clothes in his On the Palingenesia, or Newbirth of Society.[77]

Society's problem is the same as the individual's in essence, and the solution, for both, comes from the same direction. To incarcerate the religious spirit in forms which are no longer a real expression of anything is to kill it. What is needed is a living form of religion, and that form has to be adapted to the special needs of the era it serves. Carlyle is in no doubt as to where the living religion for the nineteenth century can come from. In Past and Present he identifies three different forms that have shown the requisite liveliness-twelfth-century Catholicism, seventeenth-century Puritanism, and nineteenth-century German poetry.[78] The St. Edmundsbury monastery and Cromwell's England, because of the living beliefs that informed them, were ideal societies in Carlyle's eyes, and from the living belief of Goethe and the other Germans must be formed the ideal society of the nineteenth century. The kind of solution offered by Coleridge, and by followers of his such as Julius Hare, F.D. Maurice, and John Sterling, that is,

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76. Ibid., p.92 ("Pedagogy").

77. Ibid., p.173 ("Church-clothes").

78. Past and Present, p.151 ("Gospel of dilettantism").

a re-adjustment and re-vitalisation of the religious spirit, partly with the aid of German metaphysics, which leads back to a re-endorsement of the Church of England,[79] is false and hateful to Carlyle, because such an attempt to put new wine in old bottles blasphemes against his own dynamic theory of history, and because even apart from theory the old, established forms of religious observance are, in their present manifestations, intensely distasteful to him. France, after all, had been punished with the horrors of the Revolution for precisely this form of blasphemy, for not taking up the true religion for the age-Protestantism - and persisting in the dead and rotten forms of Catholicism with their capacity for spreading rottenness to the whole structure of society.[80] Through Carlyle's public writings about Goethe in the 1820s and early 1830s, all these ideas about society, and especially about the present crisis, as he sees it, in British society, can be seen in process of formation. Goethe, of course, plays a considerable part in the process. He shows Carlyle the way through on an individual level, and hence, as the situations are so closely parallel to Carlyle, the way through for society as well; he provides suggestive dicta about history for Carlyle's mind to work on; and he supplies in himself a living example of the new poetic/prophetic priesthood for the nineteenth century.

To Carlyle the fundamental requisite for a religion fit to be the centre of human society is honesty, veracity, fidelity to fact. He dismisses Sterling's religious belief, at one stage in his career,

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79. See J.A. Froude, Thomas Carlyle: a history of his life in London 1834-1881, 2 vols. (1884), i.38-39. See also Carlyle, Life of Sterling, p.53.

80. For a brief version of this aspect of Carlyle's ideas regarding the French Revolution, see Frederick the Great, i. 223.

as 'mere theoretic moonshine, which would never stand the wind and weather of fact'.[81] In the nineteenth century this means that any religion, to be acceptable, must confront, overcome, and assimilate eighteenth-century scepticism, the spirit of inquiry. Scepticism is there and has to be answered, and if the battle is shirked, man is left, like Coleridge, creating logical fatamorganas for himself on the hither side of the "howling deserts of Infidelity".[82] Carlyle's first essay on Goethe, the 1822 Faust article,[83] shows him still engaged in the battle, and already focusing on those things in Goethe which have a bearing on this most crucial of modern concerns. Mephistopheles is likened to 'some French philosophe of the last century',[84] and Faust, whose depiction Carlyle finds the most admirable thing in the first part, and with whom he clearly identifies very strongly, is said to have been 'born with the head of a sceptic and the heart of a devotee' (p.332). Carlyle gets into some confusion with his polarities here; the sceptic and the devotee both inhabit Faust, but on the other hand Faust and Mephistopheles represent the two opposite propensities, 'to admire and to despise, to look at the world on its poetical or on its prosaic side' (p.332). It is interesting that Carlyle should want, at the expense of some neatness in his interpretation, to place this polarity within one person (a reading which, it must of course be added, the text of the play does fully allow). The polarity, as Lore Metzger points out in his article on Faust and Sartor Resartus, is of central importance to Carlyle.[85]

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81. Life of Sterling, p.124.
82. Ibid., p.60.
83. See note 39, above.
84. Carlyle, "Faustus," p.326.
85. L. Metzger, "Sartor Resartus: a Victorian Faust," Comparative Literature, xiii (1961), pp.316-331.

He sees the sceptic and the devotee co-existing within himself, within Goethe, and in some way within every modern man, and he presents that combination fictionally in Wotton Reinfred, the hero of his unfinished philosophical romance,[86] and in Diogenes Teufelsdröckh. It is in the nature of these two opposed principles that, whether separately embodied or within one organism, they must conflict until one gains the ascendancy, and it is this conflict which, in modern times, must take place both within the individual and within society before a genuine new religion can emerge. Already, then, Carlyle is pointing out the modernity of Goethe's work, its relevance to the 'habits of a refined and intellectual age'.[87] As yet, though, he has not encountered Wilhelm Meister, or found for himself the way through, which the first part of Faust (the second part, of course, was not to appear until ten years later) does not indicate.

In the course of this Faust essay, Carlyle gives his own translation of Faust's curse (from the "Studierzimmer" scene, lines 1583 to 1606 of part one).[88] Later in 1822 (probably), Carlyle produced another verse translation of the curse, omitting one or two lines, and this translation was published in the Athenaeum in 1832.[89] Both translations are unsatisfactory to say the least. Carlyle clearly understands the German well enough, but the constraint of writing verse, something at which he was consistently inept, forces him into distortions and clumsy turns of phrase. The second translation, evidently more self-conscious and careful than the first, attempting

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86. Carlyle, Wotton Reinfred (1827), published in Last words of Thomas Carlyle (1892).

87. "Faustus," p.321.

88. Ibid., p.325, note.

89. Carlyle, "Faust's curse," The Athenaeum, v (1832), p.5. This translation was also published in Ottilie von Goethe's Weimar coterie journal Chaos, in 1830. See Tennyson, pp.38-39, note.

to be a poem in its own right, is in a way the worse of the two, in that Carlyle departs further from the German in the struggle to write an English poem. The most interesting feature of the two translations is the way they deal with the final line of the curse,

> Und Fluch vor allen der Geduld!

In the later translation, Carlyle is for once straightforward and literal here, if awkward:

> And Patience more than all be curs'd!

Earlier, however, Carlyle had turned this one line into two and a half:

> and cursed
> Above all cursed, be the tame dull spirit
> Which bears life's evils patiently.

In the third of his letters to Goethe, Carlyle thanks him for playing such a large part in his deliverance from a state of unbelieving despair, in which 'Faust's wild curse seemed the only fit greeting for human life, and his passionate Fluch vor allen der Geduld! was spoken from my very inmost heart'.[90] Faust's angry despair, 'the destruction of a noble spirit by the force of its own thoughts',[91] was clearly the first thing in Goethe to fire Carlyle's imagination, offering as it did a parallel to his own state of mind when he first read Faust, early in 1820. The curse, climax of Faust's negative tendency, and yet in a sense positive because of the sheer energy of defiance which the poetry generates, provides a centre for Carlyle's preliminary response to Goethe, and is sufficiently important to him to prompt two translations. The curse on patience is most important of all to Carlyle, and the personal animosity which he injects into it in the first translation shows how much he participates in the

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90. "TC to Goethe," 20 August 1827, Letters, iv. 248.

91. Carlyle, "Faustus," p.332.

angry dynamism, the hatred of passive acceptance of circumstances, which it implies. Though later his passions are sufficiently cooled for him to translate this final curse more literally and briefly, this kind of bitter energy remains a central element in Carlyle. It characterises the mood of the Leith Walk experience as fictionalised in Sartor, and also of much of Carlyle's dark and pessimistic social prophecy.

By 1826, however, a more hopeful vision has come to Carlyle, if in rather vague form, and the "Goethe" essay in German romance (written in 1826, published early in 1827)[92] is both an acknowledgement of the source of that vision and a vehicle for expressing the thoughts that translating Wilhelm Meister has led him to develop for himself. Scepticism is conquered, for Carlyle as for Goethe, and there is as it were a grafting of a Goethean solution, through art and beauty, which at this stage in his life Carlyle valued more highly than later, onto an agonised, dark, Carlylean struggle of the kind Carlyle always continued to attribute to Goethe:

> His world seems once to have been desolate and baleful as that of the darkest sceptic: but he has covered it anew with beauty and solemnity, derived from deeper sources, over which Doubt can have no sway. He has inquired fearlessly, and fearlessly searched out and denied the False; but he has not forgotten, what is equally essential and infinitely harder, to search out and admit the True. (93)

Here is a summary statement of the progress modern man and modern society have to make - the assimilation of scepticism in the formation of new belief - but as yet the rhapsody about Goethe is mostly in aesthetic rather than moral terms; Goethe is the beautifier of his

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92. See note 33, above.

93. Carlyle, "Goethe" (1827) (i.e. Wilhelm Meister vol. i in Centenary edition), pp.24-25.

century rather than its moral instructor, priest, and prophet: 'there is the barren prose of the nineteenth century, the vulgar life which we are all leading; and it starts into strange beauty in his hands' (p.28).

This 1827 essay was part of a collection of translated specimens of German fiction. Carlyle's next general essay on Goethe, in 1828, was an article in the Foreign Review, by a writer who was now establishing himself as a regular and respected contributor to periodicals, and still more as an outstanding British expert on German literature. In 1827 he had two articles published in the Edinburgh Review, on Richter and on the "State of German literature".[94] When William Fraser left the staff of the newly-formed Foreign Quarterly Review, and set up his own rival Foreign Review, he secured Carlyle as one of his writers, and from 1828 to 1830 Carlyle contributed eight long articles, seven of them on German subjects, to the nine numbers of this London-based review that appeared before it again merged with the Foreign Quarterly. The time was one of increasing British interest in German culture. Carlyle tells Goethe in a letter of this tendency, pointing for evidence at the recent formation of two foreign quarterlies.[95] It was also the time of Carlyle's most extensive, though not perhaps of his most intense, study of German literature - the subjects of his articles range from the Nibelungen Lied to Novalis, and cover plenty of ground in between. He and his wife were living first at Edinburgh and then at Craigenputtock, the bleak and lonely farmhouse where he finished developing his personal philosophy, taking

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94. These, and the other essays I refer to here, all appear reprinted in Essays, vols. i and ii.

95. "TC to Goethe," 18 April 1828, Letters, iv. 365.

what was of value to him from the Germans and elsewhere, before finally settling in London in 1834. The 1828 Goethe essay was the fifth of the eight articles for Fraser's Foreign Review, and compared to the 1827 essay it shows an increased confidence both in the greatness of Goethe and in the fitness of Carlyle to write about him, helped by a knowledge that British readers were likely to be more receptive to high praise of Goethe than ever before.

By 1828, while continuing to make the same points as in 1826, Carlyle has begun to form a more systematic body of thought about the artist and society, into which his ideas about Goethe can be fitted. He has been reading Fichte and other German philosophers, and now we have a Goethe who is in contact with the 'old, divine spirit' (something like a cross between artistic inspiration and Fichte's Divine Idea) which has long been absent from among men;[96] the artist-hero is fast approaching. In one passage, commenting on a long quotation from Wilhelm Meister where Wilhelm proposes that the true poet should be seen as teacher and prophet, friend of gods and men, we can see Carlyle, with the portentous tentativeness which is typical of his early periodical style, and which is in a way more assertive than plain statement, actually in the process of inflating and modifying his claims for Goethe: if Wilhelm's claims for the poet can justly be made for Goethe himself, then 'he deserves not mere approval as a pleasing poet and sweet singer; but deep, grateful study, observance, imitation, as a Moralist and Philosopher' (p.228). An image which pervades this essay, and which occurs also in the expository essay on

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96. Carlyle, "Goethe" (1828), Essays, i. 208.

Goethe's "Helena" written in the same year,[97] is that of the ideal resting firmly on the base of the actual.[98] Here are the beginnings of Natural Supernaturalism, Carlyle's idiosyncratic blending of positivism and mysticism,[99] and also of Carlyle's belief in Goethe's works as the foundation of the new social edifice. Once contact has been re-established with the 'natural rock', a harmonious structure can be deliberately built as Goethe's life has been. The millennial hopes appear, with appropriate biblical language, in the passage where Carlyle sees, in Goethe's 'soft, melodious imaginations', the 'Wisdom which is proper to this time', and which can 'still, in these hard, unbelieving utilitarian days, reveal to us glimpses of the Unseen but not unreal World, that so the Actual and the Ideal may again meet together, and clear Knowledge be again wedded to Religion, in the life and business of men'.[100] Goethe has built for himself a true belief - he believes 'not by denying his unbelief, but by following it out'. In this, and in his 'life of effort, of earnest toilsome endeavour after all excellence', he has shown the way for modern man, though as yet this moral is implied by Carlyle rather than plainly stated.[101] The essay is full of reconciliations between superficially opposed principles - ideal and actual, religion and knowledge, inquiry and belief. The reconciliation at the centre

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97. Carlyle, "Goethe's Helena," Foreign Review, i (1828), p.468; Essays, i. 197.

98. See "Goethe" (1828), Essays, i. 225.

99. See Carré, p.121.

100. "Goethe" (1828), Essays, i. 208.

101. Ibid., p.210.

of these is that between heart and head, the Faustian and Mephistophelean principles or alternatively the two principles that co-exist within Faust. In artistic terms, Goethe has (as Carlyle stated it in an article of 1827) disproved the currently popular assumption that 'creative imagination consorted not with vigour of intellect'.[102]

It is worth examining the passage from Wilhelm Meister whose appearance in this article I have mentioned, as an example of Carlyle's prose translation of Goethe. The passage is from Wilhem Meisters Lehrjahre, book two, chapter two, and I refer to the translation in the 1828 article, which is lifted from Carlyle's translation of the whole novel, with one or two unimportant alterations.[103] Carlyle is a gifted translator of prose; his version is accurate, fluent, and readable. He does, however, tend to use old-fashioned and 'poetic' vocabulary and constructions, a habit which is occasionally irritating and which gives to the translation a musty flavour, subtracting much of the stylistic charm of the original. A good example of this tendency is his translation of Wilhelm's "Sie fanden eine gastfreie Welt, und ihr niedrig scheinender Stand erhöhte sie nur desto mehr" into "They found a home in every habitation of the world, and the lowliness of their condition but exalted them the more".[104] More significantly Carlylean is a tendency to choose English equivalents which heighten suggestions of strenuousness, of conflict, or which impart a more moral emphasis than does the original. Goethe's Wilhelm sees men "nach Glück und Vergnügen rennen"; Carlyle's sees them

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102. Carlyle, "State of German literature," Edinburgh Review, xlvi (1827), p.336; Essays, i. 67.

103. Carlyle, "Goethe" (1828), Essays, i. 226-228. In Carlyle's Wilhelm Meister, the passage is in vol.i, pp.112-114.

104. Essays, i. 227.

"struggle after happiness and satisfaction" (my emphasis). "Was beunruhiget die Menschen" is expanded into "What is it that keeps men in continual discontent and agitation". While Goethe's poets, unlike less happy mortals, experience the "Genuss der Welt", Carlyle's have the more respectable "right enjoyment of the world". The same poets impart "schöne Empfindungen" in Goethe, "lofty emotions" in Carlyle. The infiltration of Carlyle's personal pre-occupations into the translation is insidious, a part of his creative misreading of Goethe of which, probably, he was hardly aware. As I have indicated elsewhere,[105] there is always some kind of strain, not often consciously registered, between Carlyle and Goethe, and this strain expresses itself in details of translation, producing tiny discrepancies of spirit which, for all Carlyle's admirable command of German and careful correctness, subtly infect the whole. The Wilhelm Meister which was read most in nineteenth-century England was, with its archaisms and Carlylisms, a duller, more solid, altogether more hebraic work than Goethe's. In this way also, Carlyle was presenting a distorted image of Goethe which was more likely to be acceptable to the British public than the original.

The death of Goethe in 1832 brought commissions for Carlyle from Bulwer Lytton's New Monthly Magazine[106] and from the Foreign Quarterly Review, at a time when he had left Goethe behind and was occupied with his own creative plans. The important essays of this time - "Characteristics," "Biography," "Cagliostro" - show a movement towards social and historical themes, a process leading up to The French Revolution

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105. See pp.26 - 27, above.

106. See ch.3, p.144 , below.

(1837), the "Heroes" lectures (1840), and Past and Present (1843).[107] The two Goethe essays of that year, accordingly, while they contain Carlyle's largest claims for him (including the one which heads this section), are, like the earlier essays but to a much greater degree, about Carlyle's thoughts rather than Goethe's. The doctrine of heroes, of the paramount importance of great individuals in human history, is by now well developed, and the placing of emphasis on the artist's life, always a feature of Carlyle's critical essays, is now a point of dogma - Goethe's works are important and a power for good because 'the record of his whole spiritual Endeavour lies written there'.[108] That spiritual endeavour is now explicitly Christ-like; Goethe is 'the Redeemer of the time',[109] and the time is likened to the 'old chaotic Era, of world-confusion and world-refusion' in which Christianity began.[110] The move from concern with individual salvation to the parallel problem of the salvation of society is completed in these essays. Goethe had to cope as an individual with the 'woes and contradictions of an Atheistic time',[111] and by virtue of his great personal success in this matter, magnificently chronicled by himself and thus made available to the world, he has become the hero, the 'Uniter, and victorious Reconciler',[112] the Wise Man[113] who, like the wise men of the past to whose company he belongs,

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107. See Tennyson, pp.83-84.

108. Carlyle, "Death of Goethe," Essays, ii. 380.

109. Ibid., p.379.

110. "Goethe's works," Foreign Quarterly Review, x (1832), p.38; Essays, ii. 434.

111. Ibid., p.434.

112. Ibid., p.434.

113. "Death of Goethe," Essays, ii. 379.

represents the only means by which an age of transition (of the kind referred to also, in the same year, in Carlyle's commentary on Goethe's Märchen)[114] can be led into a new era, so that society can enjoy the peace and productivity which Goethe as an individual came to enjoy. Carlyle makes, for the first time, a division of Goethe's life, and works, into three stages - the 'pestilential fever of Scepticism' and all the agonies that brings (Werther, Faust part one), followed by a Pagan or ethnic period which involves a healthy recognition of the richness and depth of life but no piety yet (Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, Venezianische Epigramme), then a final period of 'melodious Reverence' and 'all-pervading Faith' (Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, West-Oestlicher Divan, Zahme Xenien).[115] The hero's life is great and inspiring not only because it is a life of contact with the "open secret" (in Goethe's terms)[116] or Divine Idea of the World (in Fichte's),[117] but also because it is progressive, moves from stage to stage, and hence shows the contemporary hero-worshipper how he can himself progress towards the ideal state from where he is, as Carlyle himself felt that he was shown.

The period when Carlyle was writing essays about Goethe was one of prolonged preparation for an autonomous literary career. The messages he receives from Goethe and the other Germans are all the time being worked into a message of his own for him to transmit. The message, as it emerges at the beginning of the 1830s and as it develops

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114. Carlyle, "The tale, by Goethe," Fraser's Magazine, vi (1832), p.260; Essays, ii. 449.

115. "Goethe's works," Essays, ii. 430-431.

116. "Death of Goethe," Essays, ii. 377.

117. Carlyle, On heroes, hero-worship, and the heroic in history, p.157 ("The hero as man of letters").

through the rest of his literary career, is in effect a theodicy. Vague though Carlyle's ideas about God always were, what he attempts in his works is to explain the operation of the divine in the universe, to justify the ways of God to men. Goethe, with the rest of German literature grouped behind him, is the first of the manifest ations of the divine that he lights on - through his personal debt to him he comes to see his universal significance, and in the process the working of the universe itself becomes clearer to him. Goethe is to Carlyle a revelation - that is, he represents one of those aspects of creation in which the design of the creator is most easily observable - and Carlyle uses him as a vehicle of prophecy, as he later uses the French revolution, the present social condition of England, Oliver Cromwell, and Frederick the Great. When Carlyle writes to his brother 'Among Goethe's admirers here I find no one possessed of almost the smallest feeling of what lies in him',[118] what he really means is that none of these admirers has a correct, an adequately serious, conception of what is happening to human society at the present time. It is hence impossible for them to understand the immense significance of Goethe, because they see him merely as one writer among many and not as the Reconciler, the Redeemer, and bringer of the new era. If Carlyle conveyed nothing else about Goethe to his readers - and his Goethe-essays do leave a rather vague impression of what the author and his works are really like - he must have conveyed the idea that Goethe was important and good. He presents him as crucially beneficial both to the individual, because in his own life he showed how the typical difficulties of the modern

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118. "TC to John A. Carlyle," 16 February 1832, Letters, vi. 124.

individual can be overcome, and to society, because society's difficulties are of the same kind. Such a message, presented - for all the shortcomings of the essays as criticism - with a forceful intelligence and an imaginative power, coupled with thorough knowledge of the subject, rare in the periodical criticism of any time, could not fail to give a new direction to English people's attitudes to Goethe, whether they already knew his works or not.

'What was the great Goethe himself? The greatest of contemporary men; who however is not to have any follower & should not have any.'

It was only in private that Carlyle expressed his waning belief in the actual efficacy of Goethe. In public he simply stopped writing about him, though of course he continued to refer to him with great frequency and always with reverence. Nevertheless, the temporariness of Goethe's active presence with Carlyle and in his writings sets an important precedent for English response to Goethe. Goethe has at least the metaphorical status of a life-saver to Carlyle, and life-saving is usually an act that is performed once and then done with, however much gratitude and admiration it leaves in the near victim. In his writings about Goethe and his references to him, particularly those in Sartor Resartus, Carlyle sets about what he sees as his duty, to indicate to the British public how they too can be saved and supported by Goethe as Carlyle was, and also how society as a whole can partake of that saving influence. The latter proposition, however, is much more dubious than the former, and Carlyle's belief in it is

short-lived. In a letter to Goethe's friend Eckermann, after Goethe's death, Carlyle gives a clear expression of his loss of belief in Goethe as the foundation of the new social order. Goethe seems 'ever the grander, the more genuine' to him, 'yet stands out, I might say, as an object finished, to which there will be no continuation made; like a granite Promontory, high and sheer, stretching far into the waste chaos; yet not thro' it; thro' it, the world seems seeking itself another road, - or losing all aim of any'.[119] There is nothing wrong with the way through for humanity which Goethe presents (though the image Carlyle uses is a surprisingly cold and forbidding one), but it is simply not the way society is taking or is likely to take; the divine order is not going to manifest itself in that way, at least for the present. Even in 1832, when writing to his brother about his lack of real sympathy with the essay "Goethe's works", which he has just written (and clearly referring tacitly to the turmoil of hopes and fears occasioned by the Reform Act of that year), he says 'These are no days for speaking of Goethe'.[120] And in the letter of 1833 from which the quotation heading this section is taken, he says, speaking of art in general, 'how can we sing and paint when we do not yet believe and see?'[121] Goethe now seems to Carlyle to be remote from society's urgent, pressing problems of the moment. The kind of solution he offers would only work for a society at a better, more advanced stage.

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119. "TC to Johann Peter Eckermann," 6 May 1834, Letters, vii. 143.

120. "TC to John A. Carlyle," 31 July 1832, Letters, vi. 193.

121. "TC to John A. Carlyle," 1 October 1833, Letters, vii. 9.

It is noticeable that Carlyle's essays about Goethe contain very little reference to the 'practical maxims' which he quotes in his counselling letter to John,[122] which are spoken of in retrospective accounts as crucial to his own recovery from the horrors of unbelief, and which are given places of honour in the "Everlasting Yea" of Sartor Resartus. Goethe the moralist of Wilhelm Meister, the advocate of renunciation, work, and the nearest duty, the opponent of the pursuit of happiness, makes few appearances in the actual articles on Goethe, and in this rather surprising discrepancy lies part of the reason for the diminution in the strength of Carlyle's faith in Goethe. What helped Carlyle most in Goethe was his moral doctrine, or rather the moral doctrine which Carlyle was able to form for himself by extrapolating from some stray remarks and hints in Wilhelm Meister. On the other hand, Goethe by profession is not a moralist but an artist - if the English public turn to Goethe, they are turning not to moral edicts but to poems, plays, and novels. When Carlyle writes for the periodicals about Goethe, he is reviewing the works of a poet and novelist, and in the 1820s he is happy to do that, because at that time the poet is of highest significance and value in his eyes, the priest of modern times, the reconciler of the ideal and the actual, the friend of gods and men; and Goethe is the sign of how this may be.[123] The genuine artist may be acclaimed as a 'Moralist and Philosopher',[124] but in that case his morality and philosophy is his art, his beautifying of the actual with the colours of the ideal, and not some moral or philosophical precepts extracted

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122. See pp.23 - 24 above.

123. See Hill Shine's three articles, note 71, above.

124. See p.36 , above.

from his works. The climax of claims of this kind for Goethe comes in Sartor Resartus:

> knowest thou no Prophet, even in the vesture, environment, and dialect of this age? None to whom the Godlike had revealed itself, through all meanest and highest forms of the Common; and by him been again prophetically revealed: in whose inspired melody, even in these rag-gathering and rag-burning days, Man's Life again begins, were it but afar off, to be divine? Knowest thou none such? I know him, and name him - Goethe. (125)

Two years later, however, Carlyle is coming to think (and his realisation that art as normally understood was not the proper outlet for his own talents may have played a considerable part in the change of stance) that 'Art is but a reminiscence now, that for us in these days Prophecy (well understood) not Poetry is the thing wanted', and he is placing Goethe firmly in the category of artist, not of prophet, and saying for that reason that he will and should have no follower.[126]

Once Goethe is reduced back to the 'greatest of contemporary men', the actual and the ideal, at least the ideal as represented by that artistic beauty and sublimity which Carlyle centred on in the essays of 1827 and 1828, are again separate. Goethe may beautify and solemnify the 'barren prose of the nineteenth century',[127] but to do that is not to find the way for human society, to bring the millennium closer, because society is not ready for that kind of solution, and, for the present at least, other ways are needed. The Goethe who is left is still 'the Wisest of our time',[128] but he can no longer be

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125. Sartor Resartus, p. 202 ("Organic Filaments").

126. "TC to John A. Carlyle," 1 October 1833, Letters, vii. 9.

127. See p. 35, above.

128. Sartor Resartus, p.153 ("The Everlasting Yea").

the redeemer of that time. The help he can offer is the help he afforded Carlyle in the early 1820s: by the example of his life, and by practical maxims of the kind extracted by Carlyle from Wilhelm Meister, he can guide modern young intellectuals out of the misery of unbelief and into positive and useful lives. Unfortunately, human society is something other than a conglomeration of such individuals waiting to be saved, and for that reason the analogy between individual and collective salvation does not hold. Eloise M. Behnken rightly observes that in his search for modern literary priests Carlyle only finds one - Goethe -, and that his disappointment at the smallness of that priesthood is part of the reason why, in his later years, he turns more and more to the hero as man of action.[129] I would like to add, however, that the idea of an effective hero as man of letters is something Carlyle really abandons, though not quite consciously, as early as 1833. I agree with Carré[130] that the reason Carlyle gives for his omission of Goethe from the Heroes lectures (that Goethe is not well enough known in England to be a meaningful figure to Carlyle's listeners)[131] is not the real reason, though Carlyle himself may have thought it was. Carlyle still accords Goethe prophetic status in the brief remarks he makes about him, but, as his letters reveal, he has really long lost faith in the value of art as a field of heroic endeavour. It is significant that the three literary heroes he does choose - Johnson, Burns, and Rousseau - are all, in Carlyle's eyes, failures, all men who 'fought bravely, and fell'.[132]

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129. Behnken, pp.70-71.
130. Carré, pp.181-183.
131. Carlyle, On heroes, pp.157-158 ("The hero as man of letters").
132. Ibid., p.158.

As Carré points out, the serenely successful Goethe would fit ill into a series of lectures which repeatedly dwells on the heroic struggle. But more important, I think, is Carlyle's uncertainty, by 1840, as to where he stands in relation to Goethe - here is a man of letters who (as Carlyle sees him) fought bravely and conquered, but there is no longer a place for such a figure in Carlyle's current idea of the problems facing modern society.

Carlyle's response to Goethe, then, falls roughly into four stages, as follows: first, a vague feeling, from what he has read and heard, that German literature will be able to answer the questions that torment him as a youth; second, a grateful sense that, in Goethe especially, these questions are indeed being answered - a period when personal discipleship is at its strongest, though reservations about the master and teacher are also present, especially at first; third, a period of optimism, when the Goethean solution is explored, expanded, and publicly propagated, when it seems that Goethe might save society as he has saved Carlyle; fourth, a period when the tendency of his own personality and upbringing, his apprehension that the needs of society are such as Goethe cannot in fact supply, and the continued presence of the reservations he had at the outset, together cause him to drift away from Goethe to an extent that he himself never fully realises, leaving him with the veneration and gratitude that he felt in the second stage, but largely cancelling out the high hopes of the third.

In the question of the saving potential of art, which I have just been considering, we can see the fluctuating strength of Carlyle's doubts about both art and Goethe through the successive stages. Early in his acquaintance with Goethe, an innate suspicion of art, no doubt partly inherited from his father,[133] shows itself in his complaint to

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133. See Carlyle's Reminiscences, i. 12-13 ("James Carlyle").

James Johnston about Wilhelm Meister, with its 'players and libidinous actresses and their sorry pasteboard apparatus for beautifying and enlivening the "moral world"!'[134] This suspicion is held in abeyance through the third of my stages - Carlyle struggles, as his note-book entries show, to understand and sympathise with Goethe's preference of the aesthetic to the moral.[135] In the fourth stage, however, the suspicion re-asserts itself, and Carlyle tells his brother of his 'crabbed one-sided persuasion, that all Art is but a reminiscence now'.[136]

The same four stages can be seen in the connected question of Goethe's influence on Carlyle's religious convictions.[137] In the Life of Sterling he describes how inquiring young men believed that Coleridge, with his German transcendentalists around him, would show them how to believe 'by "the reason" what "the understanding" had been obliged to fling out as incredible'[138], and though Coleridge was apparently an immediate disappointment to Carlyle, there is no doubt that at one time he was one of those inquiring young men, that, having lost the Calvinist faith of his childhood, he believed that the Germans would answer his questions and supply a new and more valid brand of faith. As he reads Wilhelm Meister, and reflects on those suggestions in it which strike him most forcibly, the second stage begins. The consoling religious truth which Carlyle soonest discovers in Goethe is that man does not need to travel far to find his belief. It is those maxims about the

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134. "T C to James Johnston," 21 September 1823, Letters, ii.437.

135. See note 71, above.

136. "T C to John A. Carlyle," 1 October 1833, Letters, vii.9.

137. See note 72, above.

138. Life of Sterling, p.53.

nearness of the ways to blessedness that impress him most deeply.[139] The nearest of all is duty, and once that has been recognised as a way to blessedness, divinity can again be seen in the nearby, commonplace universe of the nineteenth century. In his homiletic letter to his brother, Carlyle asserts that the man who 'has once seen into the infinite nature of Duty, has seen all that costs difficulty: the universe has then become a Temple for him, and the Divinity and all the divine things thereof will infallibly become revealed.'[140] Another aspect of Goethe's religious thought which is an inspiration to Carlyle at an early stage is his advocacy of reverent silence regarding the more contentious and difficult areas of religious thought.[141] The two major sources for this attitude (though of course what Goethe did not say is in this matter as important as what he did, as Carlyle acknowledges in On heroes)[142] are the 'Wer darf ihn nennen' speech from Faust part one and the passage about the sanctuary of sorrow, where the sufferings of Christ are kept hidden out of sight as Goethe always insisted they should be, in Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre. The former is used by Carlyle in a letter to Sterling, whose complaint that there is no personal god in Sartor Resartus he treats as irrelevant because the attempt to pin down and identify anything as high and sacred as God must be a futile

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139. See p. 25, above.

140. "TC to John A. Carlyle," 16 February 1832, Letters, vi. 122.

141. On Carlyle's love of silence, see Harrold, pp.230-234, and also his "The mystical element in Carlyle (1827-34)," Modern Philology, xxix (1931-1932), pp.459-475.

142. On heroes, p.158 ("The hero as man of letters").

endeavour.[143] The latter is another of the pregnant suggestions in Wilhelm Meister which Carlyle encourages his brother to ponder on.[144] By keeping such a silence about the nature of God and about the central image of Christianity, Carlyle can both withdraw himself from the dogmas of the faith he has left behind, and experience and express a religious emotion towards the mysterious higher truths; keeping silence is always a more reverential, and religious, activity to Carlyle than speaking.

Having acquired the rudiments of a new faith that works, Carlyle, in his confidence about the solutions which the Germans can offer, sets about building a superstructure, a whole transcendental system which he can present to the British public, as he finally does in Sartor Resartus. Carlyle still uses Goethean thought and language, adapted to his own purposes - Goethe's Open Secret expresses Carlyle's new sense of the accessibility of the divine,[145] and the song of the Erdgeist in Faust, with its image of the earthly making the divine manifest, provides the foundation of the philosophy of clothes - but he also needs the German metaphysical philosophers, Kant, Fichte, and Novalis in particular, to help him form a body of thought out of Goethe's hints. Carlyle's borrowing is imperiously eclectic. He takes Kant's doctrine of the ideality of time and space, extending it to make time and space actually non-existent, Fichte's divine idea of the world which is the sole reality, Novalis's statement about the

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143. "TC to John Sterling," 4 June 1835, Letters, viii.136.

144. "TC to John A. Carlyle," 16 February 1832, Letters, vi. 123. The 'Heiligtum des Schmerzes' is spoken of in Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, book 2, ch.2 (vol. ii, p.275 in Carlyle's Wilhelm Meister).

145. See J. Slater, "Goethe, Carlyle, and the open secret," Anglia, lxxvi (1958), pp.422-426.

holiness of the human form as the highest manifestation of the divine and his doctrine of Selbsttödtung (presented as synonymous with Goethe's Entsagen, which it certainly is not), and other items from German transcendentalism, and mixes all into a moral and philosophical system, centred on the idea that everything we observe, ourselves above all, is supernatural and a clothing of the divine. The system is an attempt to synthesise all the different, and often conflicting, strands of Carlyle's thought in the late 1820s, and above all Carlyle is trying, though he is hardly conscious of this, to bridge the gap between two major tendencies of thought, the Calvinist tendency towards dualism, a belief in the autonomous power of evil and in a transcendent and remote God, and the Goethean tendency towards monism or pantheism, belief in the universe as a harmonious whole which comprehends both good and evil, and in an immanent and nearby God. Again, Carlyle's note-book shows him struggling to accommodate the idea that good and evil might exist together in the universe without mutual hostility.[146]

The fourth stage is harder to locate, because of course Carlyle never makes an outright repudiation of Goethe's beliefs, in fact never fully realises how different they are from his own. On the other hand, he does repudiate the doctrines of the metaphysical philosophers, telling in the 1838 lectures on the history of literature how he found German metaphysics, with its obliterating of the material world, 'a frothy system: no right beginning to it, no right ending', and how having investigated it he discovered its worthlessness to him and

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146. Two note books, pp.204, 227.

had nothing further to do with it.[147] In this act of hand-washing a certain amount of Goethe is washed away also, because Goethe and his beliefs are an inextricable part of Carlyle's encounter with German metaphysics. Carlyle continues to believe, in some sense, in the physical world as the manifestation of the divine, but that belief in its later forms has little to do with Goethe's harmonious pantheism. Human history as presented in The French Revolution, or Past and Present, or Cromwell, or Frederick, certainly is a showing-forth of the divine in the world, but it is the divine law that is shown forth, and that law exacts retribution, punishes evil, furthers forceful good, in a thoroughly Calvinistic, Hebraic, and un-Goethean way. A Calvinistic temperament, deeply authoritarian, dogmatic, earnest, together with some tenacious residues of Calvinist thought, inevitably swept away most of the superstructure raised in the days of Carlyle's flirtation with light and airy pantheism. All along, as Carré neatly sums up, 'Moniste quand il réfléchit, il est pluraliste, manichéen quand il agit et quand il sent'.[148] The Goethe-inspired beliefs which Carlyle is left with are, again, those which he acquired at the beginning of his discipleship: that holiness can be found in the right doing of the nearest duty and in the renunciation of foolish longings for distant happiness, that in general manifestations of the divine are not far to seek, that it is wise to maintain a reverent silence with regard to the things that are of God.

Carlyle's liking for Faust's 'Wer darf ihn nennen' speech[149]

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147. Lectures (1838), p.189 (Lecture 12).

148. Carré, p.175.

149. The speech is from Faust part one, ll. 3432-3458 ("Marthens Garten").

illustrates a fundamental characteristic of his religious thought, perhaps the most important regarding the influence of that thought on Carlyle's contemporaries and followers. In this speech, Faust is answering Gretchen's insistent and awkward question, 'Glaubst du an Gott?' Faust effectively side-steps the question with a magnificent lyrical expression of vague and highly emotional pantheism:

> Der Allumfasser,
> Der Allerhalter,
> Fasst und erhält Er nicht
> Dich, mich, sich selbst?

Like Goethe's Iphigenie, with her 'Ich untersuche nicht, ich fühle nur',[150] he ends up sweeping aside the intellect and resting on such certainties as are offered by strong feeling:

> Gefühl ist alles;
> Name ist Schall und Rauch,
> Umnebelnd Himmelsglut.

Carlyle, in the letter to Sterling which I have mentioned,[151] side-steps in much the same way, faced with Sterling's awkwardly direct assertion that Teufelsdröckh recognises no personal God. 'One, Three, what meaning can any mortal (after all) attach to them in reference to such an object? Wer darf ihn NENNEN?', Carlyle thunders, using punctuation, underlining, and capitals, in the same way as Faust uses high poetry. The evasion, characteristic of both Goethe's and Carlyle's attitude to religion, is by no means a dishonest one, but such hazy emotionalism, however sincere, does not promise well as a foundation for the new religion which Carlyle wants to see informing a new-born society. 'Gefühl ist alles', but in any case, as I have said, Carlyle's

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150. Goethe, Iphigenie auf Tauris, act 4, scene 4, l.1650.

151. See pp.50-51, above.

religious feeling and Goethe's are of radically different kinds. It is in feeling, indeed, that they are farthest apart - Carlyle's attempt in the years up to Sartor Resartus to reconcile himself to Goethean pantheism is primarily an intellectual endeavour. Carlyle's religious teaching is characterised by a refusal to answer the most difficult, and arguably the most important questions on the grounds that they are irrelevant. The problem of belief, however, is manifestly not solved by these means. Taught by Goethe to dispense with the letter, Carlyle cannot rightly claim a community of religious spirit even with Goethe himself.

Carlyle cannot follow Goethe as an artist, or as a pantheist. Nevertheless, there are influential aspects of Carlyle's thought which would not have been the same if he had not known and admired Goethe. Above all two large ideas, neither of them new but both given special impetus by Carlyle's propagation of them, stem from Carlyle's encounter with Goethe: that there is an enormous moral and religious value in work, and that belief can co-exist with, indeed flow out of, a spirit of sceptical inquiry. The oddity of the literary relationship between Goethe and Carlyle, the fact that Carlyle had to misinterpret Goethe, darkening the shades both of his life and of his doctrines, in order to admire him as highly as he did, is in itself influential. As Harrold points out, the body of doctrine Carlyle finally emerges with, in the fourth of my stages, is a jumbled and disharmonious one, ultimately more likely to confuse than to enlighten those many Victorian thinkers who were drawn by Carlyle's imaginative and eloquent preaching.[152] The trouble with Carlyle's grouping of modern German

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152. Harrold, pp.235-236.

poets with seventeenth-century Puritans and twelfth-century monks, in Past and Present,[153] is that while the last two have at their back creeds which, however crude, old-fashioned, and unfit for an inquiring age, are at least solid, definite, and supportive, the first have no satisfactory equivalent for such, as Carlyle effectually, though never quite consciously, discovered when he tried to build a body of thought on the foundation of their beliefs. Goethe gives much to Carlyle, but never delivers the more that he seems to promise, and Carlyle's experience, partly because so publicised in some of its phases, foreshadows that of other of his countrymen. Goethe, with the other modern German poets and philosophers, represented one of the directions from which the new era and its new religion, anxiously awaited by so many Victorians, might come; from that direction, however, it was certainly not to materialise.

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153. See p. 29 , above.

Chapter Two

BRITISH OPINIONS OF GOETHE, 1824-1845

Part I: Individual literary works

Of those writers who have attained and kept a reputation for genius of the very highest order, Goethe was the first (and remains the only one) to emerge in an age when literary criticism was a wide-spread activity. By 1824, German critics were already placing Goethe alongside Homer and Shakespeare, and in that year, in the Preface to his translation of Wilhelm Meister, Carlyle made this opinion known to English readers, not endorsing it personally, but not dismissing it either.[1] However absurd such a judgement might seem to those who wrote about literature in the British periodicals, the very existence of the claim made it clear that the 'Goethe question' was one of some importance, and one which those who mediated between the poets and the public ought to be considering. Carlyle was expressing an extreme and somewhat eccentric view when he said that 'the existence or non-existence of a new Poet for the World in our own time, of a new Instructor and Preacher of Truth to all men, is really a question of more importance to us than many that are agitated with far greater noise,'[2] but he was certainly not the only critic of his time and country who saw the presence of a contemporary artistic genius as of more than recreational significance. For those writing about Goethe in the periodicals with any pretence to seriousness, it became a question not merely of reviewing a given publication, but of assessing the stature, and, still more important, the tendency of Goethe seen as a whole. Long before his

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1. Carlyle, Wilhelm Meister, i. 10 (Preface to the 1st edition).

2. Carlyle, 1827 "Goethe" essay (i.e. Wilhelm Meister vol.i), p.33.

death, Goethe's reputation, in Germany at least, had become as striking a phenomenon as Goethe himself, and the English Goethe-critics of the years up to and after his death are often writing as much about the former phenomenon as about the latter. As De Quincey wrote in 1842, in an Encyclopaedia Britannica article, Goethe had at this time two claims on the notice of the English: 'one in right of his own unquestionable talents; and another much stronger, though less direct, arising out of his position, and the extravagant partisanship put forward on his behalf for the last forty years'.[3]

After the sensation caused by Werther in the 1780s and 1790s had died away, the frequency of Goethe's appearances in the British periodicals only began to increase significantly in the 1820s, reached a climax in the mid-1830s, and thereafter dropped slightly but remained consistently high.[4] The flow of periodical literature on a given subject is controlled by the flow of published material that can be reviewed. In the period I am dealing with, the important landmarks are not, of course, the initial appearances of Goethe's works - most of his major works had appeared in Germany well before 1824 - but the publication of English translations, or of books about Goethe, or of such miscellaneous items as did first appear late in Goethe's life and after his death. The following are the most important events as far as the periodicals were concerned. Lord Leveson Gower's translation of Faust part one appeared in 1823,[5] Carlyle's of Wilhelm Meisters

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3. T. De Quincey, "Goethe," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 7th ed. (Edinburgh, 1842), x. 596.

4. For figures, see Morgan and Hohlfeld (ch. 1 note 13, above), p.78.

5. See ch.1, p.11, above.

Lehrjahre and an anonymous translation of part of Dichtung und Wahrheit in 1824,[6] Charles Des Voeux's of Torquato Tasso in 1827,[7] and a series of translations of Faust, including a few of part two, from 1833 to the end of the period. Wolfgang Menzel's Die deutsche Literatur, of great importance because of the adverse criticism of Goethe it contained, was first published in Germany in 1828,[8] Goethe's correspondence with Schiller in 1828-9[9], and with Zelter in 1833-4.[10] Goethe died on the 22nd March 1832, and in 1833 his Nachgelassene Werke, including Faust part two and the final section of Dichtung und Wahrheit, were published.[11] Also in 1833, Sarah Austin published her translated anthology of laudatory accounts of Goethe from the Germans, Characteristics of Goethe,[12] and another work generated by near-idolatry of Goethe, Eckermann's Gespräche mit Goethe, appeared in Germany in 1836.[13] The chronological order of these events influenced but did not determine the chronology of English Goethe-criticism. Translations or original works might be reviewed long after they were first published, especially if a new edition had appeared, and works published in Germany, naturally,

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6. Wilhelm Meister's apprenticeship, translated by T. Carlyle, 3 vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1824); Memoirs of Goëthe [sic], 2 vols. (1824).

7. Torquato Tasso...with other German poetry, translated by C. Des Voeux (1827).

8. W. Menzel, Die deutsche Literatur (Stuttgart, 1828).

9. Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe, in den Jahren 1794 bis 1805, 6 vols. (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1828, 1829).

10. Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter, in den Jahren 1796 bis 1832, ed. F.W. Riemer, 6 vols. (Berlin, 1833, 1834).

11. Goethes nachgelassene Werke, 15 vols. (Stuttgart and Tübingen, 1833).

12. Characteristics of Goethe, from the German of Falk, von Müller, etc., translated by S. Austin, 3 vols. (1833).

13. J.P. Eckermann, Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens, 1823-1832, 3 vols. (Leipzig and Magdeburg, 1836-1848).

often produced a delayed reaction from the British periodicals.

The articles I shall mostly be concentrating on will be those longer, more serious ones which show a genuine interest in Goethe, whether that interest finishes in praise or in blame. A large number of the articles relating to Goethe from this period are simply notices, or express views or attitudes too vague and general to be of more than passing interest. Ill-informed stock responses are interesting only as a background to more independent and thoughtful assessments of Goethe. There is in fact a large amount of intelligent and knowledgeable criticism among the articles I am considering. Part of the reason for the high standard of much of the material is that the criticism of a foreign author, if undertaken seriously, has to be done by people with special knowledge. The German language, especially in the period before 1845 when there were few and mostly inadequate translations, was quite an effective barrier between Goethe and the more ignorant and foolish among English critics. The people who wrote the important articles about Goethe would at least know German, and if they knew German - not a normal qualification for Englishmen at the time[14] - they would have acquired some sort of knowledge of German literature, and of the works of Goethe other than the volume they were specifically reviewing at a given time. Often, therefore, Goethe is preaching to the converted among the British reviewers, but fortunately, not all these converts were as blindly zealous as Carlyle. In Carlyle's case, the acquisition of proficiency in German led almost straight into a whole-hearted personal adherence to

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14. See ch.1, pp.10-12, above.

Goethe. Other German scholars, such as J.G. Lockhart, J.S. Blackie, and Herman Merivale, less extreme in their reactions and less in need of a personal saviour, were able to combine a special interest in things German with what can be tentatively labelled a typically British capacity for balanced, common-sense judgement.

The most convenient way of grouping the articles under consideration is in terms of their connection with the various 'events' I have listed above. Other kinds of connection, however, will necessarily cut across these divisions from time to time. Where authorship of the articles is known to me,[15] it is obviously worthwhile to see a plurality of items by one author as in relation to each other, and the distinctive character of a particular periodical, or a recognisable type of attitude shown in different contexts, will create other connections.

Carlyle's Wilhelm Meister

Even if Carlyle's ideas about Goethe had made no impact at all on British readers, his individual contribution to knowledge of Goethe in Britain would still have been considerable, by virtue of his translation of Wilhelm Meister. Not only was it a serious, complete, and competent translation of a large-scale work (and it was the first of its kind in all these respects), but it was also prefaced by remarks which indicated that the work translated was both good and important, that the reader also ought to take it seriously. The translation (of Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre - Carlyle's translation of the Wanderjahre first appeared in

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15. My information as to authorship is drawn mostly from The Wellesley Index to Victorian periodicals, ed. W.E.Houghton, vols. i-iii (Toronto and Buffalo: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1966-1979).

1827, in his German romance) attracted three substantial reviews from distinguished men of letters: Francis Jeffrey's in the Edinburgh Review, J.G. Lockhart's in Blackwood's Magazine, and Thomas De Quincey's in the London Magazine.[16] These three articles - offering respectively qualified blame, qualified praise, and unqualified blame - present a useful cross-section of British views of Goethe in 1824. Carlyle, in his Preface and his 1827 essay on 'Goethe', seems to be completing the series by offering unqualified praise, but it should be remembered that Carlyle himself had mixed feelings about the work, was aware of its artistic failings and absurdities while reverencing the Goethean wisdom that he found manifested in it.[17] Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre is a work which, partly through Carlyle's advocacy of it, came to be taken more seriously in the nineteenth century than it has tended to be in the twentieth. With its contrived and inconsequential plot, its patchwork structure, and the grafting of Bildungsroman onto Künstlerroman which G.H. Lewes noticed,[18] it presents in extreme form a difficulty which is characteristic of Goethe's works. The difficulty, experienced particularly by early critics of Goethe, whose conceptions of literary excellence were perhaps more limited than ours, is that even if Goethe's genius and greatness are acknowledged, it is hard to find even one of his literary works that will stand up on its own as an undoubted masterpiece. It was, understandably,

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16. F. Jeffrey, "German genius and taste: Wilhelm Meister," Edinburgh Review, xlii (1825), pp.409-449; J.G. Lockhart, "Wilhelm Meister, Memoirs of Goethe," Blackwood's Magazine, xv (1824), pp.619-632; T. De Quincey, "Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's apprenticeship," London Magazine, x (1824), pp.189-197, 291-307.

17. See ch.1, p.26, above.

18. Lewes, Life of Goethe, 2nd ed. (see ch.4, note 9, below), pp.393-395.

an almost universally popular view among his admirers in the nineteenth century, thatGoethe's greatness was manifested in the whole rather than in the parts, that his genius was something one felt through one's dissatisfaction with the particular work one was reading.

Jeffrey, a brilliant Edinburgh advocate and Editor of the Edinburgh Review from 1803 to 1829, later an eminent Whig politician and a loyal friend to the Carlyles, writes from the standpoint of a British reader experiencing German literature for the first time. His reflections on differences of national taste lead him to a summary statement of his own artistic ideal. A national literature, he says, will always progress towards a state of refinement where,in its highest manifestations, it shows forth in artistic form 'the repose and simplicity of graceful nature' (p.410). Measured by this standard Wilhelm Meister seems to him - and he sees himself as representing the generality of English taste - 'eminently absurd, puerile, incongruous, vulgar, and affected', and he is alarmed at the idea, presumably conveyed to him by Carlyle's Preface, that the Germans regard this as 'the very greatest work of their very greatest writer' (p.414). Jeffrey goes on to give detailed examples of the bad qualities he has listed, castigating Goethe in particular for his emphasis on homely (that is, in a work of art, vulgar) domestic items like food, drink, and soap. Jeffrey also lists what he sees as the novel's (occasional) redeeming features - 'outbreakings of a fine speculation, and gleams of a warm and sprightly imagination - an occasional wild and exotic glow of fancy and poetry - a vigorous heaping up of incidents, and touches of bright and powerful description ' (p.415). The impression given by this old-fashioned, Augustan critique is of wild, spasmodic, uncultivated power, coupled with a wilful eccentricity which seems to want to keep the novel

'aloof from general or ordinary nature', (p.415), while also perversely insisting on that other kind of ordinariness which is classifiable as the vulgar. Jeffrey clears the book, however, of the charge of exceptional immorality which had already become attached to it. He sensibly points out that its indelicacies are no more shocking or dangerous than those of Tom Jones or Roderick Random. (p.418).

What is most interesting about this review is the way it becomes more sympathetic as it proceeds. It was a common and a significant experience among English readers of Goethe that their initial revulsion gradually gave way to a tendency to concede more and more - this, after all, was what had happened to Carlyle, which partly explains the ambivalent attitude to Goethe which he finished with. Jeffrey, broad-minded enough within his limits, finds much to praise as well as to blame as he describes and quotes from parts of Wilhelm Meister. A typical comment, again introducing a vaguely defined 'nature' as a yardstick, is that on Philine, who shows 'a daring and capricious pleasantry, which, if it often strikes as unnatural, is frequently original and effective'. (p.424). He likes Mignon and her famous songs, and acclaims Wilhelm's remarks about Hamlet as 'the most able, eloquent, and profound exposition of the character of Hamlet, as conceived by our great dramatist, that has ever been given to the world' (p.433). Profound exposition is something Jeffrey himself, probably wisely, does not attempt. He avoids commenting on the mystical features of Wilhelm Meister, merely recounting the cabalistic proceedings towards the end of the novel with a somewhat scornful emphasis. Its patent incoherence (one can assume) would make discussion of the work's 'idea' a futile exercise. By the end of his article, though, Jeffrey feels that he has, as he writes, perceived and demonstrated enough of what is good in

Wilhelm Meister to have to back-pedal slightly, and soften his initial verdict. The novel, he says, improves as it goes, and it clearly leaves him (as I suggested Goethe's works tend to) impressed with the author if not with the work - his final remark is that the better passages in Wilhelm Meister 'demonstrate,that if Taste be local and variable, Genius is permanent and universal' (p.449).

Lockhart, twenty years younger than Jeffrey, was at a much more advanced stage in his appreciation of Goethe, and of German literature as a whole, in 1824. Most famous for his biography of Scott, Lockhart was a Tory man of letters, Editor of the Quarterly Review from 1826 to 1853, who, like Carlyle, studied German in his early twenties in order to investigate the new German literature at first hand. His article is a review of Carlyle's Wilhelm Meister with a brief warning against the inadequacies of a pretended translation of Dichtung und Wahrheit.[19] As he points out at the beginning, Blackwood's was traditionally favourable to Goethe, and had previously engaged in some controversy with the Edinburgh Review on the question.[20] The stage Lockhart has reached, however - and in this he can be said to represent the rather limited scope of the early Blackwood's pro-Germanism - is one where he has accepted Goethe as a great writer, but is concerned to put him in perspective and to avoid over-stating his greatness. He states it as a Blackwood's opinion that to rank Goethe with Shakespeare and Homer is absurd, though he can perhaps be regarded as the greatest, or at least the most influential, of contemporary writers. (p.619-620).

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19. See note 6, above.

20. p.619. See Rosemary Ashton's thesis (ch.1, note 8, above) for details of English reception of German literature in the period immediately preceding this one, and particularly for an examination of the important part played by the early Blackwood's.

Lockhart states plainly the idea I have mentioned, that Goethe is great as a whole rather than in his individual works - he is 'an exhibitor of unrivalled power, rather than a creator of unrivalled works'. (p.622). Wilhelm Meister, in accordance with this view, is neatly described as 'one of those lumber-rooms which could be found nowhere but in the palace of a Croesus' (p.623). In another Goethe article, which appeared in Blackwood's later in 1824, Lockhart presents Götz von Berlichingen as a work where Goethe started, or helped to start, something new and of great potential - a literary re-endorsement of the Gothic Middle Ages - then immediately left the field, so that he was easily overtaken in it by Scott.[21] This point is developed further in the Meister article. Goethe has been 'injured in many respects' by 'the very magnificence...of his originating genius'. Because Goethe is always passing on from his successes to some new kind of endeavour, he has been 'passed, once and again, in the race of which he first pointed out both the course and the goal' (p.622). As Scott has passed him in the historical romance, so Schiller has passed him in the drama.

This idea sets the tone of the whole article. Lockhart, a knowledgeable and intelligent advocate of Goethe, interestingly regards as self-undermining a tendency in Goethe which others, Carlyle included, have seen as one of his chief assets - the insistence on continual change and development which prevents him from ever repeating himself artistically. In Lockhart's eyes, this tendency has the effect of making Goethe's works (Faust perhaps excluded) instant fossils - once others have developed the techniques he introduced, his own models are of little

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21. J.G. Lockhart, "Goetz von Berlichingen, a tragedy, by Goethe," Blackwood's Magazine, xvi (1824), pp.369-385. Lockhart is writing about Scott's 1799 translation of Götz.

more than historical interest. Lockhart disagrees with Madame de Staël's view that the best of Wilhelm Meister is its critical and philosophical disquisitions. The ideas discussed in these passages, Lockhart says, have by now become too commonplace to be interesting, and there is more value in the emotional charge produced by the story of Mignon (p.623 - rather surprisingly, Lockhart does not claim that Scott has rendered Mignon redundant by producing his imitation, Fenella in Peveril of the Peak). Lockhart certainly regards Goethe as great, but he is reduced to defining his greatness in negative terms - 'There is no barren, dry, uninstructive work of Goethe. He has no pompous artifice about him' (p.622). Lockhart puts a lot of emphasis on Goethe's influence - it is in this that his greatness shows itself rather than in the qualities of his works - but he makes no judgement on whether this influence is for good or bad. The only judgement he passes on Goethe's tendency, later to become a highly controversial question, is to compare his vision of the world favourably with that of Byron, one of those modern writers who have come most obviously under his influence. Goethe is remarkable for his ability to feel and show forth 'The beauty and nothingness of the world', to see simultaneously the loveliness and the futility inherent in human destiny, and hence he produces pairs of characters like Faust and Mephistopheles, Meister and Jarno - the idealist and the cynic, both of whose attitudes he can experience himself. Byron, on the other hand, tends to weld these two opposites into one character - Harold, Don Juan, Conrad - and in Lockhart's view such a presentation of human nature is false and degrading to humanity (p.621). To realise what a simplification this is, and how limited is Lockhart's insight into Goethe, one need only look at Carlyle's Faust essay of two years earlier, which shows a much

more sophisticated appreciation of the duality Lockhart is talking about here.[22]

De Quincey's review, amusing though it is, does not merit close attention. De Quincey was a good German scholar, and learned in German metaphysics, but Goethe aroused a revulsion in him which, unlike Jeffrey's, was unaffected by the process of writing about Wilhelm Meister. The article expends most of its energies expressing horror at the salaciousness of Wilhelm Meister, especially offensive to De Quincey on account of the author's advanced age. De Quincey unwisely commits himself as to Goethe's future reputation (Carlyle's un-denied report that the Germans place 'this old vagabond' with Homer and Shakespeare almost deprives him of his self-control - pp.190-191), claiming that once the immediate craze dies Goethe will be 'dismissed to that oblivion which inevitably awaits all fantastic fopperies that have no foundation in nature and good sense' (p.196). Nature and good sense are very much the principles which Jeffrey was applying, but De Quincey's approach is different, in that while Jeffrey was largely talking about good or bad taste, De Quincey sees dangerous immorality as well as artistic failure. Like Jeffrey, De Quincey makes a clear statement of his own artistic ideal, and this statement is quite important as representing a kind of attitude to literature in the light of which Goethe was often criticised adversely by the English. 'That the general current of feeling [in the works of a poet] should be deeper than that of ordinary life, nobler, and purer, - is surely no unreasonably postulate: else wherefore is he a poet?' (p.293). The artist's nature, then, is something

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22. See ch.1, pp.31-32, above.

different from ordinary nature, and it is crucial part of the poet's duty to impart a high tone to his material. Goethe's crime is of double magnitude. Not only has he not selected the extraordinarily high and pure from nature, but he has gone out of his way to concentrate on the extraordinarily low and impure, for example in the story of Mignon, centred as it is on an incestuous relationship - there is the typical Goethe, 'never relying on the grand high road sensibilities of human nature, but always travelling into bye-paths of unnatural or unhallowed interest' (p.303). In the latter portion of his article, De Quincey affects to withdraw and allow Goethe to condemn himself. To demonstrate the moral turpitude, as well as the absurdity, of Wilhelm Meister, he presents a 'Gallery of female portraits', summarising, with sustained irony and often quite funnily, the plot as it relates to the various female characters in the novel. The approach is the same as that of a frivolous Blackwood's article by James White, who uses scornful plot summary as a means of demonstrating the appalling immorality of Die Wahlverwandtschaften.[23] In both cases, one feels that there is a strong element of pruriency in the authors' moral outrage.

Of the reviews of Wilhelm Meister, De Quincey's is the only one that makes adverse comments on Carlyle's translation. De Quincey criticises Carlyle for introducing barbarous provincialisms, vulgarisms, and Germanisms (he gives several examples), thus depriving the reader of the stylistic pleasure which is the only pleasure he could possibly receive from Wilhelm Meister. He also sees inaccuracies, though as he (by admission) has no original to hand, he has to deduce these errors from

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23. J. White, "A discourse on Goethe and the Germans," Blackwood's Magazine, xlv (1839), pp.247-256.

what he sees in the English text (pp.192-197).[24] Later, when Carlyle was beginning to have a literary reputation of his own, De Quincey speaks of him, as of Goethe also, with much greater respect, in the Encyclopaedia Britannica article which I quoted from above.[25] It is worth considering that article now as a clear illustration of the way general English attitudes to Goethe changed between 1824 and 1842. With De Quincey himself, very little seems really to have changed. He still has a basically low opinion of Goethe, he still thinks Wilhelm Meister is 'at open war, not with decorum and good taste merely, but with moral purity and the dignity of human nature' (p.602), and he still seems to have only what Carré calls 'une connaissance très indirecte'[26] of most of Goethe's works. The difference is that, for all the low opinions he expresses, De Quincey now writes with respect, as of an established writer of unquestionable merit, rather than an 'old vagabond' whose books are temporarily in vogue. No doubt the Encyclopaedia Britannica encouraged a quieter critical approach than the London Magazine, but there is no doubt either that by this time Goethe had acquired an automatic literary respectability in England, partly through the advocacy of the translator of Wilhelm Meister of whom De Quincey now says that his 'original genius qualified him for sympathizing even to excess with any real merits in that work' (p.602). De Quincey is still, however, belittling enough within his new limits. The popularity of Hermann und Dorothea suggests

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24. On the merits of this translation, see ch.1, pp.38-39, above.

25. See p.58, above.

26. Carré, p.198.

to him that Goethe missed his vocation, that he should have 'confined himself to the real in domestic life, without raising his eyes to the ideal'. Goethe seems to have been a good man, but he had an easy and happy life, and De Quincey does not believe his moral nature would have stood against suffering or temptation. He was by temperament religious, but inquiry and error so clouded his mind that he thought of God with curiosity, not with awe. Finally, though De Quincey can no longer dismiss Goethe's success as a flash in the pan, he can describe his present reputation as inflated, and predict that it will decline for the next generation or two, until it reaches its proper level (pp.602-603).

Nobody but Carlyle, among early critics of Wilhelm Meister, made any attempt to discuss the 'meaning' of the work, to take it seriously either as a whole or in its parts. De Quincey, in his London Magazine review, promises to examine the question of what Goethe means by 'apprenticeship', if he should have space (p.293), but apparently his detailed exposure of the book's immoral tendency leaves him with none to spare. William Taylor of Norwich, in a short and, in general, vaguely favourable review in the Monthly Review, dismisses the more philosophical parts of Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, with their typically German 'oracular mysticism', as unworthy of a precise thinker.[27] Carlyle's translation of Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, a work he himself took more seriously than he took the Lehrjahre, attracted at most a mention in the undistinguished collection of English reviews of his German romance, in which the translation first appeared. The Literary Gazette reviewer of German romance doubted that English taste

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27. W. Taylor, "Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's apprenticeship," Monthly Review, new series, cvi (1825), pp.528-529. See ch.3, pp.101-103 below.

would ever become reconciled to 'the mysterious mysticism of Wilhelm Meister',[28] and the Monthly Review, though approving of Carlyle's biographical notice of Goethe, and quoting from it at length, made no comment on the work by which Goethe was represented.[29] The 'mystical' was regarded as a characteristic feature and fault of German literature and thought, and one that would long be a stumbling-block to English acceptance of the Germans; English solidity and common sense would rightly have nothing to do with German Will o' the Wisps. I have devoted a large amount of space to the early reviews of Wilhelm Meister because they present in a straightforward form attitudes to Goethe which recur, in more or less refined shapes, throughout this period. Mystical, incongruous, vulgar, immoral, were epithets that continued to characterise negative English opinions of Goethe, and perhaps more importantly, the mixed feelings expressed by Jeffrey and Lockhart - hostility shading into partial acceptance, sympathy into condescension - present different stages of an uncertainty typical of the more thoughtful English critics.

Dichtung und Wahrheit, Torquato Tasso

Two Goethe translations of the 1820s which attracted much less serious attention than Carlyle's Wilhelm Meister were an inadequate translation of part of Dichtung und Wahrheit, from 1824 (which Lockhart mentions in his Wilhelm Meister review), and Charles Des Voeux's Torquato Tasso, of 1827.[30] The most remarkable of the reviews of

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28. "German romance," Literary Gazette, xi (1827), p.35.

29. "German romance," Monthly Review, new and improved series, v (1827), pp.157-166.

30. See notes 6 and 7, above.

these translations is Henry Crabb Robinson's of Dichtung und Wahrheit in the Westminster Review in 1824.[31] Robinson, though a man of limited critical powers, was well ahead of his time as a Goethe-critic,[32] and this review, in the second issue of the newly-formed Westminster Review, shows a well-informed and open-minded liberalism of approach characteristic both of the author and of the journal, and very uncharacteristic of the generality of English Goethe-criticism in 1824. Much of the article consists of detailed exposure of the faults of the translation, and proof that it has been done from a French version, not from the original. Robinson also, however, makes his comments on the work itself, and in these he expresses a kind of positive attitude to Goethe which appears only rarely in England before Lewes's Life of 1855. The most distinctive feature is that Robinson praises Goethe for what some British critics regarded as a serious defect in his works, his objectivity, or moral neutrality, his describing of human actions without offering moral comment on them. He says of Dichtung und Wahrheit, 'that which constitutes the peculiar excellence of the book is, that he has scattered over his volumes a copious treasure of psychological observation, the tone of which is purely explanatory, not critical or judicial' (p.374). He credits Goethe with a 'rich spirit of contemplative wisdom', and compares him, in his objectivity, to a naturalist searching for accurate information (p.374) - this reference to scientific method also anticipates Lewes. He refers to Goethe as a 'great man', and predicts (more accurately than De Quincey) that Dichtung und Wahrheit will still be read 'after the

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31. H.C. Robinson, "Göthe's Memoirs of himself," Westminster Review, i (1824), pp.370-383.

32. See ch.3, pp. 104-107 below.

lapse of ages, on account both of its wisdom and its beauty' (pp.375, 382). He is also rather unusual for his time in that he commends the moral purport of Faust part one, commenting on the 'awful and instructive lesson' it teaches about the danger of exceptional human acquirements (p.381). He is, however, more characteristic of the 1820s in his statement that the reflective passages in Dichtung und Wahrheit are too German and speculative to be expected to please the British, and in his implied comment on the moral tone of Die Wahlverwandtschaften, when he says that that work is the only one of Goethe's less fit for translation into English at present than Dichtung und Wahrheit (p.374). These remarks are familiar ones, though in this case they are not, as they often are, accompanied by an endorsement from the reviewer of the British response he is predicting. An altogether less surprising review of this translation is William Taylor's in the Monthly Review in 1825.[33] Like Robinson, Taylor knows his German, and he corrects the translator's mis-spelling of Goethe (Goëthe), but unlike him he finds the combination of poetry and truth merely confusing, and accuses Goethe of 'diffuseness' and 'servile garrulity' (p.534).

Des Voeux's translation of Torquato Tasso caused no great stir but was generally well received. Carlyle writes to Goethe in harsh terms of this translation,[34] but in fact it is not so bad, and certainly gives a better impression of the original than most English verse translations of the time. The Literary Gazette speaks in glowing language of both translator and work ('sweetness', 'exquisite touches of moral sentiment'), but has nothing of interest to say about either.[35]

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33. W. Taylor, "Memoirs of Goëthe[sic]," Monthly Review, new series, cvi (1825), pp.534- 536.

34. "TC to Goethe," 18 April 1828, Letters, iv. 366.

35. "Torquato Tasso," Literary Gazette, xi (1827), p.453.

The most interesting review of this translation is in the Monthly Review[36]. The reviewer is unlikely to be Lockhart, but his attitude to Goethe resembles Lockhart's in many respects. Like Lockhart, he speaks of Goethe's enormous influence on European literature, and he argues that, his influence being so great, it is idle to dispute the fact that he is a great writer (p.182). He is also, however, like Lockhart in seeing Goethe's greatness as a general phenomenon that does not manifest itself most strongly in individual literary works. For a whole page he wavers, obviously uncertain of the way he is using the different terms, between ascribing genius or talent to Goethe: 'We would say, that he is a man of admirable talents, rather than marked, peculiar genius devoted to one pursuit. At least, his genius for any one, bears small proportion to his general talents, adapted to all' (p.184). Finally, he says that this undirected but exceptional quality of mind can be called either 'master-talent' or 'universal genius', and that it does not particularly matter which term is chosen. In some sense, however, it obviously does matter which is chosen, because 'genius' and 'talent', vague terms though they are, unquestionably suggest very different degrees of stature and importance. This reviewer's uncertainty is typical of a whole class of well-qualified early critics of Goethe - Lockhart and J.S. Blackie are the most obvious others - who want to produce a just estimate of Goethe, somewhere in between the bigoted and insular view of men like De Quincey and the extravagant admiration expressed by German critics and, in Britain, by Carlyle.[37] This reviewer seems to end up saying that what Goethe has is talent - this is the correct term to attach to 'unequalled versatility and vigour of mind' (p.184) - but

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36. "Goethe's Torquato Tasso," Monthly Review, new and improved series, vi (1827), pp.182-197.

37. This reviewer states his desire to find such a middle position on p.183.

he has so much of it that it almost becomes genius; his is talent in kind, but genius, or nearly genius, in degree. In his criticism of Tasso, and of Iphigenie auf Tauris, which he discusses with it, he is in danger of blurring his position, in that he definitely presents these works as masterpieces, praising them in terms that suggest the high dignity of genius rather than the more mundane excellence of talent - both plays, he says, show 'lofty spirit and singleness of purpose', 'noble simplicity', 'strength, dignity, harmony'(p.190). These 'classical' works of Goethe were generally well received by English critics, and their high quality seems uncontroversial, but they attracted very little detailed attention, at least in this period, partly because, as this review shows, they were little to the purpose in that discussion of the general stature of Goethe which interested the early English critics most.

Translations of Faust

Articles about Faust are to be found from beginning to end of the period I am dealing with, their frequency varying in accordance with the appearance of various new translations on the market. It is worth viewing these articles as a group rather than trying to fit them piecemeal into a chronological framework, but it should be emphasised that I am not attempting a comprehensive history of English reactions to Faust in the period. What will interest me most, as throughout this study, will be general ideas about the stature, importance, and tendency of Goethe, and Faust assumes a position of some prominence simply because of Goethe's works it was the most translated, the most written about, and generally regarded as the greatest. It should also be pointed out that when I speak of Faust, unless I specify otherwise, I shall mean Faust part one only. Most of the articles I am considering concern themselves only or mostly with the first part, and regard it as in some way a whole in itself.

Faust, unlike the more incoherent Wilhelm Meister, is a work that invites interpretation, for the reason that it quite obviously deals with a large-scale theme of some kind, involving as it does a devil, issues of salvation and damnation, and a hero who clearly bears a heavy weight of representation. The English periodical critics, not invariably fools, rush in with numerous kinds of interpretation, influenced by and influencing their numerous shades of opinion about Goethe as a whole. Two writers on the subject of Lord Leveson Gower's 1823 translation of Faust,[38] J.G. Lockhart in 1826 and William Empson in 1830, produce virtually opposite readings of Faust, both inadequate, and both clearly the natural product of different general attitudes.[39] Lockhart is consistently sympathetic to Goethe, and in his brief remarks about the moral tendency of Faust he sets out to combat the common English view (based, he thinks, on an ignorance bred by inadequate translations of the work) that in Faust Goethe ridicules human curiosity, knowledge, and virtue.[40] What Goethe is really attacking, Lockhart considers, is the spiritual pride which produces excessive, presumptuous curiosity, knowledge divorced from wisdom, and the false virtue that relies solely on itself. (p.138). Faust is an essentially good man who sins in these ways, and Lockhart asserts that if the work were continued (the second part was not to appear until seven years later), Faust must inevitably repent and be saved, as the sinner Gretchen is saved in the work as it stands. (p.139). Lockhart, then, convinced that Goethe is fundamentally sound, and, indeed, conventional, in moral and religious matters, predicts the right result for the wrong reasons, and utterly misses the distinctively Goethean scheme of salvation through perpetual striving which is hinted at in the Prolog im Himmel and in the terms of Faust's wager with Mephistopheles. William Empson, writing for an Edinburgh Review still mostly

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38. See ch.1, p. 11, above.

39. J.G. Lockhart, "Translations of Goethe's Faust," Quarterly Review, xxxiv (1826), pp.136-153; W. Empson, "Lord Leveson Gower's Poems and translations," Edinburgh Review, lii (1830), pp.231-261.

40. This opinion is most famously expressed in Coleridge's Table talk, Oxford ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1917), p.209.

hostile to Goethe, presents precisely the view that Lockhart was attacking, describing Faust as 'a sort of monster in literature', a 'splendid sneer on the imbecility, vanity, and hypocrisy, of human learning and human virtue', praising the linguistic power and deploring the 'immoral tendency' which together make it 'the extreme compound of German genius and German extravagance'(pp.252-253). Empson, a Whig, man of letters, and professor of politics and law, later Jeffrey's son-in-law, and Editor of the Edinburgh Review from 1847 to 1852, is spoken of in two of Carlyle's letters to Goethe, in relation to this article and to a later and better one on Goethe's correspondence with Schiller.[41] In the first letter, predicting what the latter article will be like on the basis of what the former is like, Carlyle says 'an admiring Dilettantism, but no true insight or earnest Criticism is to be looked for'[42]. Certainly the article promises no more, if so much. Empson shows a complete lack of either intellectual independence or thorough knowledge in this portrayal of Goethe as power without principle, an author as conventionally immoral as Lockhart's Goethe is conventionally moral.

There is a similar opposition, though on a more sophisticated level, between two reviews of Hayward's prose translation of Faust,[43] both written in 1833. The negative view, by now a much more moderate and considered one, is again from William Empson in the Edinburgh Review, the positive one from J.A. Heraud (probably) in Fraser's Magazine.[44] Hayward's translation, the first into English with any pretence to accuracy and completeness, was

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41. See Ch.3, pp. 128-130, below.

42. "T C to Goethe," 22 January 1831, Letters, v. 220.

43. Faust: a dramatic poem, translated by A. Hayward (1833). See ch.1, note 16, above.

44. W. Empson, "History and principles of translation - Hayward's Translation of Faust," Edinburgh Review, lvii (1833), pp.107-143; J.A. Heraud (probably), "Hayward's translation of Goethe's 'Faust'," Fraser's Magazine, vii (1833), pp.532-554.

an important event for English critics of Goethe, and most of Empson's article is an over-long dissertation on translation, and particularly on the advisability of prose translations of poetry. Empson's most important critical statement is a denial of Rosenkranz's assertion, quoted in Hayward's Preface, that Faust is concerned with the reconcilement of the real and the ideal, the great problem of existence. This is a Carlylean idea, though Carlyle applies it to Goethe in general, not to Faust,[45] and it represents one of the highest claims that could be made for Goethe in the nineteenth century. Empson, consistent with his former position, considers that Faust is likely to do the reverse of reconcile these two principles - 'We could fancy that many of its believing readers have for a time been made by it less contented with their own share, both of the real and the ideal' (p.137). Empson sees nothing remarkable or new in the ideas encompassed in Goethe's Faust - Goethe has certainly brought new life into an old legend with admirable skill, but he has not added anything to what the old legend had to say. Faust is 'more or less the history of every human, certainly of every thoughtful and susceptible being' (it is plainly the story of Goethe, in particular), and the lesson it teaches is an old one - that in all our acquirements and enjoyments we must seek 'not so much the best means of adding to their extent, as the best means of really using and enjoying what we are already in possession of' (pp.141-142). This is similar to the lesson Carlyle drew from Wilhelm Meister, but Empson sees no new gospel such as Carlyle saw. The difference is that in this being satisfied with what we have, and attending to our nearest duty, Carlyle sees the actual reconciliation of real and ideal, whereas Empson sees only a reconcilement to the lack of possible reconciliation between the two principles.

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45. See Ch.1, pp.37-38, above.

The Wellesley Index is uncertain as to whether J.A. Heraud wrote the next article I am considering, but it seems very likely he did, as the critical approach adopted in this article is similar to that in other articles known to be by Heraud. In particular, in a Fraser's review of Taylor's Historic survey of German poetry, Heraud asserts that a knowledge of and sympathy with modern German philosophy is necessary to an understanding of German poetry,[46] and the critical comments in this article obviously start from such an assumption. Heraud was an unsuccessful poet and dramatist, author of an ambitious and inflated epic, The Judgement of the Flood, a frequent contributor to the periodicals, early acquainted with German, and an enthusiastic advocate of the philosophy of Schelling.[47] In this article (I shall assume that Heraud is the author), he expounds certain passages - in particular, the Lord's speech 'Doch ihr, die echten Göttersöhne...', from the Prolog im Himmel, and the passages concerning the Makrokosmos and the Erdgeist - with the aid of the theological doctrine of the Holy Trinity, Kant's critical philosophy, and Paracelsus (pp.539-543). He claims to be showing that such passages, previously thought difficult, are in fact perfectly simple once one has found the right intellectual sources, but his mode of interpretation seems to me in general so contorted and metaphysical as to be of little help. More important is Heraud's

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46. J.A. Heraud, "German poetry. Taylor's Historic survey," Fraser's Magazine, iv (1831), pp.167-179.

47. See L.A. Marchand, The Athenaeum: a mirror of Victorian culture (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1941), pp.214-215, for a brief account of Heraud's career.

over-all interpretation of Faust, which, though not quite as conventional as Lockhart's, is similar in that it is based on Christian ideas of sin and redemption. To support his interpretation, Heraud refers to the third reverence, or the Christian religion, from the pädagogische Provinz section of Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, where it is said that Christianity even reverences sin and crime because they are possible furtherances to holiness. Faust, then, passes into the sins of sensuality and supersitition from the higher reaches of speculative intellect - as, indeed, it is humanly likely a man would - and Providence then leads him through sin to the ultimate redemption that would have come if Goethe had completed the work (pp.548-549). Goethe's genius is spoken of earlier, in contrast to Byron's, as an active genius that uses the materials of art for its own 'glorious purposes - to set forth the heart of man, the mystery of the universe' (p.538). Heraud, then, unlike Empson, sees Goethe as an important thinker, but he errs on the side of interpreting his thought in too exclusively Christian and theological a way.

When the second part of Faust was eventually published, in 1833, those whose interpretations of the first part were based on conventional moral and religious principles, as virtually all were, were bound to be faced with difficulties. It must be admitted that the second part, with its complex, wayward style and structure, and its abstract and symbolic over-all scheme, is a very difficult work, and that it is particularly difficult to see how it can possibly cohere with the separately published and much more solid-seeming first part. Abraham Hayward, a self-made man of letters and lawyer, whose reputation was made by the translation of Faust which came out in

his thirty-third year, reviewed Faust part two for the Foreign Quarterly Review in the same year, when it appeared for the first time as part of Goethe's Nachgelassene Werke.[48] Hayward, a rather lazy or at least unadventurous thinker, suggests that really Goethe had no 'object' at all in writing Faust, other than that of putting to use to their full extent all his admirable poetic qualities (p.81). He praises in high terms the 'felicity of the execution' of part two (p.107), but as to its 'meaning', he is completely at a loss as to why Faust should be so contented at the idea of draining a bog and struggling perpetually with the sea, and, more importantly, why he should all of a sudden be saved after 'not one virtuous action, and scarcely one ennobling thought in addition to those which he started with'. Goethe's highly individual scheme of salvation drives Hayward into seeing an absence of design because there are in it no familiar, recognisable features of the road to heaven: 'His soul appears to have made little, if any, progress towards fitting it for that higher region it is wafted to; nor, to say truth, is there much in his adventures to inform or purify the mind or heart of any man' (p.105).

A similar view of part two, though coupled with a more serious interpretation of part one, is taken by John Stuart Blackie in the 'Preliminary remarks' to his translation of part one, published in 1834. Blackie is one of the most interesting minor figures from this period, not least because his career, at least in its early stages, bears quite a strong resemblance to Carlyle's. Like Carlyle,

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48. A. Hayward, "Goethe's Posthumous works," Foreign Quarterly Review, xii (1833), pp.81-109.

he was intended for the Calvinist ministry, but his beliefs weakened (though never to the extent that Carlyle's did) when he was around twenty years old. Unlike Carlyle's, his parents were well-to-do and middle-class, and were able to send him to university at Göttingen and Berlin in this difficult period of his life. While in Germany he became interested in modern German literature and theology (he attended Schleiermacher's lectures), and he returned to Scotland with the kind of broad, up-to-date beliefs which were, at this time, a typical product of the combination of youth and a knowledge of German. Such beliefs, however, were unhelpful as regards finding employment in the world, and having failed to find work as an advocate, Blackie, again like Carlyle, earned money by translating from and writing about German literature, mostly Goethe, until he was appointed Professor of Latin at Aberdeen University, in 1841. Blackie was born in 1809, and he followed the pattern set by both Carlyle and Hayward, achieving some reputation and thus making a start in the world of letters through a translation from Goethe.[49] As a thinker, Blackie is very ordinary in comparison to Carlyle, but his mind is also much clearer than Carlyle's, and his appreciation of Goethe more balanced. His Faust translation[50] can be regarded as a commendable effort rather than a success. His lack of command over the techniques of English verse produces both absurdities and inaccuracies, but it is clear that genuine pains

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49. Biographical information about Blackie is drawn from A.M. Stoddart, John Stuart Blackie: a biography, new edition in 1 vol. (Edinburgh and London, 1896).

50. Faust: a tragedy, translated by J.S. Blackie (Edinburgh and London, 1834).

have been taken, and the translation ranks quite high among the many English Fausts produced in the 1830s.

To return to the 'Preliminary Remarks', Blackie devotes most of his space to learned and occasionally interesting material about the historical Faust, and about mediaeval magic and demonology. He then produces an interpretation of the first part which is based on the assumption that the tendency of that drama is inescapably towards Faust's damnation. Faust rushes helpless towards destruction because the ultimate, spiritual knowledge which he seeks is necessarily unavailable to him, with the natural result that he reacts in the direction of base sensualism. His plight is the worse because he is trapped between the two tendencies - he 'has not virtue sufficient to follow the dictates of his good genius, but enough always to poison the enjoyments of vice'.[51] Goethe, praised as a 'calm, meditative, and impartial student of things as they are' (p.xliv), is not presenting a solution to the problem of existence, but, with his own youthful experience as a guide, showing the full extent of the problem, how aspiring man, without the control of virtue, is dragged down towards hell, constantly dissatisfied as he fluctuates between 'pious mystic' and 'fleshly debauchee' (p.xlv). Blackie quotes the important lines from the "Wald und Höhle" scene,

> So tauml ich von Begierde zu Genuss,
> Und im Genuss verschmacht ich nach Begierde, (52)

but does not see that this constant unrest, though undoubtedly a

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51. 'Preliminary remarks,' p.xlv.

52. Faust part one, 11.3249-3250.

source of discomfort to Faust, is precisely what makes his salvation possible, because it drives him perpetually onwards, prevents him from being satisfied with the things of the world, or, in the terms of his wager with Mephistopheles, saying to the passing moment 'Verweile doch! du bist so schön!' Like the great majority of Faust - critics of his time, whether more or less liberal in their theology, Blackie has ingrained ideas about the nature of sin and the nature of redemption which prevent him from seeing Faust's predicament as Goethe saw it. Consequently, he has to dismiss part two as not only incongruous, motley, disjointed, but a positive insult to our moral feelings in its conclusion, a desertion from the 'deep moral seriousness' of part one (pp.1-1i). In the same way, a reviewer of Anster's translation of Faust, in 1835 in the Edinburgh Review,[53] sees Faust at the end of part one as a sinner who has fallen into that state of indifference where recovery is impossible. Critics, the reviewer says, seem generally agreed that the second part is 'a mere after-thought of the author, not to be considered in estimating the tendency and scope of the first fragment',[54] and this must be correct, because to pretend Faust is redeemable after the events of part one would be to apply a 'Kotzebue-like morality' which is quite foreign to the principles of Goethe's 'clear and manly intellect' (p.39). This school of opinion, then, will only grant moral seriousness to Faust if part two can be ignored and Faust considered as damned.

Behind the spate of translations and interpretations of Faust

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53. "Anster's Poetical translation of Faust," Edinburgh Review, lxii (1835), pp.36-45.

54. p.39, note.

in the 1830s was a growing enthusiasm about the work's qualities. The first part of Faust was, understandably, the only individual work of Goethe's that a large number of the early critics considered great. There was much debate in the periodicals about the relative merits of the various translations, and it was common for the reviewer to contrast the poverty of a translation with the magnificence of the original. The Athenaeum reviewer John Chorley, in 1834, is particularly rhapsodic - 'all that Imagination, Feeling, Philosophy, and Poetry could bind together by a strength almost superhuman - are here, glowing from the hand of their immortal author, with a life which shall endure until Time shall be no more'.[55] The general feeling among the admirers of Faust is that it excels for its combination of beauty and profundity, even if the nature of its profundity remains rather obscure. J.H. Garnier, a German-born reviewer writing in the Westminster Review, in 1836,[56] steps straight from emotional response into interpretation, seeing beauty and significance side by side. He describes as 'the heavenly creation of a genius' (p.386) the passage where Faust looks at Gretchen's bed and is driven to considerations of conscience by the thought of her innocence,[57] then proceeds to demonstrate the importance of the idea of Gretchen's innocence to the whole structure of the play. Gretchen, who can be saved because in her total innocence her mind never becomes shackled to the sin she commits,

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55. J. Chorley, "Translations of Faust," The Athenaeum, vii (1834), pp.500-501. See L.A. Marchand's book (note 47, above), p.217, for the attribution of this article to Chorley.

56. J.H. Garnier, "Translators of the Faust-Hayward, Anster, etc.," Westminster Review, xxv (1836), pp.366-390.

57. Faust part one, 11.2709-2728 ("Abend").

offers a parallel to Faust, who can also be saved because his intellect never becomes shackled to the sensuality which Mephistopheles involves him in. It is a naive and over-allegorical interpretation, and only offered as part of the meaning of the play, but like Crabb Robinson's Westminster Review article,[58] this one shows an unusual independence of mind, and in a sense it comes nearer to modern interpretations of Faust than any of the other articles I am considering. In an age when puritan Manicheanism, a sense of the power of evil and the deep seriousness of sin, was becoming increasingly strong as an attitude underlying religious beliefs, this article from the freethinking Westminster comes unusually close to understanding Goethe's fundamental monism and optimism. In the Prolog im Himmel, the Lord says 'Es irrt der Mensch, solang er strebt',[59] and Garnier similarly speaks of error rather than sin in relation to Faust's actions, seeing his course as an upward progress through inevitable error, rather than a road to damnation or a prodigal son's route through sin and repentance.

Faust part two may have meant very little to the vast majority of English readers, but it nevertheless had its share in the vogue of Faust translating. Four English translations of part two appeared between 1838 and 1842, and two of these, if not good, were at least conscientious efforts at correct, complete translation.[60] Of these

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58. pp.73-74 , above.

59. Faust part one, 1.317.

60. See Morgan, pp.161-167, for details. The two good translations are: Goethe's Faust; part II , translated by L.J. Bernays (London and Carlsruhe, 1839); Faust: a tragedy...part two, as completed in 1831, translator not named (Dumfries, 1838).

four translations, only one is incorporated with a translation of part one, a fact that emphasises the English preference at this time for viewing the two parts as separate and autonomous works. This approach is certainly justifiable in a sense, on the grounds of the considerable and obvious differences of character between the two, but it seems to me that properly to understand the 'idea' that Goethe elaborates in Faust - which is, after all, what the serious nineteenth-century Faust-critics are always most interested in - it is absolutely necessary to see the work as a whole, though bearing in mind that Goethe's own idea of the work changed and developed very considerably during the long process of its composition. Like most literary critics when faced with something new, the early English critics of Goethe tended to ignore what was actually new and distinctive about him, and if they felt that he was good, would interpret him in such a way that he seemed to be supporting or beautifying what they already knew and felt, and reject the parts of him that did not fit with this interpretation. Carlyle himself (though incidentally he was not among those who considered Faust part two inferior to part one)[61] did precisely this. Though the course of his thoughts was undoubtedly changed by his early reading of Goethe it was not a distinctively Goethean 'message' that showed him the way, but a temporarily latent Carlylean tendency of mind which the great contemporary poet seemed

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61. See the letter Carlyle sent to Blackie, congratulating him on his translation but taking issue with his view of the comparative merits of the two parts. Carlyle considers the first part merely a fine expression of the 'sorrow-struck sceptical' spirit of the times. The second is more meaningful, but Carlyle does not specify in what way. "TC to John Stuart Blackie," 28 April 1834, Letters, vii. 137.

to put into words. Hence he presented a changed, Hebraized Goethe for the British reader, and hence Goethe ceased quite rapidly to have any active influence on him. The extent of the influence of Carlyle on those British Goethe-critics who followed him is difficult to determine, but it is certainly true that he was the most powerful early proponent of the view that Goethe had serious, important religious and moral ideas to convey, and that those critics after him who grant moral seriousness to Faust usually err, like Carlyle, on the side of seeing a too Hebraic, too Christian seriousness, of a kind that speaks of sin and repentance in a way Goethe very seldom did.

Three articles published in 1840 and 1844 show three different kinds of attitude to Faust part two. It would be over-schematic to try and pair off these articles with the three on Wilhelm Meister with which I started, but the later articles do evidence a striking change in general tone and approach from the 1820s to the 1840s, even if Faust is a work inherently more likely to be admired than Wilhelm Meister. Of the three articles, the one least favourable to Goethe is a review of most of the recent Faust translations by Charles William Russell - a very distinguished Roman Catholic scholar who later exercised a strong influence on members of the Tractarian Movement, Newman in particular - in the Catholic Dublin Review.[62] Within the limits of an undisguisedly Catholic point of view, Russell produces a balanced, intelligent, and well-informed judgement on Faust, and he expresses in a very lucid form the common

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62. C.W. Russell, "Recent translations of the Faust - its sacred poetry," Dublin Review, ix (1840), pp.477-506.

orthodoxly Christian opinion which I have discussed:

> Among the endless theories upon the scope and tendency of the first part of Faust, there is one which regards it as a grand, moral, or religious allegory, designed to illustrate the insufficiency of earthly pleasures, whether of mind or of sense, for the happiness of man. The second part, however, if we regard it as a continuation of the first, completely upturns this theory, and destroys the existence of Faust as a moral poem. (p.494)

The insufficiency of earthly pleasures is scarcely a new doctrine, or an especially Goethean one, and no newer or more Goethean is the ending Russell would like to see, with Faust delivered from the Mephistophelean power through repentance and purification (p.495). In accordance with these views, Russell prefers to see the first part as independent, if unfinished, and to ignore the second part. His comments on part one make it clear that he is fundamentally out of sympathy with much of what is central to Goethe's art - he speaks of Faust's 'Wer darf ihn nennen' speech as 'the solemn nonsense of scepticism' and 'the plausible language of the Pantheistic creed' (p.505) - but on the other hand, he sees in Faust 'numberless beauties, moral as well as poetical' (p.478), and he selects and quotes in translation various passages of beautiful and edifying devotional poetry - the songs of the angels in the Prolog im Himmel, the Easter hymns that save Faust from suicide, Gretchen's terrible experience of sin and guilt in the cathedral. Russell can be compared to De Quincey in that Goethe as a whole represents something quite alien to him. The comparison should not be taken far, because Russell is clearly by nature a fairer, more scrupulous critic than De Quincey, but it is certainly indicative of a general change in English attitudes that the later critic, unlike the earlier, can take artistic pleasure in the beauty of Goethe's poetry,

can believe in his moral seriousness, and revel in his occasional pietistic tendency, while being fundamentally so divided from him.

A middle position is occupied by a reviewer of Archer Gurney's poor translation of the second part,[63] in the Spectator in 1844.[64] This reviewer accepts the conclusion presented in part two, but sees nothing particularly interesting or new about it. He sees, as earlier critics had been unable or unwilling to see, a 'unity of conception' connecting the two parts, and he gives a synopsis with explanation of both, showing how Faust's eventual salvation is perfectly logical and in keeping with what happens in part one (p.41). Faust makes a compact with Mephistopheles, but that arrangement is subordinate to Mephistopheles' wager with the Lord, whereby Faust's soul is his if he can change his nature to the image of his own. This he fails to do, so though Faust does in fact ask the passing moment to stay just before he dies, his soul is still the Lord's. The reviewer hints at the importance of Faust's continual dissatisfaction with the things of the world, and his consequent continual activity, but he makes no real examination of the nature of Faust's route to salvation. His approach is certainly an advance on that of Hayward, or Blackie, or Russell, in that he is prepared to take the poem on its own terms, without trying to impose orthodox theology or morality on it, but this (considerable) virtue is not combined with any particularly deep

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63. Faust. a tragedy. part the second, translated by A. Gurney (1842).

64. "Faust, part second: Mr. Gurney's translation," The Spectator, xvii (1844), pp.40-41.

understanding of the work. He praises (in speaking of the defects of Gurney's translation) the poetry of part two, but in general regards its execution as feeble in comparison to the 'substantial power' of part one. Another loose comparison can be made, this time with Lockhart's Wilhelm Meister review. Both reviews are mildly enthusiastic, balanced, intelligent, and accept Goethe calmly but without any sense of personal response to the novelty of his genius or of his ideas.

The third of these articles,[65] and the last I am considering, can only be compared to Carlyle's essays in the seriousness of its attempt to penetrate Goethe's meaning, and in a way it is better criticism than Carlyle's, in that it is not controlled to such an extent by the critic's own ideas about the world. Carré states confidently that this article is by Blackie,[66] but the Wellesley Index makes no attribution, and it seems to me unlikely that Blackie is the author, as there is no mention of the article in Anna M. Stoddart's list of the articles Blackie had published in 1840,[67] and as it both expresses views utterly opposed to those expressed in Blackie's 'Preliminary Remarks' of 1834 and shows a capacity for really deep insight which Blackie's other articles do not suggest. The article is exceptional in the way it combines two kinds of approach to Faust, as no previous English critic had done. On the one hand, the reviewer (ostensibly this is a review of various

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65. "The two parts of Goethe's Faust," Foreign Quarterly Review, xxv (1840), pp.90-113.

66. Carré, p.229.

67. John Stuart Blackie (see note 49, above), pp.128-129.

Faust translations) emphasises that Faust is a work of art, not a dissertation, and scouts the common tendency, fostered in part by Carlyle's work on Goethe, to regard Goethe's literary works, Faust in particular, as vehicles for moral (or immoral) doctrine. Speaking of the surpise some critics felt at the old-fashioned, 'theological' presentation of Faust's final redemption, the reviewer says 'It is indeed no part of any poet to invent theological or metaphysical dogmas - his concern is with the illustration of ideas by means of apt symbols in nature and experience' (p.104). On the other hand, he does take seriously the ideas that can be considered inherent in Faust, and often discusses them very well, avoiding another common tendency, which is to dismiss the intellectual content of Goethe's works as either trivial, hackneyed, or reprehensible. These two approaches are difficult to combine, and occasionally it seems that the reviewer is begging the question whether or not Goethe has anything new to say in Faust, as when (on the same point as my last quotation) he says that, because Goethe is using an old fable but writing about the problems of modern life, he presents not new beliefs but 'old beliefs with a new interpretation' (p.104); does this mean he is inventing theological dogmas or not? The reviewer has also, in my view, a tendency to excessive intentionalism - he grants Goethe as great artist a God-like creative role, and therefore, approaching this creation as he would God's creation, in a teleological spirit, he reads into it a more careful, elaborate, conscious design than I believe Goethe had in mind (though of course I am not suggesting either that there is no symbolism in Faust or that the poem is put together in an entirely haphazard way): 'the point of art with Goethe in this poem was not

to solve the riddle of the universe, but to create as great a riddle, by presenting in a poem a certain totality of symbols in an order of arrangement which was a secret in the mind of the author' (p.112).

For all these reservations, however, this is an impressive piece of criticism. The reviewer asserts the excellence of part two (though he admits that it lacks any of the passion and pathos of part one), and reads the poem as a whole. In his reading he sees important and distinctive features, and ideas, which most of his contemporaries missed altogether. He makes interesting comments on Goethe's fragmentary method of composition, seeing the importance of the Direktor's 'Gebt Ihr ein Stück, so gebt es gleich in Stücken', from the Vorspiel auf dem Theater.[68] His argument is that the work, like God's creation, has a coherence which is not observable by the reader, that it is an incommensurable whole made of parts which are in themselves intelligible enough (p.112), and though, as I have suggested, he may be crediting Goethe with a more comprehensive conscious design than he in fact had, this seems to me an intelligent insight into the formal principle he was applying. He sees in Faust 'The origin, progress, and destiny of man, symbolized in an individual' (p.95), and in this he compares it to Hamlet, a comparison which G.H. Lewes was later to make as part of a different argument, but with a similar sense that the two works share an exceptional magnitude of scope.[69] This reviewer also draws together the Gretchentragödie, the Helena episode, and

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68. p.91. The reference is to part one, 1.99.

69. Lewes, Life of Goethe, pp.448-449.

the 'Ewigweibliche' of the closing lines of part two, seeing in the progression from particular personal beauty to ideal beauty to eternal and absolute beauty a crucial part of Goethe's vision of the continual striving which alone can lead to salvation. The emphasis which the reviewer places on the final song of the Chorus Mysticus is the most important part of his interpretation. He connects 'Alles Vergängliche/Ist nur ein Gleichnis...' with the biblical notions that the things that are seen are temporal, the things that are unseen eternal, and that the sun shines alike on the good and the evil, letting the wheat and tares grow together until the harvest. The idea is that human life, and hence Goethe's presentation of it in this poem, is a great mystery - limited, fragmentary, heterogeneous - and that the characteristic longing of man for such absolutes as cannot be found in this life, with which he is therefore permanently dissatisfied, furnishes 'intuitive testimony' to the soul's immortality and to the existence of another world in which it can be said 'Das Unzulängliche, /Hier wird's Ereignis' (p.113).

By placing such emphasis on the insufficiency of earthly things, and by speaking of evidence for immortality, the reviewer perhaps makes Faust seem more Christian, more biblical than it is. He shows the same tendency earlier in the review, in his discussion of the stages of Faust's search for beauty, when he claims - and quotes from Bernays's notes to his translation a statement to the same effect - that between parts one and two Faust repents of his sinful actions towards Gretchen (p.108). To reconcile Faust's final salvation with his thorough betrayal of Gretchen is one of the major moral difficulties presented by Faust, and this kind of extra-textual

solution seems to arise rather from a desire to justify in every point a favoured poem than from a real understanding of Goethe's meaning. Goethe may never have thought in terms of repentance, and it is a characteristic trick of the apologist (particularly the Victorian apologist) to put the right words into an admired author's mouth. Despite these questionable features, however, this is by far the most convincing, as well as the most ambitious, attempt at a reading of Faust in the period I am discussing. In the light of the interpretation it presents of Goethe's idea of the world, it is easy to see why there was little in Goethe that fitted with the more orthodox elements (in religious and in moral terms) of English intellectual life in the nineteenth century, unless a fit was engineered by such creative distortion as Carlyle unconsciously practised. Faust must strive after the things eternal, but the things eternal remain unseen and mysterious until the end, and do not manifest themselves in the temporal in the form of absolute moralities, prescribed duties, or principles of self-abnegation. It required the more progressive, flexible type of Victorian mind, such as the author of this review mostly shows, both to understand and to sympathise with what was genuinely Goethean in Goethe.

Chapter Three

BRITISH OPINIONS OF GOETHE, 1824-1845

PART TWO: GENERAL ESTIMATES

Two periodical articles of 1836 contain comments which illustrate contrasting ways of responding to Goethe. George Moir in the Edinburgh Review, debating the question of whether or not Goethe can be considered a genius, says that in any case

> we cannot ascribe to him the highest and purest quality of genius, that which regards poetry as a divine gift, a talent intrusted to human hands to be put to account, and to be employed only on the noblest subjects, to be expended only in forwarding, elevating, and purifying the heart, and the great destinies of men. (1)

J.S. Blackie, in the Foreign Quarterly Review, speaks of the difficulty of arriving at a just estimate of Goethe at the present time, and says that the 'criterion of judgement' he prefers to use (rather than attempting to balance up the conflicting verdicts of Goethe-critics) is

> the health and gladness of soul which we daily drink in from the well of spiritual beauty which Göthe has opened up to us, - the pure enjoyment which a sympathy with the fair creations of his mind daily affords us. (2)

When judged according to an external notion of what a poet should be, as in the first of these quotations, Goethe was usually found wanting by the early Victorian critics. With his reputation for political, moral, and religious neutrality, and for cool composure

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1. G. Moir, "Menzel's German literature," Edinburgh Review, lxiii (1836), p.461.

2. J.S. Blackie, "Göthe's correspondence with Zelter and Bettina Brentano," Foreign Quarterly Review, xvi (1836), p.360.

of demeanour, Goethe was unlikely to be granted the highest qualities of genius by the spokesmen of an insecure age which typically favoured commitment, seriousness, and a high-minded ardour of emotion. In terms of the vocabulary of the time, Goethe appeared to be neither 'earnest' nor an 'enthusiast',[3] and this being so, his artistic achievement, great though most British critics (at least from 1832) admitted it to be, must generally be seen as crucially limited. It was only those few who, like Blackie in my second quotation, were sufficiently in sympathy with Goethe to be prepared to judge his art in terms of the kind of aims Goethe himself was interested in achieving, who would produce resoundingly favourable judgements.

One large exception to this rule is, of course, Carlyle. He would have claimed that Goethe did possess that 'highest and purest quality of genius', partly because his idea of what the poet should be was formed in the period of his closest allegiance to Goethe and under the influence of Goethe's own remarks on the subject. Carlyle only really began to be a famous and influential writer in the 1840s, towards the end of the period I am discussing here, but his Goethe-essays of the 1820s and 30s did make an impression at the time, and are occasionally referred to by the better-informed among other writers about Goethe in the period. Carlyle was most commonly regarded as a British representative of the idolatrous Schwärmerei about Goethe which was so prevalent in Germany, and which

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3. The Victorian concepts of earnestness and enthusiasm, and their connections with, respectively, Evangelicalism and Romanticism, are discussed at length in chapters 10 and 11 of Walter E. Houghton's The Victorian frame of mind 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1957).

must be regarded with deep suspicion by more clear-headed critics. More importantly, by making the kind of claims he made for Goethe, by suggesting that perhaps he should be seen not merely as a 'pleasing poet and sweet singer' but as a 'Moralist and Philosopher' to be earnestly studied,[4] Carlyle made his hero specially vulnerable. Carlyle set a precedent for judging Goethe on moral terms, and because his own positive judgement on those terms was based to such an extent on misunderstanding of Goethe's achievement, it was inevitable that other critics, like George Moir in my first quotation, should, using basically similar criteria of judgement, arrive at negative assessments of Goethe. The criteria were similar, but by no means the same. Carlyle's idea of morality (as also of religion), though it later played a large part in shaping Victorian thought, was always a strongly individual and idiosyncratic one. Within this period he was criticised for the 'indulgent fatalism' he showed towards the actors in his French Revolution.[5] Through the period there was a growing tendency among British critics, a tendency of which Carlyle was a part, to ask of the artist "Is his teaching good?" Of Goethe, Carlyle answered firmly "yes", but both Carlyle's reading of Goethe and his idea of good and bad were very heterodox and the more conventional majority generally refused Goethe the title of moral instructor.

In John Sterling's tale "The onyx ring", written at a time when he was still partially hostile to Goethe, and first published in

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4. See ch.1, p. 36 , above.

5. H. Merivale, "Carlyle on the French Revolution," Edinburgh Review, lxxi (1840), p.420.

1838,[6] there is a character called Walsingham, a highly-admired aristocratic poet who clearly represents Sterling's conception of Goethe.[7] Maria, the heroine of the story, musing about Walsingham, imagines that a person who had never seen a Gothic cathedral, if presented with the sight of the tower of such a building, beautiful, richly ornamented, and perfectly finished in every detail, would yet feel that something was missing, though he might not guess that the missing item was "the sky-pointing spire which ought to have crowned the tower".[8] This is how Maria feels about Walsingham/Goethe - that his life and works present a beautiful and perfected structure which lacks a crucial transcendent element, the "sky-pointing spire" which could be defined as religious devotion, political commitment, moral earnestness, fervour of emotions, or all of these things. William Empson, in an article of 1831, makes contrasting use of an architectural simile. Speaking of Goethe as revealed in his correspondence with Schiller, Empson says 'the fabric of his mind displayed that singular symmetry and harmony of parts, which, as when we look at St. Peter's, makes us for a moment forget its vastness'.[9] There is a significant difference in implication between the Gothic architectural model and the Renaissance one. A comparison with soaring medieval art, with its suggestions of deep piety and an energy of Christian

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6. J. Sterling, "The onyx ring," Blackwood's Magazine, xliv (1838), pp.664-689 and 741-768, and xlv (1839), pp.17-47. The story is reprinted in Essays and tales, by John Sterling, ed. J.C. Hare, 2 vols. (1848), ii. 394-649. These volumes are referred to hereafter as Essays and tales.

7. See note 114, below, for support for this identification.

8. Essays and tales, p.511.

9. W. Empson, "Schiller and Goethe," Edinburgh Review, liii (1831), pp.83-84.

aspiration, is always likely to be less favourable for Goethe than one with a sixteenth-century art whose emphasis is on balance, symmetry, and classical repose. I do not think that either of these similes provides an adequate encapsulation of Goethe's character or achievement, but they illustrate well and vividly the two contrasting ways of looking at Goethe, represented also by the two quotations I opened with, which characterise the more intelligent general assessments of Goethe in this period. There are those critics, like George Moir and Herman Merivale, whose final judgement on Goethe is determined by what they think he lacks, by their vision of the "sky-pointing spire" which can represent a large variety of virtues, and those who, like J.S. Blackie and the later John Sterling, are satisfied with the completeness of the beauty, harmony, and balance that they can see. Carlyle's untypical view of Goethe might be characterised as a vision of St. Peter's with an enormous Gothic spire projecting from its dome.

Another untypical critic of Goethe in this period, much less interesting and influential than Carlyle, was William Taylor of Norwich,[10] a life-long student and translator of German literature and author of a Historic survey of German poetry which appeared in 1828-30, but for which a lot of the work had been done much earlier. Taylor was born in 1765, and for all his pioneer status as a worker on German literature, his attitudes to literature remain more characteristic of the eighteenth than of the nineteenth century, and the views expressed in his survey have a distinctly old-fashioned

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10. See ch.2, p.71, above.

air. Like Jeffrey in his review of Wilhelm Meister[11] (Jeffrey was only eight years younger than Taylor, and their critical attitudes are basically similar, though of course Taylor knows much more about the subject than Jeffrey does), Taylor criticises Goethe not in moral but in artistic terms, and applies vaguely 'classical' artistic ideals of graceful naturalness and elegance of form. Accordingly, Iphigenie auf Tauris is described as 'an imitation of greek tragedy, not unworthy of Sophocles, and justly considered as the masterpiece of Göthe',[12] Faust as 'singular' and 'fantastic' (p.323), and Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre as a 'tedious planless novel' (p.348). Taylor is on the whole sympathetic to Goethe, and considers him a great writer, but he makes it clear that he thinks extravagant the 'copious eloquence' of Carlyle's praise in his recent articles (p.378). He sees as Goethe's most characteristic feature his truth to life, and the moral impartiality which is part of that truth to life, and he makes no judgement on this artistic approach except to say that because he keeps so close to nature Goethe is less entertaining and 'stimulant' than he might be (p.378). 'Stimulant' is one of Taylor's favourite commendatory adjectives, and in his vigorous attack on the Survey in the Edinburgh Review, Carlyle is particularly severe with Taylor for seeming to want nothing higher than stimulation from literature.[13] Taylor was not a Victorian, or even a Romantic, and the leisured,

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11. See ch.2, pp.63-65, above.

12. W. Taylor, Historic survey of German poetry, 3 vols. (1828-1830), iii. 248.

13. Carlyle, "Taylor's Historic survey of German poetry," Edinburgh Review, liii (1831), pp.151-180; Essays, ii. 333-370.

amateurish tone of his criticism emphasises by contrast the seriousness and self-consciousness of many of the younger critics at this time. A sensible, fairly well-informed, and moderately intelligent critic, characterised by neither the anxiety nor the optimism which made other writers look to literary artists for moral instruction and support, Taylor takes no part in the Victorian debate over Goethe's 'tendency'.

Taylor was one of a small number of British men of letters who took an active interest in the new German literature in the years before Carlyle made his presence felt. Others were Coleridge, De Quincey, Henry Crabb Robinson, and, from a later generation but still just ahead of Carlyle, R.P. Gillies and J.G. Lockhart. Of these, Coleridge and De Quincey, the two Romantic thinkers, both deeply involved in German metaphysics, are the only ones who think of Goethe and his works in moral terms, and both find him morally wanting and hence have little to do with him.[14] The others take a more relaxed attitude, to literature in general and to Goethe in particular. These writers are notable for their knowledge of Goethe at a time when such knowledge was rare, and for their freedom from most of the prejudices of Goethe's detractors, but none of them is a distinguished thinker, and they have little of real interest to say. Taylor and Lockhart, as we have seen, tend to patronising approval.[15] Gillies, founder and first editor of the Foreign Quarterly Review, most famous as the author of Memoirs of a literary veteran

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14. See ch.1, pp.8-9 , and ch.2, pp.68-71, above.

15. See ch.2, pp.65-68, above.

(1851), contributed little to the British exchange of ideas about Goethe. In an article on modern German tragedy for his own Review, Gillies praises Goethe's self-control and balance, his talent for mastering his feelings and using them for artistic purposes (Gillies here praises what other critics condemned as coldness),[16] and in a later one on Tasso, in Fraser's Magazine, he again commends Goethe's dignity, and makes some vaguely approving remarks about the play.[17] In neither article is there much sense of personal response or of critical insight.[18]

The most enthusiastic of Goethe's early British readers was Crabb Robinson, the lawyer, journalist, and friend of literary men who conversed endlessly but wrote very little about the wide range of literature he knew. F. Norman, in his long article on Crabb Robinson and Goethe,[19] seems to me unduly harsh on Robinson's few unpretending efforts at criticism of Goethe, but I agree with Norman that Carré, who devotes a whole chapter to Robinson and calls him 'un précurseur de Carlyle', overestimates his intellectual capabilities.[20] In his Westminster Review article on Dichtung und Wahrheit, as we have seen,[21] Robinson, like Gillies, praises Goethe

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16. R.P. Gillies, "Modern German tragedy," Foreign Quarterly Review, i (1827), pp.565-595.

17. R.P. Gillies, "Goethe's Tasso," Fraser's Magazine, xiii (1836), pp.526-539.

18. See M. Batt, "Contributions to the history of English opinion of German literature. I. Gillies and the Foreign Quarterly Review" and "II. Gillies and Blackwood's Magazine," Modern Language Notes, xvii (1902), pp.166-170 and xviii (1903), pp.65-69. Batt wrongly attributes to Gillies Lockhart's article on Götz von Berlichingen in Blackwood's, xvi (1824), pp.369-385.

19. F. Norman, "Henry Crabb Robinson and Goethe," Publications of the English Goethe Society, new series, vi (1930), pp.1-124, and viii (1931), pp.1-129.

20. Carré, pp.87-100.

21. See Ch.2, pp.73-74 , above.

for a quality which more earnest critics looked on as a fault - in this case, his moral neutrality. In the long series of articles on Goethe which he had published in the Unitarian (and rather obscure) Monthly Repository in 1832 and 1833, comprising a biographical sketch and a critical catalogue of his works,[22] Robinson refers more than once, with high approval, to Goethe's critical principle, so different from that of English reviewers: 'his purpose is always to point out what is in a work; our reviewers are more bent on informing us what is not'.[23] Robinson, then, is not interested in the sky-pointing spire that may be missing from Goethe's life and works, and he accordingly goes through the life and the works, describing their beauties and only rarely and briefly speaking of deficiencies. Apropos the poem "Offne Tafel", he speaks of Goethe's 'practical wisdom', a philosophy of life which he designates a 'poetical epicureanism, in which the pleasures of imagination hold the balance with those of sense' (vol.vi, p.365). This is a view of Goethe which Carlyle would scarcely have approved of, but it is stated as admiringly as is Carlyle's own sterner notion of Goethe's philosophy of life. Goethe is an artist who is content with men and things as they are, and who can see beauty even in things normally regarded as ugly or evil, and this sunny, tolerant relativism, applicable to both artistic and moral matters, is the critical approach which Robinson, influenced by his own conception of Goethe, adopts throughout. Even in the question of sexual morality, he sees nothing to condemn

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22. H.C. Robinson, "Goethe and his works," Monthly Repository, new series, vi (1832), pp.289-308, 361-371, 460-469, 505-520, 595-603, 681-689, 742-756, and vii (1833), pp.111-119, 184-195, 271-284.

23. Vol.vi, p.306; see also vol. vi, p.518, note.

in Goethe's works, though he sees that English readers might well be offended by the inclusion of every 'variety of female charm and attraction' in the 'gallery of beauties' in Wilhelm Meister (vol.vii, p.187), or by the prevalence of the German attitude to marriage and divorce, so different from the general English attitude, in Die Wahlverwandtschaften (vol.vii, pp.118-119). In this Robinson goes further in tolerance than does John Russell, an Edinburgh advocate whose one published work, A tour in Germany... in the years 1820, 1821, 1822,[24] contains a short account of Goethe which is knowledgeable, relaxed, and unprejudiced, in a way that is characteristic of this small group of early British readers of Goethe, but which qualifies its perhaps rather condescending praise of Goethe with a warning against the 'licentiousness of incident, and pruriency of description' which mar the otherwise admirable Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre.[25]

Robinson's acceptance of the Goethean principle of tolerance makes his criticism contrast favourably in some ways with that of both the more artistically and morally hidebound among critics of his own generation, such as Jeffrey and De Quincey, and the younger and more earnest critics such as George Moir and Herman Merivale. Robinson takes Goethe on his own terms, and does not blame him for not being what he never set out to be. The principle, however, at least as put into practice by Robinson, is one that begs some important questions. For instance, how are we to arrive at any

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24. I refer to the 2nd edition, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1825).

25. Vol.i, p.87.

judgement as to an author's stature (as such judgements are necessarily comparative), if we always concentrate on his good qualities and ignore his limitations in relation to the possibilities of artistic achievement? Robinson is not averse to making comparative general assessments himself. At the end of the first of his Monthly Repository articles, the biographical one, he makes exceptionally high claims for Goethe, as 'the most extraordinary person of our age' and producer of 'the most perfect works of any age' (vol.vi, p.308). Because he thinks as highly of Goethe as that, he naturally accepts Goethean values, so that when he writes, say, about Goethe's 'poetical epicureanism', he is bound to write approvingly, even if he had not also accepted the Goethean ruling that critics should always speak in positive terms. To be fair to him, Robinson never makes any pretence at offering a thorough-going criticism of Goethe in the way others, most obviously Carlyle, did. He expressly says that his catalogue of Goethe's works is not 'a critical or criticising catalogue' (vol.vi, p.361) - though of course some critical opinions do find their way into it - and his 1824 Westminster Review article is primarily about the faults of a translation, not about Goethe. Robinson is interesting as the most whole-hearted admirer among what could be described as the first generation of British students of Goethe (the figures I have grouped together are not, of course, literally of one generation), and as a rare early adherent, if rather a naive one, of Goethean principles of tolerance and open-mindedness with regard to both human behaviour and artistic achievement. Serious discussion of Goethe within this period took place mostly among younger writers, those born in the 1790s and 1800s,

with Carlyle (born in 1795) gradually assuming a more and more prominent position among them. The German critic Wolfgang Menzel, born in 1798, belongs to this 'generation' as well, and I shall now proceed to discuss the English response to Menzel's conspicuous criticisms of Goethe in his Die deutsche Literatur.

Menzel's view of Goethe

To call Menzel's literary criticism polemical is a considerable understatement. Menzel was an apostle of strength, action, and fervour, a politically active German patriot, and Goethe the detached Olympian and quietist represented most of the things he detested most strongly. He was the first powerful representative of German anti-Goetheism, and he provided other critics, both in Germany and elsewhere, either with ammunition to fire at Goethe or with pretexts on which to defend him.[26] The faults Menzel accuses Goethe of, having first granted him superior artistic talent, in his Die deutsche Literatur (1828), can be summarised as follows. Goethe is an egotist, immoral, irreligious, unpatriotic, cold-hearted (that is, lacking in enthusiasm), effeminate, and a plagiarist. Menzel sees Goethe as the mirror of a decadent age, and he blames him for being a mere reflector, for not standing up against the tendency of his age and becoming its leader and instructor. Menzel's book also contains a section on Schiller, which is rhapsodic in its praise of his earnestness, idealism, simplicity of heart, and unique combining of passion with purity. Menzel is, of course, making a comparison of the odious kind between Germany's two

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26. An English translation of Die deutsche Literatur by T. Gordon, with notes and a biographical introduction, 4 vols. (Oxford), appeared in 1840.

outstanding literary figures, as many critics inevitably did and have continued to do, though not often in such extreme terms as in Menzel's book. Goethe, as Menzel sees him, is culpably wanting in both passion and purity, and he and his works are hence repugnant both to the enthusiasm that thrills to high feeling and to the earnestness that reverences stern moral law.[27]

The exaggerated, unbalanced character of Menzel's assessment of Goethe was obvious to English reviewers, but their attitudes to Menzel's criticisms still vary considerably. Menzel's writings were generally found refreshing, because they presented a sensible, down-to-earth, 'non-German' view of German literature, even if Menzel tended to exaggerate at times. A writer in the Monthly Review in 1828 applauds Die deutsche Literatur for the sound sense it mostly shows, a welcome change from the indiscriminate praise of modern German literature which is now the general fashion.[28] The reviewer does not express a straightforward judgement on Menzel's criticism of Goethe, but his own admiring remarks about Goethe, 'undoubtedly the first of living minds' (p.207), make it clear that though he might think Goethe, along with the rest of German literature, has been praised too highly in recent years, he does not go nearly as far in the opposite direction as Menzel does. A stronger line

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27. See p.98 and note 3, above.

28. "German literature," Monthly Review, new and improved series, viii (1828), pp.199-201.

is taken in one of the 'Short Reviews of Books' in the second volume of the Foreign Review (1828), where the reviewer (perhaps William Fraser, the editor of the Review) accuses Menzel of unjustifiable acrimony and vehemence in his criticism of Goethe, though again the book as a whole is praised for its intelligence and vigour.[29] The assertion of Menzel's that this reviewer particularly attacks is that Goethe 'accommodated himself to the fashions of his age' (p.253). The reviewer speaks in terms of literary fashion, and hence does not really answer Menzel's charge that Goethe was a mere mirror of his age, but the claims he makes for the absoluteness of Goethe's vision includes a refutation of any such charge - 'every age will claim him, because he is true to nature, and nature is the same in all ages' (p.253). The author of another short review, in the Athenaeum in 1833, blames the 'bigot admiration' of Goethe's followers for calling forth 'hyper-critical attacks' of the type contained in Menzel's book.[30] Again Menzel is praised for his un-German qualities as a critic - in this case, for the clarity and precision of his language - but again the 'immortal name' of Goethe, 'that great man', is defended in the face of Menzel's attacks. News of Goethe's mountainous reputation in Germany, together with the conspicuous and extravagant discipleship of Carlyle, naturally created the feeling among English writers more detached than Carlyle that a clear-headed assessment of Goethe and the rest of modern German literature was needed, from some writer knowledgeable but not soaked in Germanism. Menzel

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29. "Wolfgang Menzel, Die deutsche Literatur," Foreign Review, ii (1828), p.252.

30. 'Menzel, Die deutsche Literatur," The Athenaeum, vi (1833), p.649.

came near to providing what was needed, but in the case of Goethe, Menzel was felt to have taken iconoclasm to the point where a recovered sense of proportion is lost again. Menzel presented Goethe as a shoddy and ephemeral article with an attractive exterior, but these three reviewers all show a belief in the solidity and permanence of Goethe's standing - he is 'that great man', 'the first of living minds', and definitely belongs to the wheat rather than the chaff of German literature.

A basically similar attitude to Menzel is expressed by George Moir in the Edinburgh Review article which I quoted at the beginning of this chapter,[31] but Moir's attitude to Goethe is a very different one. Moir was born in 1800, and is one of my younger 'generation' of writers about Goethe, those who came to maturity amongst the rapid social and intellectual changes of the 1820s. Moir's career follows a familiar pattern. Like so many of the nineteenth-century periodical writers, he combined a legal career with a literary one - he was an Edinburgh advocate who wrote some well thought-of legal works, and he was also Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres at Edinburgh University from 1835 to 1840, and the writer of many articles for the periodicals, on a wide variety of subjects. Like Carlyle, Hayward, and Blackie, he made a translation from modern German literature early in his career - in his case, a good verse translation of Schiller's Wallenstein, published in 1827. Moir started as a Whig, but became a Tory in the late 1820s, but nevertheless he was still contributing articles to the broadly Liberal Edinburgh Review in the 1830s, and this article

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31. See p. 97 and note 1, above.

on Menzel presents an opinion of Goethe that can be considered typical of the Edinburgh Review, in that three other substantial articles in the Edinburgh around this time present similar opinions.[32] This brand of opinion can be characterised as mature, considered disapproval of Goethe and his art on ethical grounds, accompanied by acknowledgement of the magnitude of his artistic achievement. It is a more moderate view than Menzel's, but not really different in kind. Moir goes through the same steps as the three reviewers I have just discussed. He praises Menzel's directness, his freedom from the 'mysticism of views, and tediousness in their development' that are typical of modern German criticism (p.442), then blames him for his excessive condemnation of Voss, Kotzebue, and, in part, Goethe. He suggests that Goethe might be granted genius rather than perfect talent (p.461),[33] defends him against Menzel's charge of plagiarism, and, at the end of his remarks about Goethe, speaks highly of Egmont, Götz, and Goethe's lyric poems, even quoting with assent Carlyle's statements about the poems in his 1827 essay.

While wanting to moderate Menzel's criticisms, however, Moir is fundamentally in sympathy with them. As can be seen from the quotation I gave before, Moir has strong views as to the obligations of the genius. Genius is a gift, and the man given it has a sacred duty to make repayment for the gift by using his genius to make the

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32. The articles are Herman Merivale's of 1833 and 1850, and Sarah Austin's of 1857, and are discussed below, pp.135-140, and ch.5, pp.271-274, 284-286.

33. Moir's wavering between these much-used and ill-defined terms is reminiscent of the Monthly Review article about Tasso which I discussed in ch.2, p.75 , above.

world better. Goethe, in Moir's view as in Menzel's, has done the reverse. His poetry is morally worthless, and his influence positively evil, because instead of denouncing the 'vices and weaknesses' of his age, he actually beautifies them through the power of his art (p.445). Moir's idea of the world is a stern, Calvinistic one, not unlike Carlyle's, but while Carlyle sees Goethe as teaching modern man, through his doctrines of Entsagen and the nearest duty, how to comport himself in such a world, Moir, influenced by Menzel, sees him as an aesthetical shirker, 'taking refuge in an ideal world of art from the labours, and duties, and sufferingswhich it is our proper task in life to bear and overcome' (p.445). Both Goethe's way of living, the egotistical 'passive tranquillity' which shuts itself away and ignores 'the great interests of the time', and the philosophy of life which he propagated, a 'fanciful system of refined Epicurism', are presented as symptoms of a damnable desertion from the grim battle of life (pp.461-2). Goethe both lacks 'earnestness' himself and promotes a lack of it in his readers, and the same is the case in relation to 'enthusiasm'. His is a cold, indifferent genius, no more enthusiastic for excellence than it is revolted by vice (p.445), and his works consequently have a deadening effect on the sensibilities - 'Amidst all the polished beauty and marble grace of their execution, we regard them with cold admiration, not with sympathy' (p.462). This, then, is the mature moralistic rejection of Goethe, other examples of which I shall discuss later. It includes protest against Goethe's attitude to sexual morality, but is much larger in scope than the prurient critiques of De Quincey, James White,[34]

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34. See ch.2, pp.68-69, above.

or the Foreign Quarterly reviewer who, speaking of Wilhelm Meister, becomes hysterical over the 'loathsome carcases of putrifying abomination, these nauseous public gloatings and laboured delineations of vice' which he finds there.[35] To Moir, Goethe's laxity, even frivolity, over sexual matters is a symptom rather than the disease. The disease, which Goethe both suffered from and helped to spread, is in essence a failure to see properly the dynamic quality of man's relation to the world. Moir, like Menzel, Carlyle, and many others of his generation who in their reaction against eighteenth-century empiricism assimilated notions from both Christian puritanism and the Romantic movement, has a view of life as a struggle of conflicting forces where there is a duty for each man which involves on the one hand fighting the evil principle and on the other striving fervently after high ideals. The model is a chivalric one, and clearly Goethe, content to enjoy life in 'passive tranquillity' at his Weimarian round table, and bearing, unlike Gawain, no easily identifiable symbol of belief and duty on his shield, scores very badly as a modern knight-errant, especially as he lived at a time when the dragons and giants seemed to be becoming ever more numerous and threatening, in the shape of a spreading religious, moral, and hence social disintegration.

The other interesting English review of Menzel's book is Blackie's in the Foreign Quarterly Review. As my pairing of a quotation from Blackie with one from Moir at the beginning of this chapter indicates, I see Blackie as representing an approach to Goethe sharply contrasted to the one I have just been discussing, and in

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35. "German literature and composition," Foreign Quarterly Review, xxiii (1839), p.136.

order to give a clear picture of Blackie's approach I shall consider together the four articles of his that contain general remarks about Goethe.

J.S. Blackie

Blackie has the same attitude to Menzel as all the others. He praises him as a clear-headed, manly, non-mystical writer, welcomes his book as a much-needed corrective to the recent over-blown praise of modern German writers, but sees some of his views, notably those on Goethe, as exaggerated and polemical.[36] Blackie singles out Carlyle as an example of Goethe - idolatry at its most extravagant, and says that we need a judgement of Goethe somewhere in between Carlyle's and Menzel's (p.20). He does not offer such a final judgement himself, but he is clearly presenting himself as a critic with a balanced middle view of the matter, as in many ways he has a right to. His stay in Germany in his early twenties[37] left him sympathetic to the tolerance and breadth of approach characteristic of at least some parts of the new German intellectual movement, but did not turn him into a neophyte Germanist like the young Carlyle or like Crabb Robinson. Blackie speaks with some admiration of Menzel's political activism, of the way even his literary judgements are determined by his concern with the question 'how, under present circumstances, the civil and religious condition of his country may most surely and most speedily be ameliorated'

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36. J.S. Blackie, "Menzel on German literature," Foreign Quarterly Review, xvi (1835), pp.1-26.

37. See my sketch of Blackie's life, ch.2, p.83, above.

(p.3), and of his preference, though he is a Protestant, of 'a warm glowing Catholicism of the heart to a cold self-contained Protestantism of the understanding' (p.11). Although impressed by the earnestness and enthusiasm of the man, however, Blackie has to warn against the polemical character of his judgements, and he even archly suggests, in relation to Menzel's harsh criticism of Voss, that 'in moderation and tolerance of criticism that arch-heretic Göthe might give him some most useful lessons' (p.13). Like Crabb Robinson, then, Blackie espouses the Goethean principle of tolerance in criticism, and that principle leads him to reject the Goethe-idolatry of Carlyle as well as the hostility of Menzel. The very adoption of the principle, however, shows that he is in sympathy with Goethe in a way Moir is not, and unlike Robinson he demonstrates this sympathy of spirit in a detailed consideration of the factors for and against Goethe.

Menzel's anti-Goetheism is welcome as an antidote to 'besotted idolatry', and some of the hits he scores will help reduce Goethe to his true proportions, but it is Blackie's firm belief that these proportions are still very large - 'Göthe still remains a great man, a splendid piece of humanity' (p.16). Blackie goes through Menzel's accusations against Goethe one by one, either denying them or accepting them only in a modified sense. At the centre of his defence of Goethe is his confident denial that he was an egotist. Blackie affirms Goethe's exceptional kindliness, and cites the warmth of his statements about Herder, Voss, and Schiller - men so opposite to himself - and the fondness and constancy of his love for nature and art, as proof that he was not selfish (p.18). Assessments of Goethe (and not only those made in the nineteenth

century) tend to depend on this kind of personal reaction to him. Because Blackie feels the glow of Goethe's warmth of heart, he is fundamentally in sympathy with him in all his aspects, whereas Menzel and Moir, chilled by what they see as superfine sensibilities, react in the opposite way. Matters of principle do, of course, enter into the question as well, and there is no clear line of division between personal sympathy and ideological approval. Thus Blackie, following on from his denial of Goethe's selfishness, also denies that he has no enthusiasm, partly because he feels a warmth that Menzel does not feel, but partly also because his definition of enthusiasm is broader than Menzel's - he can extend the term so that it includes characteristically Goethean tendencies of mind: 'Göthe had an enthusiasm, but a calm and clear, not a noisy and troubled enthusiasm' (p.18). For similar combinations of reasons, Blackie half-denies that Goethe lacks either religion or morality. Goethe has the capability of religious feeling, though that feeling never expressed itself in any specific religious commitment, and though not a moralist, he has a respect for the beautiful and the natural (he substitutes beauty and is for duty and ought) which in some way corresponds to a moral sense, and in that he does not speak on moral matters he certainly cannot be regarded as immoral. Blackie is a relativist who is prepared to enjoy either St. Peter's or a Gothic cathedral, and having formed a notion of Goethe's religious and moral nature he accepts that for what good is in it, rather than trying (as did not only Carlyle but also, in a different way, Lewes) to see Goethean religion and morality as necessary modern replacements for the traditional forms from which they differ. Blackie confesses himself

unable to discover 'that strong development of the bump of veneration on Göthe's cranium, of which Carlyle and some of our German illuminati so mysteriously discourse'. He has another incidental fling at Carlylean thinking as an opposite extreme when qualifying his acceptance of Goethe on moral grounds with a warning against his occasional tendency towards Epicureanism: 'It is absurd and ridiculous to torture the mind into moral systems,....but it is irrational and unmanly to be sensual' (pp.19-20).

Blackie's wise passiveness does draw the line at some points, as here in relation to sensuality, and as at the end of his 1836 Eckermann article, where he protests mildly against Goethe's aristocratic attitudes to subjects such as Catholic emancipation (which he exclaims against) and the slave trade (which he palliates).[38] On the whole, though, Blackie sees Goethe as a man who was what he ought to be, and who used his talent as it was fit to be used, and he upbraids Menzel for wanting Goethe to be a politician and patriot, which he was not suited or required to be (p.18). The two other Goethe-articles which Blackie wrote for the Foreign Quarterly in 1835-6 (the Eckermann one and one on Goethe's correspondence with Zelter and Bettina Brentano)[39] deal much less than the Menzel article with judgements as to Goethe's stature and tendency, and mostly express and encourage an unprejudiced enjoyment of Goethe's art and of his personality as revealed by items like these correspondences and conversations. The quotation from the Zelter article which I gave

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38. J.S. Blackie, "Eckermann's Conversations with Göthe," Foreign Quarterly Review, xviii (1836), p.30.

39. See note 2, above.

at the beginning of this chapter speaks of 'pure enjoyment', but it also speaks of 'the health and gladness of soul which we daily drink in'. Blackie sees the Goethean beauty as a tonic where Menzel and Moir see it as a narcotic. The notion of Goethe's healing power appears again in another Foreign Quarterly article, a review in 1843 of a German book about Goethe by C.B. Carus. The reviewer speaks of the 'serene countenance' which shines through both Goethe's works and the works of those who write about him as 'a fine panacea against every morbid sensation'.[40] Carlyle, of course, saw Goethe as a healer too, indeed a life-saver,[41] but Carlyle's vision of Goethe's effectiveness, of the cure he proffered to modern man by the actual teaching of sound and healthy moral doctrine, is more specific than what Blackie speaks of, more the kind of thing which Menzel and Moir thought Goethe ought to have done but did not. Blackie sees the interaction between Goethe and his receptive reader in much less dynamic terms than Carlyle does. At the end of the Zelter article he says how much he has enjoyed drifting through the two sets of correspondence, choosing quotations and offering occasional comments: 'We have rambled carelessly over hill and dale, through a rich country of new and various prospect' (p.360). Goethe's intellect has the unobtrusive richness, the pleasing and beneficial power, of a beautiful and tranquil landscape, or - in the terms Blackie uses in a particularly rhapsodic passage of the Eckermann article - of one of nature's most perfect and wholesomely nourishing products: 'His judgments on men and things come to us with all the outward beauty, and all the inward mellowness,

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40. "Carus on Göthe," Foreign Quarterly Review, xxxii (1843), p.182.

41. See ch.1, pp.18-27 , above.

of a perfectly ripe fruit' (p.7).

Blackie finds in Goethe both richness and harmony, a prodigality that is ordered, so that the bad extremes of rigidity and anarchy are both avoided. In the Eckermann article, contrasting Goethe with the popular image of the flowing-haired, rolling-eyed poet, Blackie says 'To him poetry was law, measure, and harmony, as law conversely was poetry, beauty, and grace' (p.9). The synthesis Blackie is talking about here is one he finds also in Classical art - his admiration of Goethe is always closely connected with the Hellenism which was, at least in the early part of his career, a strong element in both his thought and his tastes.[42] He ascribes to Goethe 'a mind most akin of any modern to the perfection of Phidias and of Sophocles', recommending the reading and re-reading of his works to those with 'a taste formed on the models of Greece and Italy' (Zelter article, p.335). He also gives a list of Goethean qualities which indicates that combination of refined beauty and robustness which Blackie, along with Matthew Arnold and many other nineteenth-century thinkers, saw as characteristic of Ancient Greek civilisation and art - 'Beauty, simplicity, symmetry, grace, ease, cheerfulness' (p.328). Using one of those architectural images which so often attach themselves to Goethe, Blackie speaks of the 'sedulous devotion' with which he has 'built up to its perfect height that temple of Ionic beauty which God and nature called upon him to raise' (p.331). There is no suggestion of a missing 'sky-pointing spire' here - the temple is just the height it ought to be, and the building of it is precisely Goethe's appointed role in creation. Blackie goes on to denigrate the demand for a kind of

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42. See A.M. Stoddart, John Stuart Blackie, p.109.

universal genius who makes 'misdirected excursions into foreign regions' - the kind of universality Goethe can lay claim to is 'a universality of activity in his own proper sphere of the beautiful in art and nature' (p.332). This statement has a self-contradictory air, and suggests some unsatisfactoriness in Blackie's middle position as a critic of Goethe. Rightly seeing Carlyle's picture of Goethe as too Hebraic, Blackie himself packages him neatly as a Hellenist, a cheerful, robust votary of beauty, balance, harmony, to the extent that he has to dodge the more mystical and obscure parts of his works - dismissed as either 'a whimsical trick of his old age' or the creation of his misguided critics (pp.328-329) - and also the references in the Zelter correspondence to the idea of duty, which, Blackie had told us, Goethe had replaced by the idea of beauty - here Blackie expresses some surprise and points at Goethe's catholicity of spirit, which cannot totally reject even an idea that does not belong in his philosophy (p.331). On the other hand, Blackie wants to affirm Goethe's real greatness, not to present him as a 'mere artist', so he keeps the term 'universal' while at the same time jettisoning the idea that Goethe's powers extend beyond matters artistic.

The question of Goethe's claim to universal genius is one that gives Blackie some trouble, and it is difficult to tell what kind of universality it is that he eventually grants Goethe. The term universal genius can have connotations of more than one kind. What it most normally indicates is many-sidedness. German admirers had, from an early stage, attached the adjective vielseitig to Goethe in the way of a Homeric epithet, because of the startling diversity of

activities he pursued in a serious way. He was poet, scientific researcher, administrator, theatrical producer, and utterer of wisdom on all conceivable subjects. Thus a reviewer of volumes six to ten of Goethe's posthumous works comments on the enormous diversity of subjects covered in them, and says that on the evidence of these volumes alone Goethe could be declared the 'most universal genius that ever lived'.[43] At a time when a tendency towards specialisation was already beginning to limit the possible range of individual achievement, Goethe was likely to be revered as one who, while outstanding in one area of achievement, was also at least good in other and contrasting ones. On the other hand, those who represented specialisation, most obviously scientists, were likely to resent Goethe's intrusions into their own territory. Sir David Brewster, for instance, in two articles about the Farbenlehre,[44] exposes the scientific inadequacy of Goethe's anti-Newtonian colour-theory, accuses him of bringing a dangerous mixture of reason and imagination to his scientific work,[45] and, because he finds him so inept as a scientist, predicts that whatever posterity's verdict is on Goethe, "he will never be worshipped as a Universal Genius".[46] It was not until Lewes that

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43. "Goethe's Nachgelassene Werke," The Athenaeum, vi (1833), p.585.

44. The first forms part of a Fraser's dinner party to celebrate the beginning of 1835. The paper, declared to be by Brewster, is read out by one of the diners as part of a jovial discussion of Goethe's standing - "The Fraserians," Fraser's Magazine, xi (1835), pp.11-12. The second is a longer and much more scientifically detailed article, which makes, however, the same basic point - D. Brewster, "Goethe's Theory of colours," Edinburgh Review, lxxii (1840), pp.99-131.

45. Edinburgh Review article, p.99.

46. "Fraserians," p.12.

an English writer attempted to understand Goethe's manysidedness properly, and to see how his literary and non-literary pursuits fitted together. Blackie's statements about Goethe's universality keeping within its proper sphere, however, suggest another, more moral kind of universality, a kind which Carlyle, Menzel, and Moir would like to see in a modern genius, but which only Carlyle (and he only temporarily) sees in Goethe. The universal genius, the man of exceptional and wide-ranging powers, should use his gifts to further human progress, and thus make his achievement truly universal. This idea of ultimate genius, where efficacy as well as effort is universal in range, is present in Carlyle's notion of Goethe as a 'corner-stone' of a new social edifice for mankind,[47] and in the complaints in Menzel's books, and the articles of Moir and other English writers, about Goethe's indifference to political and moral concerns.

In an article of 1841, on the general characteristics of German literature,[48] Blackie gives an outline of what kind of contribution he sees Goethe making to human progress. He is talking about the value of metaphysical speculation. Speculation, he says, is valuable as a means, and the end is the arrival at a definite set of beliefs about the world. Slightly beside his main point, he then describes the two kinds of belief that are possible at the present. One is epitomised by Puseyism, and is 'the metaphysics of divine institution'; the other, epitomised by the teachings of Goethe, is 'the metaphysics of mortal striving' (p.154). Man must

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47. See ch.1, p.28 , above.

48. J.S. Blackie, "Traits and tendencies of German literature," Blackwood's Magazine, 1 (1841), pp.143-160.

either believe in revelation, in truths he receives from external sources such as the Bible, or else 'throw himself back on the great sea of healthy human instincts, finding in himself alone, and in the sympathies which he is compelled to share with his brother, whatever best spiritual polarity he can' (p.154). Blackie's attitude to Goethe has changed somewhat since 1836 - he now presents him as a teacher of sorts, and an important one, whereas previously his tendency had been to keep him to the 'sphere of the beautiful'. The doctrine he sees Goethe as imparting is, basically, humanism. The term is, of course, to be handled with caution, as it can encompass a wide range of beliefs, include the kind of alternative to traditional Christianity which Carlyle constructed from Goethe and the other Germans.[49] It is a long way from Carlyle's transcendentally-tinged, Calvinistically biased brand of humanism, to the humanism of 'healthy human instincts', associated with conceptions of the spirit of ancient Greece, which Blackie finds in Goethe. Blackie is undoubtedly nearer to a real understanding of Goethe than Carlyle, though his formulation of the Goethean type of belief is clearly by nature a simplification. Between the Goethean and the Puseyite view of the world, Blackie himself was something of a waverer. A member of the serious younger generation of Goethe critics (he was born in 1809), he sees the need of choosing between the two ways of thinking, but his tolerance and broad-mindedness of temperament, reinforced by his early experience of

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49. See W.H. Bruford, "Goethe and some Victorian humanists," Publications of the English Goethe Society, new series, xviii (1949), pp.34-67, for a discussion of different types of humanism in relation to Goethe.

German intellectual life, seem to leave him more inclined to see the good in both than to choose one. Anna M. Stoddart suggests that the Hellenic spirit, whether found in ancient art or in its modern form in Goethe, never had as strong a hold over Blackie as the spirit of Christian piety in which he was brought up,[50] and though she plainly has the typical Victorian biographer's desire to make her subject look religiously respectable, this 1841 article, with its occasional slightly disparaging asides about Goethe - a sketcher of 'bloodless arabesques' (p.158), cherished in Weimar like a hot-house plant (p.151) - possibly shows a veering away from Goethean solutions.

Blackie's relation to Carlyle, whom he in fact knew slightly,[51] is a curious one. The 1841 essay contains Carlylean statements that ape Carlyle's style - for instance this address to Englishmen hostile to metaphysics: 'Consider that the world, however pleasant it might be so to picture it, is not one vast beef-steak club, and that the mind of man is not one grand steam-engine' (p.154). Like the other articles of Blackie's which I have considered, however, this one contains references to Carlyle which are critical of his work on German literature. Carlyle has become so German, so much a 'breathing incarnation of the modern Teutonic spirit' (p.160), that it is impossible for him to give an impartial, or even a wholly intelligible account of German literature to the English. Blackie

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50. Stoddart, pp.109-110.

51. See "TC to John Stuart Blackie," Carlyle Letters, vii. 135-137. See ch. 2, note 61, above.

is an early example of the way Carlyle's influence tended to operate, and he sets a pattern which is followed by other English writers, including Lewes and Matthew Arnold in their statements about Goethe. He is able to look at Carlyle's writings objectively, and see the unbalanced quality of his views, but Carlyle has made such a strong impression on him that, perhaps only half conscious of the fact, he occasionally adopts a Carlylean way of looking at things and even Carlylean rhetorical tricks and turns of phrase. In his writing about Goethe, the most significant Carlylean idea that he has absorbed is that, for modern man, Goethe is the teacher who offers the major alternative world-view that now stands alongside orthodox Christian belief. Blackie is unlike Carlyle in that he does not see traditional Christianity as obsolete - in Puseyism he sees a welcome sign of liveliness in the Church of England, which is far from what Carlyle saw - but like him he sees validity and healthiness in a different kind of belief of which Goethe is a pioneer.

Blackie's idea of Goethe's essential soundness seems to a large extent to arise from his enjoyment of material like the letters and the conversations. Such non-literary items have always had a powerful influence on people's general notions of Goethe, and it is worth looking at some more reviews of the volumes of correspondence to examine the nature of the response they evoked.

Goethe's correspondence

The volumes of correspondence that attract attention in the British periodicals in this period are the voluminous Goethe-Schiller correspondence, from the years 1794 to 1805 (published 1828-9), Goethe's

correspondence with the musician Zelter, 1796 to 1832 (published 1833-4), and Bettina Brentano's Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde (1835), not known until Lewes published his Life of Goethe in 1855 to be an imaginative reconstruction on Bettina's part and only loosely connected with the actual letters that passed between them. The Bettina letters, depicting a slightly ambiguous relationship between the sixty-year-old poet and the young girl, created some interest as amusing gossip, but did not seriously damage Goethe's reputation, as Blackie, reviewing the letters with an amused tolerance at the end of his 1836 Zelter article, predicted they would not (p.360).[52] James White, one of the Blackwood's humorists and consistently hostile to Goethe,[53] speaks up for Bettina in an article of 1845, belabouring Goethe in the process for his vanity, egotism, and cowardice, and, rather more shrewdly, accusing him of transfixing Bettina like a butterfly for use in his art, though his identification of Bettina with Ottilie in Die Wahlverwandtschaften is, of course, incorrect.[54] The Zelter and Schiller correspondence show Goethe in a better light, and reviewers tend to be impressed, as Blackie was, by the 'solid and substantial humanity'[55] these letters show in a writer who might

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52. An English translation of the correspondence, done in Germany and mostly by Bettina herself, but published in England, appeared in 1837 and 1839: Goethe's correspondence with a child, 3 vols. (London and Berlin, 1837, 1839).

53. See ch.2, p.69, above.

54. J. White, "A few words for Bettina," Blackwood's Magazine, lviii (1845), pp.357-365.

55. Blackie, Eckermann article, p.7.

otherwise appear a cold aesthete. An Athenaeum reviewer, in 1834, cites one of Goethe's letters to Zelter, consoling him after he had suffered a series of personal calamities, as a beautiful example of warmth, kindness, and tact.[56] A short review of the Schiller correspondence in the Foreign Review in 1829 speaks of the healthy, firmly based, unsentimental friendship between the two great writers, and, in sharp contrast to Menzeland Moir, brackets Goethe and Schiller together as possessors of 'the highest talent, joined to the highest worth'.[57] Moir himself, five years before the article on Menzel which I have discussed, wrote a short review of the Schiller correspondence, in which he already shows a strong bias for Schiller and against Goethe, but has to acknowledge high qualities in Goethe which the letters reveal.[58] He sees Schiller, with his 'industry and fervour', as making a deeper, if not a wider, impression on the German public than Goethe, whose works tend to have a 'Utopian and unreal aspect of tranquillity', but he grants that Goethe, 'more Catholic in his genius', calmer and more comprehensive in his views, had a genuinely beneficial effect on Schiller (pp.180-182).

William Empson's review of the Schiller correspondence in the Edinburgh Review in 1831 illustrates well the way people's views of Goethe could be modified by their response to collections of letters.[59]

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56. "Correspondence of Goethe and Zelter," The Athenaeum, vii (1834), p.9.

57. "Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Göthe," Foreign Review, iii (1829), p.532.

58. G. Moir, "Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe," Foreign Quarterly Review, vii (1831), pp.180-183.

59. W. Empson, "Schiller and Goethe," Edinburgh Review, liii (1831), pp.82-104.

As we have seen,[60] Empson was not particularly impressed by Faust, though his hostility to the poem in 1830 is considerably moderated in 1833. Wilhelm Meister does not impress him either, and in this article he speaks disparagingly of it as 'airy, theatrical , unreal' (p.94). Of Goethe as a whole, however, his perusal of this correspondence leaves Empson a most enthusiastic admirer. It is not surprising that Carlyle should have approved of this article, as it presents a view of Goethe that is not only similar to Carlyle's but clearly influenced by his Goethe-articles of 1827 and 1828. Carlyle's remarks are in a letter to Goethe.[61] He expresses surprise at the quality of Empson's article on the Schiller correspondence, and pleasure at the 'spiritual progress' which the article shows to have taken place since the Faust article of 1830, a progress unexpected in an 'English Whig Politician' of middle age (Empson was born in 1791 , and hence falls more or less in between my two 'generations'). Contrasting Goethe's demeanour in his letters with Schiller's, Empson says that Goethe writes with 'an almost epicurean tranquillity' (p.83), then lays stress on his 'almost' and proceeds to clear Goethe of the charge of being epicurean in outlook, giving a very Carlylean account of the progress through doubt and unrest to the kind of moral and intellectual equilibrium which is shown forth in these letters of Goethe's maturity. Like Carlyle, Empson sees Goethe as typical (at least of modern man) in the youthful torments he had to pass through, but exceptional in his success in finding a way. The comparison with St. Peter's

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60. See ch.2, pp. 78-79, above.

61. "TC to Goethe," 10 June 1831, Letters, v. 288-289.

which I quoted above[62] is an image for the massiveness of his achievement, and it becomes part of a complex and rather vaguely realised composite image for the whole process. The young man going through his period of youthful unrest is on a ship in a storm, the cargo of the ship being his ideas and feelings about the world. Goethe himself, when going through the storm, became creator of a similar storm for others by re-creating the experience in Werther. In going through the storm, a man may feel forced to abandon some part of his cargo. Voltaire, for instance, disastrously abandoned passion and belief in good, and others have abandoned their sympathy with the ordinary realities of life, becoming cloudy visionaries. Goethe landed with his whole freight intact, and with those 'varied stores' still in his possession he was able to rebuild his intellectual home, 'laying its foundations deep in the spirit of reverence, cementing its broad and massive front by the bands of reason, and gilding its airy and glittering pinnacles with the sunshine of wit and graceful humour' (pp.84-85).

Empson, then, under the influence of the Schiller letters, goes further than Blackie and nearly as far as Carlyle in his admiration of Goethe's achievement. The climax of his elaborate metaphor points to the kind of sacred, dear-achieved reconciliation which Carlyle pointed to in Goethe: 'It is the Holy Alliance of the head and heart, in which neither compromises its independence, but each supports, and relieves, and elevates the other' (p.85). Empson can see the 'bump of veneration' which Blackie misses, and his idea of the healthy

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62. p. 100.

harmoniousness of Goethe's maturity is therefore more comprehensive and elevated than Blackie's. Empson does not, however, make the evangelistic extension which Carlyle makes. Goethe has triumphantly survived the storm, but there is no suggestion that he necessarily makes it easier for others to do the same. Indeed, the 'moral serenity' which is characteristic of these letters and of Goethe's mature works in general, is likely to be mistaken by many for mere indifference (p.87).

Sarah Austin

Sarah Austin, born in 1793, is of the same middle generation as Empson, but her close acquaintance with German literature dates back much further than his. She came from an intellectual Norwich household, was taught German as a girl, and was reading Goethe by 1818 at the latest.[63] In 1819 she married John Austin, a free-thinking lawyer who became Professor of Jurisprudence at the newly-formed London University in 1828. The couple moved in 'progressive' intellectual circles - they were friendly, for instance, with Jeremy Bentham, the Carlyles, and J.S. Mill - and though Sarah Austin was more orthodox than her husband in religious terms, she was one of the most forward-looking of the British students of German in the 1820s and 30s, and was correspondingly critical of the tendencies of British society and the British intellect. The reasons she gives

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63. See J. Ross, Three generations of Englishwomen: memoirs and correspondence of Mrs. John Taylor, Mrs. Sarah Austin, and Lady Duff Gordon, 2 vols. (1888), i. 30-31.

her sister, Mrs. Reeve, in a letter of 1829, for encouraging her to teach her husband German, show the links between modern Germanism and the kind of Hellenism which Arnold was to advocate in Culture and Anarchy: 'The characteristics of German literature are dispassionateness of inquiry and reality of knowledge, and these are singularly valuable to the native of a country where everything is impatiently pushed forward to answer the ends of immediate gain.'[64] The Austins visited Germany more than once, and even on their first visit - to Bonn, in 1827-8 - they met such representatives of modern German literature as A.W. Schlegel and Niebuhr. Sarah Austin's two major contributions to English Goethe-study are her Characteristics of Goethe (1833)[65] - translations with notes of various German memoirs of Goethe, the most substantial being Falk's Goethe, aus näherem persönlichem Umgange dargestellt - and her 1857 Edinburgh Review article on Goethe's ethics, which I shall be considering in my fifth chapter. She also produced a historical sketch of Germany, from 1760 to 1814 (published in 1854, but made up of articles that appeared in the Edinburgh Review in the 1840s), and a number of translations of miscellaneous German works. She was an intelligent and independent thinker, and an extremely well-informed Germanist, but consistently undervalued her own intellectual powers to the extent that she gave very infrequent expression to her own ideas about the subjects that interested her.

The Preface to Characteristics of Goethe shows clearly both the intelligence and the diffidence. Mrs. Austin protests her incompetence

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64. "Mrs. Austin to Mrs. Reeve," 1829, Ross, i.63.

65. See ch.2, note 12, above.

to offer an opinion of Goethe's character and works (vol.i, p.xv), then proceeds to make some perceptive, if sometimes debatable, remarks about some of Goethe's characteristics and why these make him particularly unlikely to be generally acceptable to English readers. She expresses tentative divergence from Carlyle's view of Goethe, saying that she cannot arrive at such 'confident conclusions' about him as Carlyle does, but she does not expand on this point (p. xvi). Mrs. Austin's admiration of Carlyle's powers was always tempered with some suspicion of his opinions, and later she was to become strongly (though privately) critical of his tendency - a letter of 1851 describes him as 'one of the dissolvents of the age.'[66] Mrs.Austin increasingly became a typical representative of an Edinburgh Review liberalism that disapproved of Carlyle's general tendency, and also, ultimately (as her 1857 article shows), of Goethe's. Questioning of Carlyle's opinions was likely to involve diminishing faith in Goethe's ethical status, as Carlyle's Goethe-articles were so comprehensive in their endorsement of Goethe (cause and effect are, of course, not necessarily this way round), though the two authors were disapproved of for very different reasons. In this Preface, Mrs. Austin is strongly pro-Goethe but stops short of granting him the kind of messianic qualities and properties accorded him by Carlyle. She gives her own view of what Goethe's 'universality' consists in. His genius is universal because he has 'the singular faculty of divesting himself of intellectual identity' (xvii), so that he is able to become what he describes and thus have a deep understanding of and sympathy with an extraordinarily

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66. "Mrs. Austin to Dr. Whewell," 2 October 1851, Ross, i, 272.

wide variety of kinds of humanity. On the other hand, Mrs. Austin has (at least at this stage) a firm belief in Goethe's fundamental goodness on the basis of which she defends him from the charge of indifference. Able to see only too clearly the evil elements which lurk within all forms of commitment to rapid social change, Goethe is wisely wary of any such commitment of himself, but his sheer dedication to his own form of labour, combined with the 'Maxims of the most profound, earnest, and enlarged humanity' (xxi) which are to be found in abundance in his works, make it clear that the general good of mankind was something that meant much to him.

The most interesting part of this Preface is the brief section about ethics and aesthetics. Mrs. Austin suggests, as one of the major reasons why Goethe is unlikely to be popular in present-day England, that there is among the English a pernicious tendency to confuse art with instruction, aesthetics with ethics. Purely didactic works are out of fashion, and British readers now want to learn as they are entertained, to be instructed in small doses by writers of agreeable fiction. This criticism may be partly aimed at Carlyle, particularly at his writings about Wilhelm Meister, though obviously the main target is those critics who blame Goethe for not offering useful moral lessons. Mrs. Austin's argument is that Goethe was an artist who saw art as 'in and for itself, moral, humanizing, beneficent' (p.xxiii), and that he was right, and moreover that 'aesthetical perfection' simply cannot coexist with any violation of 'moral truth and beauty' (xxvi), so that to grant art this kind of autonomy is not to imply indifference to the artist's moral tone or tendency. Carlyle too had struggled with Goethe's

notions of the relation between good and beautiful,[67] but had finally lost interest in art and abandoned the problem. Mrs. Austin was better able to absorb Goethean notions on this subject, though she only presents a simplified version of those notions. Her view of the beautiful as necessarily containing the good is forward-looking, and her protest against naively moralistic ways of looking at art is a valid one for her time, though the solution to the problem of art and morality which she offers is of course an inadequate compromise (the 1857 article suggests that she later realised its inadequacy) between the criticism which judges only the 'message' and the criticism which ignores, or tries to ignore, moral questions when making its judgements.

The only interesting review of Mrs. Austin's Characteristics of Goethe is Herman Merivale's in the Edinburgh Review in 1833. Merivale is an impressive specimen of the Edinburgh Review liberalism I have talked about, and his view of Goethe belongs to that class of mature moralistic disapproval to which also belong George Moir's Edinburgh Review article of 1836 and Sarah Austin's of 1857. Like Sarah Austin, though, Merivale does not arrive at a clear moral point of view with regard to Goethe until later, in his case until his "Göthe's festival" article, also in the Edinburgh Review, of 1850. I am not suggesting that Sarah Austin and Merivale were Goethe-critics who developed in step - Merivale, born in 1806, was thirteen years the younger, and in any case the pattern of development is only similar in very broad terms. It is interesting, however, that they also share a disapproval of Carlyle's opinions -

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67. See ch.1, pp. 26-27, above.

it was Merivale who, in a review of Carlyle's French Revolution in 1840,[68] objected to the 'indulgent fatalism' inherent in the author's view of history, his presentation of men as powerless, and hence non-responsible, agents, and his apparent notion that energy is the only necessary constituent of heroism. Clearly there was a kind of serious progressive liberalism, represented by these two writers, which, convinced of man's ability to improve himself morally, jibbed at both of the very different sorts of moral passivity represented by Goethe and Carlyle. Merivale's career is a very distinguished one. He was called to the bar in 1832 and made a Recorder in 1841, became Professor of political economy at Oxford in 1837, and Under-secretary for the colonies in 1848 (succeeding Sir James Stephen); finally, from 1859, he was a highly respected Under-secretary for India. He wrote a large number of periodical articles, mostly for the Edinburgh Review, on an enormous variety of subjects, and throughout his career - one was published in 1874, the year of his death. As a critic of Goethe he is occasionally quirky or even hidebound, but well-informed and always intelligent.

Merivale's 1833 review of Mrs. Austin's book disapproves of Goethe mostly on other than moral grounds. He does discuss the 'moral purport' of Goethe's works at one point, giving his own reductive and faintly scornful summary of that purport, then suggesting that a less sensitive, more serious attitude is in fact more conducive to real civilisation, and the general happiness of the people, than these refined, aesthetic views. Merivale's reading of the Goethean

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68. See p.99 above. The review of Mrs. Austin is H. Merivale, "Mrs. Austin's Characteristics of Goethe," Edinburgh Review, lvii (1833), pp. 371-403.

message, like that of other nineteenth-century critics, is really little more than a reading of Wilhelm Meister, but at least his reading of that novel is more accurate than Carlyle's. The message he sees is that man's highest aim is to adapt himself to his circumstances, to 'attend to his own aesthetic developement', and to leave 'social and supernatural interests' to look after themselves (p.383). Merivale scores something more like a hit when speaking of Goethe's studied indifference to the great questions facing mankind in his time, an attitude he mildly condemns. His complaint is perhaps, as Blackie would have said, unreasonable in that it asks Goethe to be what by nature he was not, but he points cleverly at the possible self-contradiction in Goethean tolerance: 'Indifference became a fixed idea in his mind, and he embraced it with exclusive and dogmatical ardour' (p.382). Merivale's major complaint against Goethe, however, is more comprehensive than this. The tolerance, the aesthetic bias, the indifference to political and supernatural matters, he sees not as fundamental to his nature (as Blackie would) but as unnatural accretions forced on him by his position at the court in Weimar. Merivale sees in Goethe's mature works a general lack of coherence, which he explains by means of a quasi-tragic theory of his development, almost the exact reverse of the more common interpretation of that development as propagated by, among others, Carlyle, Empson, and Lewes. Merivale sees Goethe as a romantic at heart - a fiery, speculative, aspiring imaginative genius with mystical leanings - who on acquiring an official position at Weimar felt forced to adopt a demeanour of moderation and self-control in order to maintain that position, pretending (to himself as well as to others) that a moral

and intellectual change had taken place which, in reality, never did - 'With a heart still full of romance, he forced himself to adopt a system coldly and deliberately sceptical - to believe only in the Practical, over which personal experiment and observation had given him the mastery' (p.389). Hence his mature works (unlike the early Götz and Werther, which represent his true tendency) have an uncomfortable double character, drifting without warning from the hard human realities of, for instance, the early part of Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre or Faust part one, to the misty, speculative abstractions of the "Gesellschaft vom Turm" section or of the Helena episode, described as an 'incoherent, revolting mass of unsubstantial contradictions' (p.379). His courtier's wariness also leads to his refusal to commit himself on matters of public interest - for instance religion, where he seems to lean towards all of pantheism, mystical devotion, catholicism, and rationalism - and that in turn makes him a thinker who can have no influence, so diffuse and unfocused that 'The admiration which he has achieved is but a barren wreath, whose flowers can never ripen into fruit' (p.384).

It is never quite clear whether the Goethe Merivale likes least is the clear-headed realist he pretended to become or the romantic mystic he really remained. The central point, however, is clear enough. The obscurity which Merivale finds in much of Goethe, the failure to appeal (as Schiller does - p.391) with any consistency to common human sensibilities, is the result of a fundamental disharmony in his developed state of mind caused by his treachery to his own inner nature. Merivale attempts to forestall objections to his point of view by protesting against the circular argument

employed by Mrs. Austin (to whose work he is, however, on the whole complimentary) and the writers she translates, an argument which claims that a dislike of Goethe must arise from a failure to understand him, and a failure to understand him from a lack of sympathy with him. Merivale's point is a fair one, but it must be said that his complaints about the non-coherence of Goethe's mature works can be explained at least in part by sheer failure to comprehend the coherence that is there - most modern critics, for instance, would state positively that the Helena episode, if studied carefully, comes out as more than an 'incoherent, revolting mass of unsubstantial contradictions'. Merivale's disbelief in the authenticity of the harmonious self-mastery which Carlyle, Empson, Blackie, and many others saw in the mature Goethe, clearly does arise both from a fundamental lack of sympathy with Goethe (Merivale's 1850 article expresses this lack of sympathy much more unequivocally) and from a failure to understand the controlled, conscious artistry that is behind Werther as much as it is behind Faust part two. It should be added, however, that Merivale is by no means exclusively hostile in his criticisms. He praises the exceptional melodic power and technical control Goethe shows in his lyric poems (p.373), speaks of Faust part one as 'profound but simple and earnest in its severe philosophy, inviting thought and amply repaying it' (p.379), and cites his loyalty to the Duke of Weimar as evidence that he was not cold, unfeeling, utterly lacking in patriotism, as some have claimed (pp.384-385). Merivale is driven to his view, eccentric and not fully worked out, though also ingenious and thought-provoking, of Goethe as romantic soul immured within cautious official, by the feeling that the qualities

he can see fit into no recognisable over-all pattern. He sees Goethe as centrally idiosyncratic, and disagrees strongly with Sarah Austin's remarks about the Goethean universality that divests itself of intellectual identity. To Merivale, everything Goethe observes (and he extends these remarks to Goethe's botanical writings as well) emerges strongly tinted with Goethean idiosyncrasy - events are improbable, characters behave as no real people would, even botanical specimens are metaphysically transformed (pp.387-388). Such diversity as is found in Goethe, on this view, is the diversity of a disunited mind and not of an objectively seen nature.

Goethe and his influence

The more seriously argued adverse criticisms of Goethe in this period tend to involve the complaint that his influence - not as a literary artist but as a thinker - will be in some way pernicious. This is true of Menzel's criticism, and of Moir's. Objections to Goethe's likely influence proceed most commonly from a type of belief which I have just suggested as common to Sarah Austin and Herman Merivale - a belief in general human progress, in a process of collective improvement in mankind as a whole. Austin and Merivale find the doctrines both of Goethe and of Carlyle wanting in terms of this kind of belief, and a similar combination of views is found in a review of the first collection of Carlyle's works, in the British and Foreign Review in 1844.[69] The British and Foreign Review represented a firmly-held political liberalism, a point of view

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69. "The works of Thomas Carlyle," British and Foreign Review, xvi (1844), pp.262-293.

that is often, though not exclusively, found in connection with this belief in human progress. The reviewer takes exception to Carlyle's idea that great men shape human history, preferring to see humanity as collectively labouring towards collective achievement (p.274). He also takes exception to Goethe's formulation of duty as adopted by Carlyle - "do the duty that lies nearest thee". His objection to the doctrine is not that it is necessarily unsound, but that an acceptance of it can lead, as it did in the case of Goethe, to a rationalised selfishness, to an exclusive devotion to individual and domestic tasks and enjoyments, to the charity that begins at home and stays there. Goethe's devotion of himself to art, and deliberate withdrawal from those larger concerns - specifically, religion and politics - which are of vital importance to man, is a notorious example of the possible evil influence of his own dogma (p.289).

Three articles about Goethe from the 1830s express in different ways a belief that the artist can play an important role in the advancement of humanity, the kind of belief the early Carlyle also had. Unlike Carlyle, however, these three writers all agree that Goethe, though a man of great powers, has conspicuously failed to play any such role. A writer in the Athenaeum, writing shortly after Goethe's death and specifically on the subject of his influence, sees it as one of the chief ends of true poetry 'to strengthen his [man's] moral faculties, and to teach him that nature must bow before the divine power which is in him.'[70] Goethe, of course, does nothing

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70. "On the influence of the writings of Goethe," The Athenaeum, v (1832), p.242.

of the sort. An admirable artist, he paints the weaknesses of human nature with great psychological insight, but gives no suggestion of godlike qualities in man which might progressively overcome these weaknesses, offering only 'a sort of universal dillettantéism[sic]' as 'the mediating divinity which in its influence is to modify this world of temptation and strife'. The poet should not preach, but he should offer an emotional charge of a kind suited to bring to the fore the nobler aspects of his readers' humanity. An article of a more radical tinge, from Tait's Edinburgh Magazine in 1837, expresses a similar view.[71] Of the true artist (and not therefore of Goethe) it can be said that 'The only subject of his theme is humanity, pure and noble humanity; and it is impossible that he can ever remain indifferent to the advancement and amelioration of his race' (p.165). Goethe, though vastly talented, is not an artist in this highest sense. He is so politically indifferent that he can safely be regarded as a Tory, he is weak and effeminate both as a man and an artist, and above all he lacks that faith in man without which faith in God is impossible. This writer shares with Merivale the belief that Goethe was spoilt by the life he lived at Weimar, though his theory is by no means as psychologically elaborate as Merivale's. The third writer, in the Monthly Chronicle in 1839, is different in that, though also of a radical and humanistic cast, he has a much more deterministic view of human history (similar in some points to Carlyle's), and hence attaches no

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"Politics and poetry.

71. "A word from Goethe and a word to Goethe," Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, new series, iv (1837), pp.162-168.

blame to Goethe for what he was.[72] His theory is that Byron and Goethe represent the two opposite poles (labelled, respectively, subjective and objective, or internal and external) of individualism, the dominant spirit of the age they lived in, and that jointly they brought about the necessary end of individualism, a doomed tendency, by taking it to its two logical conclusions, arriving at (in Byron's case) the 'selfism' of despair and (in Goethe's) the 'selfism' of indifference (p.250). What we await now is the emergence of the new social poetry which will sing the future of humanity - that is, sing of society, not of the individual - and will thus help teach men to 'rise to the Deity through Humanity' (p.251). Goethe's influence, then, is clearly not of the right kind, though through no real fault of his own. The writer sees Goethe as having attained a calm not (as Carlyle claimed) of victory but of indifference, and he is personally less sympathetic to him than he is to Byron, who achieved no calm at all but continued to suffer and bleed under the torments of the individualist's hopeless conflict with the world.

All these writers have beliefs which approximate to, or at least tend towards, a religion of humanity, of the kind preached, mostly from the 1860s onwards, by Comte, Lewes, J.S. Mill, and George Eliot, among others. All believe in a divine potential which is present not only within specially gifted individuals (here they differ from Carlyle) but in all men, and which can, if properly drawn out and encouraged, lead the whole of humanity towards a brighter dawn. The great artist's special capability and duty is

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72. "Byron and Göthe," Monthly Chronicle, iv (1839), pp.242-254.

to stir emotions of the right kind, to help in the work of bringing the divine parts of humanity into prominence and effectiveness. It should be emphasised that all of these writers admit Goethe's excellence as an artist. Carlyle, however, and some German critics before him, had made claims for Goethe as a thinker, a prophet, a moral instructor, and on that ground he clearly stands less secure. The new democratic humanism, a religion of social striving often supported by the traditional Christian belief in man as the image and agent of God, required (in most cases) thinkers more dynamic and less ambivalent than Goethe. The writer of the article in Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, speaking of Goethe's dislike of Luther, names the Lutherish qualities in which Goethe is 'wonderfully defective' as 'Energy, enthusiasm, and, above all, moral earnestness' (p.166). Energy and enthusiasm are the driving force behind human progress, moral earnestness is the guiding principle that directs this force aright, and the writer who lacks both force and principle, especially if highly talented in other ways, can only be pernicious in his influence.

The New Monthly Magazine and Edward Bulwer Lytton

Readers of the New Monthly Magazine in the 1830s were presented with a Goethe neither pernicious nor defective. Bulwer Lytton was editor of the Magazine from November 1831 to August 1833, and secured for it Carlyle's most rhapsodically laudatory article about Goethe, "Death of Goethe".[73] During and after Bulwer's editorship, the popular poet and keen student of German language and literature

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73. See ch.1, pp. 39-41, above.

Felicia Hemans contributed verse translations of four short passages from Iphigenie auf Tauris,[74] and a synopsis with translated extracts of Torquato Tasso,[75] the latter interspersed with highly enthusiastic, if not very enlightening, critical comments - the play is 'the work of a noble hand', to be approached with reverence, its poetry of an 'exquisitely subtle spirit' (p.3). Bulwer made himself unpopular with Henry Colburn, the proprietor of this predominantly literary magazine, by bringing into it too much of the zeal for political reform which he then professed,[76] but this political seriousness brought with it no distrust of Goethe and his influence of the kind I have just been illustrating. Bulwer was born in 1803, and by 1831 he was already, thanks mostly to his immensely successful novel of fashionable life, Pelham (1828- his second novel, preceded by Falkland and followed rapidly by The Disowned, Devereux, Paul Clifford, Eugene Aram, and Godolphin, the last of which was published in April 1833), a literary star. He was an admirer of Goethe at latest by 1826. A notebook entry from that year shows him planning an essay (never written) on Wilhelm Meister,[77] and in 1827 Falkland was published, with a clear indebtedness in both spirit and form to Werther an important element

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74. F. Hemans, "Passages translated from the Iphigenia of Goethe," New Monthly Magazine, xxxiv (1832), p.407.

75. F. Hemans, "Scenes and passages from the 'Tasso' of Goethe," New Monthly Magazine, xl (1834), pp.1-8.

76. See Wellesley Index, iii. 166.

77. See R. Lytton (1st Earl of Lytton), The life, letters, and literary remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton, by his son, 2 vols. (1883), ii. 98-99.

in its torrid mixing together of romantic genres. Wilhelm Meister, for Bulwer as for Carlyle (it is not clear at what stage Bulwer learnt to read German, but it seems highly likely that he first read this novel in Carlyle's translation), made the deepest and most lasting impression, and discussions of Bulwer's relation to Goethe have always centred on his early novels as Bildungsromane in the Goethean mould and with Goethean assumptions behind.[78] As literary influence is not my concern, I shall concentrate instead on Bulwer's critical statements about Goethe in the New Monthly Magazine and elsewhere. In any case, it is hard to dispute Hans Wagner's judgement (and he extends the comment also to Benjamin Disraeli, another copier, in his Contarini Fleming, of the pattern of Wilhelm Meister) that the similarities between Bulwer's early novels and Wilhelm Meister are superficial, the differences profound.[79]

In 1831, in a review of a book comparing English and French society between the Restoration and the French Revolution, Bulwer quotes an epigram from Goethe, introducing him parenthetically as 'that great writer, in whom we scarcely know which to admire the most, the brilliant imagination, or the quiet rationality'.[80] Bulwer is

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78. Carré, pp.206-215; S. Howe, Wilhelm Meister and his English kinsmen (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1930), pp.126-177; M.W. Rosa, The silver-fork school: novels of fashion preceding Vanity Fair (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1936), pp.76-79, 94; H. Wagner, Der englische Bildungsroman bis in die Zeit des ersten Weltkrieges (Bern, 1951), pp. 19-20; A.H. Goldhan, "Über die Einwirkung des Goethischen Werthers und Wilhelm Meisters auf die Entwicklung Edward Bulwers," Anglia, xvi (1893-1894), pp.267-369, passim.

79. Wagner (note 78, above), pp. 19-20.

80. E.G.E.L. Bulwer Lytton, "Spirit of society in England and France," Edinburgh Review, lii (1831), p.385.

a critic and thinker of an elusive kind, holding surprising combinations of views and often less than fully coherent in expressing them. Richard Stang labels him as the most articulate mid-Victorian advocate of an 'idealist', anti-mimetic theory of art,[81] and certainly his critical statements seem to place him in such a camp. In the early 1860s, in a series of essays collectively called Caxtoniana, published first separately in Blackwood's Magazine and then together in book form, Bulwer says (repeatedly), 'It cannot be too often repeated that art is not the imitation of nature' and 'the artist never seeks to represent the positive truth, but the idealised image of a truth'.[82] These notions develop gradually over the years, but the central idea, of art necessarily going beyond the natural, is already present, if in a whimsical context, in 1828 in the dandy Henry Pelham's first maxim on dress: 'Nature is not to be copied, but to be exalted by art. Apelles blamed Protogenes for being too natural'.[83] On the other hand, there is also a body of doctrine in Bulwer's criticism, concerning the moral content of art, which would seem to fit more easily with realist types of attitude to art. He believes that 'Art itself is essentially

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81. R. Stang, The theory of the novel in England 1850-1870 (1959), p.153.

82. Bulwer, "Caxtoniana: a series of essays on life, literature, and manners, part xvi," Blackwood's Magazine, xciii (1863), pp.550, 549; Caxtoniana, 2 vols. (1863), ii. 144, 142. See also Blackwood's Magazine, xcii (1862), pp.163-164; Caxtoniana, i. 181-182. These two essays are entitled respectively "On certain principles of art in works of imagination" and "On the moral effect of writers".

83. Bulwer, Pelham: or Adventures of a gentleman, Knebworth edition (1875), p.173 (ch.44).

ethical',[84] that beauty and grandeur, the stuff in which it deals, can only be comprehended through the moral sense (he has accepted a point of view which Carlyle struggled and failed to accommodate himself to),[85] and therefore that the artist need have no avowedly moral purpose, as his art, if it is good art, cannot escape being moral in effect. These ideas are fully elaborated much earlier than the anti-realist ones, but they persist alongside the others. In an essay on Harriet Martineau's Illustrations of political economy for the New Monthly Magazine, in 1833, Bulwer asserts, in words which look forward to the morally realist doctrines and practices of George Eliot[86] (the difference is that Bulwer does not, as George Eliot does, stress the importance of sympathy), that 'Every revelation of some passion, thought, sentiment that belongs to us, but has not yet been analyzed, is a discovery in morals'.[87] In 1844, in the sketch of Schiller's life prefixed to Bulwer's translations of Schiller poems, the assertion is even stronger. Defending the practice (Goethe's) of presenting weak and faulty - that is, human - heroes in art, Bulwer says 'whatever makes man wiser, nerves his mind, and purifies his emotions... For to whatever is really and essentially vicious, the Beautiful itself is opposed.'[88]

84. Blackwood's Magazine, xcii (1862), p.163; Caxtoniana, i. 179-180.

85. See ch.1, pp. 26-27, above. Sarah Austin, as we have seen (pp.134-135, above), did at one stage hold a point of view similar to Bulwer's.

86. See ch.6, pp.348-352, below.

87. "On moral fictions. Miss Martineau's Illustrations of political economy," New Monthly Magazine, xxxvii (1833), p.147.

88. The poems and ballads of Schiller, 2 vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1844), i. xxxvi - xxxvii ("Sketch of Schiller's life").

Art should go beyond nature, but this is not to say that there is anything to be feared from the free presentation of nature in all its natural facets.

Holding this combination of views - a 'romantic' desire for an art which carries us beyond nature and which can thrill to Goethe's 'brilliant imagination', and a realist attitude to human character and behaviour which can admire the 'quiet rationality' that accepts and understands the real world - Bulwer is clearly well qualified to be an admirer of Goethe. In the New Monthly Magazine in 1830, in one of a series of eight rambling discussions of life and art by Bulwer in the form of "conversations with an ambitious student in ill health", the "ambitious student" seems to find in Goethe just the right combination of good sense and a higher faculty: "To me, there is something very mysterious and spiritual about Goëthe's [sic] genius - even that homely and plain sense with which, in common with all master-minds, he so often instructs us,... is the more effective from some delicate and subtle beauty of sentiment with which it is always certain to be found in juxtaposition".[89] In the 1844 sketch of Schiller's life, Bulwer singles out the Goethean 'association of homeliness and grandeur' as a characteristic of the highest art, and mocks immature critical objections to the "Adornment of Commonplace".[90] The Goethean synthesis, however, is clearly not quite the synthesis Bulwer wants, much as he admires Goethe's art (in 1833 he speaks of him as 'the greatest artist whoever [sic]

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89. "Conversations with an ambitious student in ill health," New Monthly Magazine, xxix (1830), p.517.

90. The poems and ballads of Schiller, i. xxxiii-xxxiv.

lived').[91] In Bulwer's novel Godolphin (1833), the actress Fanny Millinger, who has been reading Le Sage's Gil Blas (one of Bulwer's favourite literary works, and one he refers to frequently in his critical writings), tells Percy Godolphin "I want some one to write a novel, which shall be a metaphysical Gil Blas; which shall deal more with the mind than Le Sage's book, and less with the actions; which shall make its hero the creature of the world, but a different creation, though equally true".[92] A.H. Goldhan[93] rightly links these remarks with Bulwer's high opinion of Wilhelm Meister, but in fact it seems that Wilhelm Meister does not exactly fit Bulwer's own specifications. The 1840 Preface to Ernest Maltravers (first published in 1837) admits Bulwer's indebtedness to Goethe for the idea of 'moral education or apprenticeship' but also, with a mock humility which approaches condescension, describes the apprenticeship in Wilhelm Meister as 'that of theoretical art', whereas in Bulwer's own 'more homely plan' the apprenticeship is 'rather that of practical life'.[94] The condescension, the suggestion that Goethe's novel is after all a little rarefied, is clearer still in the narrator's comments in chapter 14, where he speaks of Ernest Maltravers as 'the Wilhelm Meister of real life'.[95] The same suggestion is present, though no adverse or limiting judgement is ever passed, in the statement by the speaker in Bulwer's part-fictional, part-discursive series for the New Monthly Magazine,

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91. "On moral fictions" (note 87, above), p.146, note.
92. Godolphin, Knebworth edition, p.107 (ch.20).
93. Goldhan (note 78, above). pp.300-303.
94. Ernest Maltravers, Knebworth edition, pp.7-8 (Preface to the edition of 1840).
95. Ernest Maltravers, p.66.

"Asmodeus at large": "'Wilhelm Meister' is to the knowledge of thoughts what 'Gil Blas' is to knowledge of the world".[96]

Bulwer consistently associates Goethe with the world of thoughts, as opposed to the 'real' world of actions. He and his works are great by virtue of the sheer power of his intellect - what Bulwer calls in 1832 a 'very stupendous, brooding mind'.[97] In 1833, in a highly enthusiastic review of Sarah Austin's Characteristics of Goethe, Bulwer speaks of the way 'your mind takes a leap after reading his [Goethe's] works or examining his character', then speaks of Goethe's two characteristic aims, to preserve 'the clearness of the intellect' and to search for truth in all its manifestations. This article isolates tendencies and carefully refrains from judgement. It is, however, made clear that Goethe's attitude to life, admirable for its single-mindedness though it may be, is not one Bulwer could share. He speaks of Goethe's peculiar beliefs about non-personal immortality, natural beliefs for one who 'established' an 'immense disproportion' between 'the intellectual faculties and all the other components of our motley frame', and of the desire for tranquillity and equilibrium above all which made him fear revolutionary shock and 'view human affairs through a philosophy of toryism' (Bulwer himself, a Liberal M.P. for St. Ives from 1831 to 1832 and for Lincoln from 1832 to 1841, was strongly in favour of reform at this stage in his career).[98] Bulwer sees disproportion in Goethe's life, and the works,

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96. "Asmodeus at large. No.4," New Monthly Magazine, xxxiv (1832), p.430.

97. "Asmodeus at large. No.5," New Monthly Magazine, xxxv (1832), p.27.

98. "View of the character of Goethe," New Monthly Magazine, xxxviii (1833), pp.302-303.

greatly though he admires them, do not correspond to his artistic ideal. Bulwer is like Carlyle, it would seem[99] (the relationship between the two men, at first frosty - Carlyle attacked Pelham in the "Dandiacal body" chapter of Sartor Resartus - but gradually improving, is discussed in Michael Sadleir's Bulwer and his wife),[100] in finding the deep wisdom of Wilhelm Meister combined with other, less impressive characteristics - the speaker in "Asmodeus at large" speaks of the 'new world' which Wilhelm Meister opens: "You read the book, and you wonder why you admire it. When you have finished it, you find yourself enriched: it is like a quiet stream that carries gold with it - the stream passes away insensibly, but the gold remains to tellwhere it has been".[101] When he is generalising about artistic excellence, Bulwer tends to make a special category into which Wilhelm Meister can be fitted, as if that favourite novel were a slight embarrassment to his theories. When in 1833 he is saying that the greatest works of art do not generally have a 'moral' attached to them, he gives a footnote to explain that in 'the metaphysical fiction' - most obviously in Wilhelm Meister - it is possible to introduce a 'pervading moral' without spoiling the art.[102] Thirty years later, in Caxtoniana, he speaks of Wilhelm Meister as an example of a modern, reflective type of fiction in which a 'moral signification' runs unobtrusively through the fable.[103]

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99. See ch.1, pp. 26 , 49 , above.

100. M. Sadleir, Bulwer and his wife: a panorama 1803-1836 (1933), pp.195-197.

101. "Asmodeus at large. No.4" (note 96, above), p.430.

102. "On moral fictions" (note 87, above), p.146, note.

103. Blackwood's Magazine, xciii (1863), p.553; Caxtoniana, ii, 151 ("On certain principles of art in works of imagination").

I have perhaps over-emphasised the partial character of Bulwer's admiration for Goethe. In his discovery of a revelation, a new art and a new wisdom, in Goethe's works, he was certainly well in advance of his British contemporaries, and only Carlyle expressed a higher opinion of Goethe in English in the early 1830s. At times it does seem as if Bulwer finds in Goethe an ideal synthesis, something that will satisfy all his requirements. In a letter to John Forster in 1838 he lavishes praise on Die Wahlverwandtschaften, in which he finds both 'such perfectly pure art' and an interior meaning 'so delicate, so noble'.[104] In one of the Caxtoniana essays, as we shall see later,[105] he does grant Goethe exceptional knowledge of the world as well as an exceptional capacity for thought. Nevertheless, Bulwer never quite made his enthusiasm for Goethe into part of his own message to the world, as Carlyle and, later, Lewes did. Bulwer's odd combination of realist and idealist traits brings him ultimately to critical ground where, as Richard Stang suggests when speaking of Lewes,[106] the realists and the idealists virtually meet. Bulwer speaks in Caxtoniana of an art which 'founds itself on the study of nature' but then goes on to re-combine the facts of nature so as to produce something not unnatural but higher than nature,[107] and the realist Lewes, though his starting-point is different, essentially proposes

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104. Bulwer to J. Forster, 3 October 1838, V.A. Lytton (2nd Earl of Lytton), The Life of Edward Bulwer, first Lord Lytton, by his grandson, 2 vols. (1913), i. 542.

105. See ch.6, pp.370-372, below.

106. See ch.4, p.243, below.

107. Blackwood's Magazine, xciii (1863), p.550; Caxtoniana, ii. 145 ("On certain principles of art in works of imagination").

just this kind of art. In Lewes's criticism Goethe becomes the monument to this philosophy of art which he never quite becomes in Bulwer's.[108]

John Sterling

John Sterling (1806-1844) seems doomed to be regarded as a representative figure. Both his distinguished biographers, Hare and Carlyle, present him as a man who went through a spiritual progress typical of the intelligent young men of the 1820s and 30s (though the two see very different kinds of progress), and a more recent study by Anna Kimball Tuell is actually called John Sterling: A representative Victorian.[109] As regards his opinion of Goethe, Sterling is typical in that he shares in most of the kinds of general response that I have been outlining in this chapter. What is unusual about him is that the tendency of his attitude to Goethe makes at one stage a clear-cut and quite a sudden change, so that at different stages he represents both sides of the British debate about Goethe's standing. The only one of the writers I have been considering who might be regarded as undergoing a similar change of attitude is William Empson (it will be remembered that Carlyle expressed pleasure, in 1831, at Empson's spiritual progress, as in 1851, in more detail, he does at Sterling's), and the change in Empson is by no means as clear-cut or as well-documented as that in Sterling.

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108. The friendly correspondence between Bulwer and Lewes in the early 1840s, in which Bulwer stands up for Schiller in response to Lewes's unfavourably contrasting him with Goethe, is quoted from in Ashton, The German idea, pp.125-126.

109. J.C. Hare, memoir of Sterling's life, Essays and tales (note 6, above), vol.i; Carlyle, The life of John Sterling (1851); A.K. Tuell, John Sterling: a representative Victorian (New York, 1941).

Sterling's adult life fits almost exactly into the period I am discussing - he went to Cambridge in 1824, and died young, of pulmonary disease, in 1844. In between, he acquired his reputation for representativeness by being, apparently, a feather for most of the intellectual winds that blew in this unstable period. At Cambridge he was strongly influenced by his tutor Hare, who passed on to him an interest in modern German thought - in the historian Niebuhr, whose Römische Geschichte Hare translated with Connop Thirlwall, in modern German theologians such as Schleiermacher, in Coleridge as the great English representative of the new German ways of thought. In a letter to Hare of 1829, Sterling speaks of Niebuhr's Römische Geschichte as 'the first help I had in getting out of the slough of Benthamism,'[110] and all through his career, up to the counselling letters to his son Edward, written as he was dying,[111] he continues to express his indebtedness to the general tendency of modern intellectual life in Germany, which is towards a critical inquiry in all fields that is the reverse of reductive. With friends of his among the Cambridge "Apostles" group,[112] such as F.D. Maurice and Richard Trench, he shared a general progressive enthusiasm and earnestness which were manifested in various forms, including a liberalism in theology which wanted to see the church broadened and strengthened through a preparedness to re-examine institutions, to look critically at the Bible, and to assimilate parts

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110. Essays and tales (Hare's memoir), i. xxix.

111. See Tuell, p.172.

112. See F.M. Brookfield, The Cambridge "Apostles" (New York, 1906).

of the new German philosophy, and also a political radicalism, a hatred of oppression which was ready to express itself in action. These two kinds of progressiveness led Sterling into a six months' half ownership (with Maurice) of The Athenaeum in 1828, into active involvement with Torrijos's Spanish refugees and their disastrous expedition to overthrow Ferdinand VII in 1830, and into ordination and eight months' service as curate in Hare's church at Herstmonceux in 1834-35, a ministry brought to an end, almost certainly (to adopt a compromise position between Hare's and Carlyle's), by a combination of ill-health and a feeling that ordination might have been an unwise step for him. Finally, Sterling came under the powerful influence of Carlyle's anti-dogmatic religious beliefs and of his dynamic social theories (he first met Carlyle in 1835, and they became close friends), and though he realised that Carlyle's idea of Goethe was an unbalanced one, intellectual closeness to Carlyle eventually brought with it a conversion to Goethe and to a Goethean concentration on the value and the importance of art (in the last four or five years of his life Sterling thought more and more of poetry as his own true vocation).

Sterling's earlier, negative feelings about Goethe are all that would be expected from the progressive and radical young man, the disciple of Coleridge and earnest moralist. The Sterling of the mid 1830s, when he was first learning German and becoming properly aware of Goethe, could be a George Moir or a Herman Merivale, or even a Menzel, except that he is much more uncertain in his disapproval of Goethe than any of these. We have seen[113] how in Sterling's tale

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113. See pp. 99-100 above.

"The onyx ring", Goethe in the person of Walsingham is regarded by Maria as lacking a sky-pointing spire. The framework of this story is provided by a magic ring which enables Arthur Edmonstone, a young man uncertain of his way in life, to become for periods of seven days a succession of people he knows, including Walsingham and also an angry young hermit called Collins who represents Sterling's idea of Carlyle.[114] The story thus dramatises Sterling's own uncertainty about what kind of life he wants to live - Arthur naturally finds all the lives he borrows unsatisfactory in some way, and the only general attitude of mind that the story seems to endorse whole-heartedly is Maria's simple, fervent Christianity, which, of course, is an option no longer open to intelligent, inquiring young men like Edmonstone and Sterling. While Arthur is Walsingham, Walsingham pays court to Maria, and uncertainty about Goethe is mostly presented through Maria's thoughts. Initially pre-disposed against Walsingham, Maria finds herself drawn by his refinement, his sensitivity to nature, his "insight into the real substance of all the kinds of human life we meet with",[115] but

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114. The identification of Walsingham with Goethe and Collins with Carlyle is not confirmed by any statements from Sterling, but the text leaves little doubt. In the margin of his own copy of Sterling's Essays and tales, Carlyle wrote 'Goethe, alas!' and 'Moi!' beside Sterling's descriptions of Walsingham and Collins, respectively - see A.K. Tuell, "Carlyle's marginalia in Sterling's Essays and tales," P.M.L.A., liv (1939), p.818, and Tuell's John Sterling, pp.195-196. In his Life of Sterling (p.153), Carlyle wrote of "The onyx ring", 'in the details, lucent often with fine colour, and dipt in beautiful sunshine, there are several things misseen, untrue, which is the worst species of mispainting. Witness, as Sterling himself would have by and by admitted, the "empty clockcase" (so we called it) which he has labelled Goethe,- which puts all other untruths in the Piece to silence'.

115. Essays and tales, ii. 513.

eventually she recoils from the cold self-mastery of the man who observes, understands, and moulds to imagery his fellow men, but seems not to feel with them (p.514). She is clearly right so to recoil, as we later discover that Walsingham has seduced and deserted a woman called Selina (Goethe's supposed mistreatment of various women was one of Sterling's strongest objections to him), leaving her to go to Italy and suggesting as a consolation that she should take up lithographic drawing (p.608). Selina is an old love of Collins, and we next, amusingly, have a scene where the Carlyle-figure harshly denounces the Goethe- figure - Sterling imaginatively reconstructs the relationship between Carlyle and Goethe as at this time he felt it ought to have been.

Maria's uncertainty about Walsingham is mirrored very closely in a letter Sterling wrote to Carlyle in December 1837.[116] Sterling enjoys and admires Goethe, and feels 'tempted to go along with him', but also distrusts him strongly, feeling there must be some 'prodigious defect in his mind' which accounts for his attitude to women and his 'coldness and hollowness as to the highest truths'. Sterling presents the view typical of the young apostle of earnestness and enthusiasm - Goethe is 'a profoundly immoral and irreligious spirit' who lived 'a thoroughly, nay intensely Pagan life, in an age when it is men's duty to be Christian' - but his disapproval is tempered by a feeling that Goethe understands things so well, that there is 'so infinitely much to be learnt from him'. Goethe is dangerously

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116. John Sterling to Thomas Carlyle, 16 November 1837, in Carlyle, Life of Sterling, pp.147-148.

seductive, a 'forbidden spell', but Sterling cannot quite bring himself to burn his books. Sterling's indecision about Goethe is partly an indecision about art, and what extent of claims art can have on the attention of modern man troubled with the problems of the real world. In a letter to Hare, Sterling wrote 'I am more and more convinced that Goethe rescues the individual from contending passions, not to animate it with new life, but to bury it amid the pomps and beneath the mausoleum of Art'.[117] Here, then, art is presented as a life-denying force, and Goethe along with it, but the question was never as simple as this for Sterling. In his early novel, Arthur Coningsby[118] (another young Arthur looking for a way in life, though in this case Sterling's disappointed radicalism is at the centre of the picture), there is a gallery of Classical sculptures, belonging to the beautiful aristocrat-turned-revolutionary Victoria de Valence, which serves as a symbol for the claims of art (significantly, it is Hellenic art) amidst the turmoils of the French revolution. Arthur Coningsby, terribly disillusioned about revolution after witnessing the September massacres, sees the sculptures as a vision of a serene, graceful, ideal world, a better home than the real world, but Victoria, guilty about her aristocratic past, reviles the sculptures as "pale, false idols", figures on "a curtain of tapestry hung between my eyes and all the living world" (vol.ii, pp.250-254). The conflict between art and life, then, was a long-lasting one within Sterling's mind. Until the late 1830s he was strongly attracted by the charms of art, but usually resisted and chose a commitment to life, and his feelings

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117. John Sterling to J.C. Hare, no date given, Essays and tales (memoir), i. cxxiv-cxxv.

118. J. Sterling, Arthur Coningsby, 3 vols. (1833).

about Goethe worked in the same way.

Carlyle, it will be remembered, experienced a similar indecision about art in the late 1820s and early 1830s, and finally rejected art as 'but a reminiscence now'[119] in an age of real social crisis, though this decision never brought with it a full rejection of the artist Goethe. Carlyle's summing up of the very different temperament of Sterling is perhaps only partially true, but as far as one can tell it is basically correct. 'I should say, not religious reverence, rather artistic admiration was the essential character of him'.[120] Certainly Sterling's final commitment of himself, for the last four or five years of his life, was to art rather than to religious devotion or social activism, though he never spoke against either of these two forms of human activity, and though his increasingly invalid state obviously played a large part in his choice of artistic aims. The change, according to Hare, happened largely when Sterling stayed in Rome for the Winter of 1838-1839, a stay that Hare regards as vaguely analogous in effect to Goethe's Italian journey (p.cxxiii). A very important contributory factor in this change, both in Sterling's attitude to art and in his attitude to Goethe, was his eager enjoyment of Goethe's letters, principally the correspondence with Schiller. Like other British Goethe-critics, but more completely than most, Sterling was won over to full acceptance of Goethe by the unexpected human warmth which he found in the letters. Once Goethe is no longer felt to be personally cold and unfeeling, his dedication to art begins

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119. See ch.1, pp.45-46, above.

120. Life of Sterling, p.265.

to look much more healthy, wholesome, and beautiful, than it used to. In a letter to Hare of September 1840, he makes this quite clear: 'No one who has read them [the letters] can suspect him of selfish coldness; and yet I see from Strauss's admirable Streitschriften, that the blustering booby Menzel does so. I used to think it probably true, but had then never read the letters'.[121] In letters to a younger friend, George Webbe Dasent, he speaks of the 'steadfast sense of duty, and warm and noble affections' revealed by the letters, and of the exceptional 'knowledge of human life, wants, and necessities' displayed in Wilhelm Meister, which makes him feel that 'Goethe's works are, on the whole, the only world, except the real one, in which it is possible for a man of our age truly to live'.[122] It should be remembered that the real world itself is not slighted. The assertion is only that it is possible to live truly in Goethe's imaginative world as well, and in the second of the letters I have just quoted, Sterling goes on to praise Carlyle (whom he sees very much as a prophet and not a poet) and the work Carlyle is doing, work belonging definitely to the real world.

Sterling learnt more from the Goethe-Schiller correspondence than the beauty of Goethe's character. In a letter of 1844 to Emerson, Sterling says of this correspondence 'That book has to me greater value than any or all those on the theory of art, - besides

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121. John Sterling to J.C. Hare, September 1840, Essays and tales (memoir), i. clvii.

122. John Sterling to George Webbe Dasent, 9 October 1840 and 23 November 1841, Letters from John Sterling to George Webbe Dasent 1838-1844, ed. J.R. Dasent (Edinburgh, 1914), pp.14, 23.

the beautiful, mild, and solid humanity which it displays in every word', and goes on to speak of Goethe's knowledge of 'what Art is, - the unity and completeness of the Ideal'.[123] From 1839, Sterling definitely wanted to be a poet, and in Goethe (and Schiller) he found inspiring theoretical statements about the ideal - the refined, shaped reality with which the poet works - and also some more practical guides for the poet. Sterling's poetry, however, carefully worked at and occasionally effective though it is, never reached great heights of artistic achievement or of popular success, perhaps mostly because, as Carlyle said, he actually lacked the innate musical sense which the poet needs (Life of Sterling, p.195). Sterling's 'conversion' to Goethe also brought with it a new belief in the authenticity of Goethe's religious feelings. In the years after his brief curacy in Hare's parish, Sterling's religious beliefs became increasingly unorthodox. Partly under the influence of German biblical criticism, which made him seriously doubt the degree of reliability which the texts of Christianity could claim, he moved from progressive Anglicanism to beliefs much more vague and liberal, though he never doubted the fundamental truth of Christianity. The first public expression of his new unorthodoxy was his 1839 article on Carlyle for the Westminster Review,[124] an article which marked and caused a degree of intellectual separation from old friends like Maurice, Trench,

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123. John Sterling to R.W. Emerson, 20 February 1844, A correspondence between John Sterling and Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed, E.W. Emerson (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1897), pp.83-84.

124. "Carlyle's Works," Westminster Review, xxxiii (1839), pp.1-68; Essays and tales, i. 252-381.

and Hare. Sterling expresses a deep admiration for, and sympathy with, Carlyle's character, aims, and beliefs, which, though accompanied by some qualifications, would have been sufficient to indicate this separation from those still working for mankind within the church. As to Carlyle's writings about Goethe, Sterling comments on the oddity of this partnership between the forceful and the graceful, but still regards Carlyle as easily Goethe's most penetrating British critic. His remarks about Goethe and religion occupy a position somewhere between those of Carlyle - who, as Sterling notes, finds in Goethe religious beliefs much more distinct than Goethe in fact seems to have held - and those of Blackie, who sees Goethean belief as resting solely on healthy human instincts. Sterling perceives a 'consciousness of an Infinite perfection', a 'piety of imagination', which Goethe does not express directly, but whose 'animating and purifying breath' is 'inhaled through all his works'.[125] Sterling, then, finds no new religion for mankind such as Carlyle thought he might have found in Goethe, but in his acceptance of Goethe he discovers a religious as well as a human warmth - it no longer seems to him, as it did as recently as 1837, that 'the Heaven he looks up to is but a vault of ice'.[126] In a poem lamenting Goethe's death but written long after 1832 and published in 1844, the year of Sterling's own death, Sterling presents Goethe as a consoling and enlightening figure. His works have power 'the soul to free/From bonds of sublunary pain', and the lamp he shone sheds light 'On paths where

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125. Essays and tales, i.298.

126. John Sterling to Thomas Carlyle, 16 November 1837, in Carlyle, Life of Sterling, p.147.

myriads dimly grope'.[127] There is genuine, wholesome teaching here, and the predominant message, it would seem, neither a negation of religion nor (as George Eliot might present such teaching) a new religion in itself, but a widening of the scope of solemn feeling, is that we must recognise the value and beauty of earthly experience:

> He taught mankind by toil, by love,
> To cheer the world that must be theirs;
> And ne'er to look for peace above,
> By scorning earthly joys and cares.

The pattern of Sterling's relationship with Goethe over the years is in a sense the reverse of the pattern Carlyle's followed. Carlyle was a fervent, active disciple of Goethe until the time when, in the early 1830s, he went into full battle with the world on his own account, at which point his interest in Goethe slackened, though the reverence remained. Sterling was an active battler virtually from his Cambridge days - a radical who actually involved himself in the fight against oppression, a Christian thinker who wanted church reform, especially reform in education for the church - but a combination of illness and failure took him out of the fight, and at that point he became a follower of Goethe. Carlyle had wanted to make Goethe part of the fight against the social and spiritual problems created by the rapid changes of the 1820s and 1830s, but clearly that would not work. Other earnest activists like Menzel, or like the three humanistic writers whose articles on Goethe I have discussed, rejected Goethe because they found him lacking in the earnestness and enthusiasm that were needed, in the sky-pointing spire

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127. J. Sterling, "Goethe," Blackwood's Magazine, lv (1844), pp.380-381.

that would indicate an active aspiration. Sterling and Blackie, however, and to a lesser extent Sarah Austin, suggested the possibility of a positive response to Goethe that did not involve Carlylean misunderstanding, a response which continued where the hesitant remarks of Crabb Robinson left off. Goethe's self-devotion to art, his tolerance, his calm cheerfulness, his non-dogmatic awareness of things spiritual, might be healthy, life-giving influences, even if they were not directly, actively helpful to human progress. I am not suggesting that any of these writers was simply 'right' about Goethe where Carlyle was 'wrong'. None of them was as intellectually powerful as Carlyle, and none went so far in the attempt to understand the more abstruse aspects of Goethe's genius. Their less strong personalities, however, and less intense ways of looking at the world, enabled them to form more realistic ideas, ideas less likely to lead to disappointment, as to what kind of comfort and help, apart from mere artistic enjoyment, Goethe could give to the nineteenth-century reader.

Chapter Four

G.H. LEWES ON GOETHE

In the first Series, entitled The foundations of a creed, of his Problems of life and mind, G.H. Lewes wrote of present-day thinkers:

> We are growing impatient of futile compromises and half-beliefs; we see that it will not do to believe, or pretend to believe, one theory of the universe, yet show, in every way wherein confidence can show itself, that our lives are ruled by another theory. In consequence of this desire, while thinking men appear, on a superficial view, to be daily separating wider and wider from each other, they are, on a deeper view, seen to be drawing closer together - differing in opinion, they are approximating in spirit and purpose. (1)

Lewes and Carlyle, the two most effectual disciples of Goethe in nineteenth-century England, offer striking illustration of this feature of Victorian intellectual life, though Carlyle would have been much less willing to acknowledge such an approximation in spirit and purpose than Lewes was. Radically different in temperament and in beliefs, Lewes and Carlyle yet share many assumptions and pre-occupations, and could be said in some sense to be fighting the same battle. Lewes himself, always aware of the gigantic intellectual presence of Carlyle, points both to the differences and to the indirect comradeship. In a review of the first two volumes of Frederick the Great, in 1858, he speaks of Carlyle's violent and often-repeated antipathy to the intellectual tendencies of the eighteenth century, saying by the way that 'our own estimate happens

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1. G.H. Lewes, Problems of life and mind, First Series, 2 vols. (1874-1875), i. 2.

to be entirely the reverse of his'.[2] On the other hand, in an earlier article on the Life of Sterling, Lewes applauds Carlyle for making clear for the first time his hostility to present-day established religion, and names him as one of those engaged in the fight against 'futile compromises and half-beliefs' referred to in my first quotation:

> We cannot accurately determine what his religious opinions are; but we do not suppose they are such as we hold. In the greater cause, however, in that which transcends all forms and formulas, and gives to every creed its rights of utterance and organization, Carlyle is working by his powerful denunciations against the make-believe which reigns at the present day. (3)

Such community of spirit and purpose as there is between Lewes and Carlyle is not, of course, coincidental, or a matter of independent arrival at a similar position. Lewes was born in 1817, and hence was a young man in the 1840s, the period when Carlyle's influence was at its strongest.[4] Two others who were young men at this time, Matthew Arnold and David Masson, both born in 1822, spoke later of the strong and deep impression Carlyle was making then. His French Revolution, published in 1837, finally brought him recognition and reputation after years of literary struggle, and was followed by the first British book edition of Sartor Resartus (1838), the Heroes lectures (delivered in 1840, published in 1841), Chartism (1839), and Past and Present (1843), all works that were eagerly consumed by the earnest young intellectuals of the time.

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2. Lewes, "Carlyle's Frederick the Great," Fraser's Magazine, lviii (1858), p.647.

3. Lewes, "Carlyle's Life of Sterling," The Leader, ii (1851), p.1067.

4. See K. Tillotson, Novels of the eighteen-forties (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954), pp.150-156.

Masson describes how in 1841 his friend John Robertson, somewhat in advance of most others in this enthusiasm, could not speak for half an hour without mentioning Carlyle, and how he particularly emphasised Carlyle's uniqueness among modern writers - 'He was represented to us as a man sui generis, a man after no fashion known among the moderns'.[5] Arnold, in the famous opening of his lecture on Emerson, makes the point that these were the days before enthusiasm for Carlyle became less general on account of the extreme doctrines of his later works, when 'the puissant voice of Carlyle, so sorely strained, over-used and misused since', was still 'fresh, comparatively sound, and reaching our hearts with true, pathetic eloquence'. Carlyle was known to be the translator of Wilhelm Meister, and in 1838 his Critical and miscellaneous essays appeared in four volumes, containing most of the essays on German literature; Arnold goes on to link Goethe's name with Carlyle's: 'A greater voice still, - the greatest voice of the century, - came to us in those youthful years through Carlyle: the voice of Goethe'.[6]

Signs of Carlyle's influence are not hard to spot in the writings of Lewes, especially in those early articles actually written in the 1840s. John Stuart Mill complained, in otherwise sympathetic and approving letters to Lewes, of the "Carlylism" in Lewes's early articles on Shelley (1841) and on Goethe (1843),[7] and with reason.

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5. D. Masson, Memories of London in the 'forties, ed. F. Masson (Edinburgh and London, 1908), p.10.

6. Complete prose works of Matthew Arnold, ed. R.H. Super, 11 vols. (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1960-1977), x. 166.

7. See A.T. Kitchel, George Lewes and George Eliot: a review of records (New York, 1933), pp.27-29.

In the Shelley essay in particular there are Carlylean stylistic traits, ideas, and metaphors, for instance in Lewes's meditations on the poet's mission: 'He is, as we before said, ever the first reformer; he sees that the world's present clothes have become too small for it, and it needs others'.[8] More interesting, however, than these obvious juvenile Carlylisms, are the evidences of Carlylean assumptions and tendencies persisting in Lewes's more mature works, particularly in the Life of Goethe, where Lewes is conscious of writing in Carlyle's shadow. The dedication to the first edition of this work reads: 'To Thomas Carlyle, who first taught England to appreciate Goethe, this work is inscribed, as a memorial of gratitude for intellectual guidance, and of esteem for rare and noble qualities'. In the second, revised edition of 1864, the dedication is the same, except that the words 'of gratitude for intellectual guidance, and' are omitted.[9] The two dedications show both Lewes's awareness of the importance of Carlyle in the area of English Goethe-studies and in his own mental development, and his desire to dissociate himself from a literary senior whose beliefs and ideals were in some respects utterly opposed to his own. The Life of Goethe was, in Lewes's words, 'my greatest

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8. Lewes, "Percy Bysshe Shelley," Westminster Review, xxxv (1841), p.318.

9. Lewes, The life and works of Goethe, 1st ed., 2 vols. (1855); 2nd ed., partly rewritten, entitled The life of Goethe, 1 vol. (1864). The changes in the 2nd ed. are mostly aimed at shortening, and involve the omission of much direct quotation, both from Goethe and from other authorities cited in support of Lewes's arguments. Unless otherwise specified, the edition referred to (hereafter as Life) is the 2nd.

literary success',[10] and it remained so. With it he finally established a solid literary reputation for himself, and for that reason, along with the fact that he must have felt a widening gap between Carlyle's opinions and his own, it is not surprising that he should have been less inclined to acknowledge the intellectual guidance of Carlyle in 1864 than he was in 1855.

These mixed feelings about the presence and influence of Carlyle can be traced in various aspects of Lewes's writings about Goethe, and of his other writings also. I do not mean to suggest that Carlyle was a dominant obsession with Lewes. The reason I am placing so much emphasis on affinities between Lewes and Carlyle is that I wish to offer a modification of the view, mentioned above,[11] that Lewes produced the sound, balanced, 'objective' appraisal of Goethe that was needed after the excesses of Carlyle's discipleship. Lewes certainly was a clearer-headed critic than Carlyle, one who kept his eye more steadily on the object, and who was, because of the nature of his own interests, better qualified to do justice to the full range of Goethe's achievement. My central concern, though, here as elsewhere, is with the 'idea' of Goethe which the British critic propagates, and Lewes's idea of Goethe seems to me, in the first place, strongly influenced by Carlyle's, and in the second, like Carlyle's in the different sense that it too is a total view determined to some extent by the pre-occupations of the critic. Carlyle distorts Goethe in obvious ways, and even

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10. Lewes's MS journal, George Eliot MS collection, Yale Univ. library, entry for January 1857; quoted in Ashton, The German idea, p.143.

11. See ch.1, p. 12 and note 25 , above.

misquotes him. Lewes is a less dominant personality and a more careful scholar, but he has his own idea of Goethe, and though he quotes accurately, his statements on points of detail are usually such as will make the details fit with the general picture. Fundamentally, both Carlyle and Lewes saw the life and works of Goethe as containing an important message for their times. Themselves learners from Goethe, they set out to teach what they had learnt. Two results follow from this attitude. In the first place, the critic, because he is holding up Goethe before modern man as some kind of ideal, becomes also an apologist, forced to justify Goethe in each of his aspects so that he can unreservedly applaud the whole. This is more of a problem for Lewes than for Carlyle, as he has the whole mass of hostile Goethe-criticism of the previous thirty-odd years to reply to, and in his position as biographer is unable to ignore such criticism as Carlyle mostly did. In the second place, the message which the critic both learns and teaches through Goethe becomes to some degree the critic's own message, so that Goethe himself ends up being partially re-organised to illustrate satisfactorily the ideas of his interpreter as to what wisdom the present time most needs to hear.

I do not wish to denigrate Lewes as a critic, or to deny the great merit of his Life of Goethe. The view I want to discourage is that Lewes in his work on Goethe was a paragon of rationality and objectivity, at an opposite extreme from the brilliant but madly self-deceiving misinterpreter, Carlyle. No critic or biographer is fully objective, though it can truly be said that Lewes was more so than Carlyle. It was, as indicated at the end of my last chapter, the more passive admirers of Goethe such as Blackie and Sterling who

were most likely to write about him without distortion, as they were under less pressure to produce final judgements. More important, however, than questions of the relative merits of Carlyle and Lewes as Goethe-critics (there is no true comparison in any case, as Carlyle wrote only introductory essays and no biography), is what comparison of their work reveals as to the continuity of intellectual life in nineteenth-century England, the common ground shared by representatives of different camps and generations, and in particular the different ways in which an author like Goethe could be held up as an inspiring synthesis, the example of whose success suggested some possible solutions to the characteristic problems of the age.

Lewes in the 1840s

Lewes started as even more of an 'outsider' in the world of letters than Carlyle initially was.[12] Neither of them had influential friends, useful family connections, or money to help them, and Lewes had the additional disadvantage, as far as his intellectual standing was concerned, of not having been to university. He had, however, lived in Germany for over a year in 1838-1840, and the knowledge of German language and literature he acquired there was useful equipment for someone trying to make his way in literary journalism, more useful by now than such knowledge had been for

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12. For biographical information about Lewes, see Kitchel (note 7, above); G.S. Haight, George Eliot: a biography (Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968); George Eliot's life as related in her letters and journals, ed. J.W. Cross, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1885); and other biographical writings about George Eliot.

Carlyle in the early 1820s. He soon acquired, in fact, a good knowledge of many national literatures - English, French, German, and Spanish in particular - and this breadth of knowledge, combined with great mental flexibility and extraordinary energy, enabled him to support himself, wife, and children (he married Agnes Jervis in 1841, and they had four children by 1848), by selling articles and books, and to acquire a reputation, if not as a genius or deep thinker, then at least as intelligent, versatile, and knowledgeable talent. Already in 1836, according to his own much later testimony, he was an 'advanced' thinker at least on religious matters - in an essay of 1866 he speaks of his early attraction to Spinoza: 'as I was then suffering the social persecution which embitters all departure from accepted creeds, I had a rebellious sympathy with all outcasts'.[13] Spinoza never became a really important influence on Lewes, but the early enthusiasm is an interesting one in relation to his later admiration of Goethe, both specifically, because Goethe himself was much influenced by Spinoza's philosophy,[14] and also generally, in that Spinoza is a model of moral nobility and a form of faith co-existing with emancipation from traditional dogmas[15] - the kind of model which many Victorian thinkers sought, and which Goethe often came to provide. In the 1840s, then, Lewes was a progressive thinker struggling to live by literature, much as Carlyle was in the 1820s.

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13. Lewes, "Spinoza," Fortnightly Review, iv (1866), p.387.

14. See Goethe, Dichtung und Wahrheit, part 4, book 16, opening; Goethes Werke, Hamburger Ausgabe, 14 vols. (Hamburg, 1948-1960), x. 75-80. See also M. Bollacher, Der junge Goethe und Spinoza (Tübingen, 1969), passim.

15. Presented as such in Lewes, "Spinoza," p.399.

They were progressive in very different ways, but Lewes himself later spoke, perhaps with some sycophantic exaggeration, of the importance Carlyle had for him in his early struggles. The letter is one of gushing gratitude for the favourable judgement which Lewes erroneously thought Carlyle had implied on his action in going away to Germany with George Eliot; in the course of it he says: 'I sat at your feet when my mind was first awakening; I have honoured and loved you ever since both as teacher and friend'.[16]

The relationship between Lewes and Carlyle on a social level supplies an interesting commentary on their intellectual proximities and divergences. The acquaintance, begun in the mid-1840s, was clearly one that Lewes was keen to cultivate, and, as the above quotation shows, to magnify into friendship - a desire arising, no doubt, out of a combination of literary ambition and a genuine admiration and affection. Carlyle himself was not so keen, and his remarks about Lewes generally contain a mixture of scorn and a grudging half-admiration for Lewes's energy and talent. In 1850, he describes Lewes to his sister, Mrs. Aitken, as 'an airy loose-tongued merry-hearted being, with more sail than ballast',[17] and the suggestion, certainly not unjust of the Lewes of 1850, that he is essentially light-weight, persists in Carlyle's passing remarks. Even his congratulatory letter to Lewes on the Life of Goethe, though

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16. "GHL to Thomas Carlyle," 19 October 1854, The George Eliot letters, ed. G.S. Haight, 9 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1954-1978), ii. 176. Carlyle's comment, written on the letter, on Lewes's misunderstanding of him, is given on ii. 177, note 7.

17. "To Mrs. Aitken, Dumfries," 25 April 1850 (letter 210), New letters of Thomas Carlyle, ed. A. Carlyle, 2 vols. (London and New York, 1904), ii. 93-94.

it praises highly, praises in a way which suggests that Lewes has done remarkably well within his limits, but that the limits must not be forgotten: 'My conviction is, we have here got an excellent Biography, - altogether transcendently so, as Biographies are done in this country. Candid, well-informed, clear, free-flowing....On the whole, I say Euge, and that heartily, - though dissenting here and there'.[18] This impression is confirmed by Carlyle's verdict as expressed to his brother, three weeks later: 'The Book is decidedly good as such Books go, but by no means very interesting if you have a strict taste in Books'.[19] There is undoubtedly a mild element of jealousy in Carlyle's damning with faint praise of the most conspicuous original contribution to English Goethe-criticism since his own articles on the subject. Ruby Redinger's theory that Carlyle was censorious of the Lewes-George Eliot elopement partly because of fear that contributions from the powerful mind of Marian Evans would significantly up-grade the projected life of Goethe seems to me far-fetched,[20] but it is true that Carlyle seems to have had little envy of Lewes himself, as he never found any difficulty in reducing him to size. Francis Espinasse records how the Carlyles originally named Lewes "The Ape" on account of his ugliness, but later, more sympathetically, spoke of "poor dear Lewes" (Jane Welsh, after the breakdown of Lewes's marriage) and "the Prince of Journalists" (Carlyle, after

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18. "Thomas Carlyle to GHL," 3 November 1855, George Eliot letters, viii, 145.

19. "To Dr. Carlyle, Scotsbrig," 27 November 1855, New letters, ii. 177.

20. R.V. Redinger, George Eliot: the emergent self (New York, 1975; London, 1976), p.270.

the founding of the Leader).[21] The later epithets may be kinder, but they are hardly less belittling. With "the Prince of Journalists" in particular, Carlyle gives with one hand and takes away with the other - Lewes is supremely good at what is at best a second-rate activity.

We have no private remarks of Lewes's about Carlyle to set off against the consistent though occasionally dissenting reverence which he expressed in print, except for one perceptive marginal comment, written presumably early in the 1840s, in Lewes's own copy of Henry Hallam's Introduction to the literature of Europe, in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, which can be seen in Dr. Williams's library in London. Lewes points to the confused nature of Carlyle's religious attitudes while protesting against Hallam's comments on Spinoza - 'How can a Pantheist suppose a "Personal distinctness of the Supreme Being" without at once falling into an ill constructed Deism? as does Thomas Carlyle, who vividly and definitely impressed with neither idea by turns embraces both - even in the same passage'.[22] Otherwise, we have an anecdote told by Espinasse, which gives a clear enough picture of the attitudes of Carlyle and Lewes to each other. In April 1848, shortly after Lewes's second novel, Rose, Blanche, and Violet, was

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21. F. Espinasse, Literary recollections and sketches (1893), pp.279, 282.

22. H. Hallam, Introduction to the literature of Europe..., 4 vols. (1837-1839), iv. 254, left hand margin, the George Eliot - G.H. Lewes book collection, Dr. Williams's Library, Gordon Square, London. See William Baker, The George Eliot-George Henry Lewes library: an annotated catalogue of their books at Dr. Williams's Library, London (New York and London, 1977), for information about this collection. Hallam's book is item no. 927 in Baker's catalogue.

published, Espinasse witnessed a visit in which Lewes persistently tried to force an opinion of his novel out of Carlyle, while Carlyle, who had read the novel and, not surprisingly, detested it, managed to maintain politeness by repeatedly steering the conversation in other directions.[23] Carlyle is inwardly contemptuous of Lewes's literary effort, but kindly and tactful, and at one point, apropos of Lewes's proposed life of Robespierre, remarks to Espinasse that "Lewes is not afraid of any amount of work". Lewes is very anxious for the opinion of his master and teacher, but on the other hand, a strong sense of confidence in his own abilities, almost of brashness, comes through the anecdote. He is very hard to discourage in his opinion-begging, and when asked by Espinasse on the way home whom he considers the head of English literature at present, he says 'Macaulay, undoubtedly", defiantly covering his disappointment by an affected sloughing off of the unresponsive Carlyle. Some aspects of Lewes's work on Goethe, and of his other writings too, especially those of the 1840s, show the same mixture of feelings which this incident illustrates - on the one hand a reverence for Carlyle and a desire for his approval and support, on the other a belief in the value of his own achievements and in his ability to establish an autonomous intellectual standing. He finally did acquire such standing with the Life of Goethe, the work in which, ironically, he came closest to Carlyle's own ground.

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23. Espinasse, pp.278-281.

Lewes's early articles are often confused and generally over-long. There is a desire to show off his remarkably wide range of knowledge, a tendency to breathless fervour, and an uncertainty as to his own intellectual direction, which together produce considerable tangle at times, though his unusually sharp and, fundamentally, clear mind raises even these essays above the level of most of the periodical criticism of the time. The 1843 Goethe essay[24] is strikingly well-informed, broad in its cultural scope, fair-minded, intelligent, but it is also rambling, diffuse, pretentious, and astonishingly indecisive. In company with a plethora of learned information and anecdote, the usual collection of accusations against Goethe appear and are passed under review. These are the accusations which, most conspicuously, Menzel had dealt out (Menzel himself is spoken of with great scorn, both here and in the earlier "Hegel" essay)[25] - egotism, immorality in both life and works, coldness, political indifference, unpatriotism. What is unusual in Lewes's treatment of these questions is an open-mindedness which is clearly the product of a genuine indecision - he has not yet arrived at the settled opinions which most critics would regard as essential to their work, and vacillates noticeably as he proceeds. He is aware of these features, and admits that he has not made up his mind as to Goethe's standing (p.118). He also marvels, like Sarah Austin,[26] at the presumptuousness of those who

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24. Lewes, "Character and works of Göthe," British and Foreign Review, xiv (1843), pp.78-135.

25. "Character and works of Göthe," p.103; "Hegel's Aesthetics: philosophy of art," British and Foreign Review, xiii (1842), p.41, note.

26. See ch.3, p.133, above.

do claim to have reached a final and just judgement on so massive, difficult, and recent a figure (p.79). The article, in its general stance, belongs with Mrs. Austin's Preface to her Characteristics of Goethe, with the later comments of John Sterling, and in particular with Blackie's articles, as representing a non-dogmatic middle position, approval without idolatry - Lewes in fact starts the article by dissociating himself from the two extreme views, that Goethe is a charlatan or that he is an infallible 'Weimarian Jove' (pp.78-79). The similarity to Blackie is especially marked, and it is interesting that the two writers both have ambiguous attitudes to Carlyle,[27] clearly influenced by his ideas and by his style, but dissenting from his extravagant admiration of Goethe.

The difference between Lewes's article and the remarks of other 'judicious' Goethe-critics is that, on the whole, Lewes is less coherent and settled in his judiciousness. There is often a sense, despite the repeated admissions that he has not made up his mind, that he would really like to be able to offer a final judgement on Goethe, and at various points in the essay one feels that he is about to commit himself either to an 'on the whole' approval or to an 'on the whole' dislike, but he never actually does so. This indecision can be traced partly to Lewes's general intellectual confusion at this early stage in his career. The intellectual influences on the young Lewes were manifold and diverse, but two main strands, I think, can be identified. There is a group

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27. See ch.3, pp. 125-126, above.

of notions, prominent in his work in the early 1840s but soon becoming less so, whose central source is Hegel, with in support some dicta from Romantic theory - Jean Paul Richter, Shelley, Wordsworth - and from Carlyle. These notions mostly concern the nature of art and the role of the artist in human progress. The Hegelian idea that religion, philosophy, and poetry are intimately connected, are 'but the threefold form of the Idea',[28] and hence that the poet has a vital teaching role to play in every age (Lewes insists, however, that the poet must not preach, but inspire),[29] is prominent in both the 1843 Goethe essay (p.111) and the 1841 essay on Shelley,[30] as well as in "Hegel's Aesthetics". The summary statement of this notion in the Hegel article starts with an ominous suggestion of possible hostility to Goethe, though elsewhere in the article Goethe is quoted with approval (p.30):

> He [the poet] speaks in beauty, but mistake not that beauty for his end! Assert no such atheistic, epicurean creed! He makes you in love with thetruth which religion has ordained and philosophy proved. (p.26).

There is a truth, or in Hegelian terms an Idea, for each age, and the Idea for the present age, the mission for the century, is 'liberty, equality, humanity' (p.20). Shelley, as is made clear in the article devoted to him, is a true poet in that he constantly gave utterance to that Idea. Whether Goethe is going to be judged a true poet by these lights is clearly a moot point. Carlyle had

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28. Lewes, "Hegel's Aesthetics," p.24.

29. "Hegel's Aesthetics," p.21.

30. "Percy Bysshe Shelley," p.321.

presented Goethe as not just 'sweet singer' but, possibly, 'Moralist and Philosopher', his works as 'corner-stone of a new social edifice for mankind'[31] (he too, of course, had been reading German aesthetic philosophy, though not specifically Hegel), but though Carlyle was undoubtedly one of the writers who nursed in Lewes the idea that the poet has a serious and vital mission, they would clearly disagree as to the form of that mission (liberty, equality, and humanity not being favourite ideals with Carlyle), and, at this stage at least, as to the extent to which Goethe was what a poet should be in these times.

The second of these two main groups of notions is less conspicuous in the early articles, but later comes largely to displace the more 'romantic' elements in Lewes's thinking. In his Goethe article (p.132) Lewes quotes in passing Auguste Comte's comments on the intellectual anarchy of the times and the need for a new, sound basis for thought and action in all areas, from the Cours de philosophie positive. This work, to which Lewes was apparently introduced by J.S. Mill some time in the years 1840-1842, influenced Lewes's thinking more than anything else, and he was a positivist first and foremost for the majority of his career as a writer. The Biographical history of philosophy, of 1845-1846, his first published work in book form, is a positivist work in content, structure, and method. In it he gives his definition of the positive philosophy - 'the extension to all investigations of those methods which have been proved successful in the physical sciences -

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31. See ch.1, pp.36,17 , above.

the transformation of Science into Philosophy - the condensation of all knowledge into a homogeneous body of Doctrine, capable of supplying a Faith and consequently a Polity'.[32] This popularising (and highly popular) history of philosophy is Comtean in content in that it gives Comte and his doctrines great prominence, presenting positivism as the ultimate doctrine, the only possible framework for human thought; in structure, in that it is divided up along the lines suggested by Comtean ideas about man's intellectual development; and in method, in that each discussion of a philosopher's doctrines is prefaced by a short biography, thus placing each study in a context of objective fact, of the positive knowledge we have of the conditions which produced the doctrines. By 1845, then, Lewes is fully given over to positivism. It is easy to see what attracted him, and other thinkers as eminent as Mill, Frederic Harrison, and Herbert Spencer, to the system, naive though it seems now, when even science is uncertain of its powers. A system which placed reliance only on ascertainable facts, on the 'certainties of experience',[33] naturally appealed to the rational, common-sense tendencies which were always uppermost in Lewes's character, for all the gushing and sometimes incoherent fervour of his early work. Furthermore, positivism, with its 'homogeneous body of Doctrine, capable of supplying a Faith and consequently a Polity', offered the kind of all-embracing synthesis which was always likely to attract

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32. Lewes, The history of philosophy, 4th ed., 2 vols. (1871), ii. 733. This work, first published in 1845-1846 under the title A biographical history of philosophy, underwent very considerable modification as it passed through its first four editions. The 4th is the one referred to here, as it is the latest that embodies authorial changes, and contains the fullest and clearest exposition of the positive philosophy as Lewes saw it.

33. History of philosophy, ii. 735.

free-thinking Victorians deprived of the support of traditional beliefs.

This synthesis may seem close to the Hegelian notions from which I am marking it off, to the idea of poetry, religion, and philosophy as different ways of inculcating the same truths. The difference, and the reason why Comte easily triumphed over Hegel in Lewes's fundamentally rationalistic mind, lies in Comte's adherence to facts as the centre from which all the interconnected disciplines radiate, as opposed to Hegel's concentration on the Idea. Idealist philosophy, a priori reasoning, and 'romantic' approaches to literature, could not be satisfactory to Lewes for long, though remnants of the early enthusiasm for Hegel do appear in the later work. In relation to art, the group of notions I am talking about, with Comtean positivism as their centre, produces both a growing bias towards the realistic in art, towards that art which is securely tied to the facts of experience, and a preference for 'analytic' over 'synthetic' critical methods. The tension between the two basic tendencies of Lewes's thought in the early 1840s manifests itself both in confusion within articles and in discrepancies between statements made in different places. In the Hegel essay, Lewes welcomes Hegel's Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik as providing an a priori theory of art and hence a scientific basis for criticism (p.4), though not professing complete acquiescence in Hegel's approach. Here he is protesting against ignorant British aversion to aesthetics and to "German mysticism". In his essay of the following year on A.W. Schlegel, however, he is protesting against "German mysticism" itself. The point, not strictly contradictory to the statements made in 'Hegel's Aesthetics", is that philosophical criticism of the kind

Hegel and Schlegel practise must be exceptionally well done or else it is pernicious - 'Bad analytical criticism is better than mediocre philosophy'.[34] The general tone of the article, however, suggests an attitude in sharp contrast to that expressed in "Hegel's Aesthetics" - the rationalist, realist, anti-romantic Lewes is beginning to predominate, the critic who would rather have an 'analytical' review which does little more than quote selections than a philosophical dissertation on the same work of art.[35] The shade of opinion which Lewes expresses in his early writings seems to depend to a large extent on what he is writing about. In his article on Lessing, of 1845, he praises Lessing's clarity, vigour, and strength as a writer, his robust outdoor characteristics, and is very severe towards Romanticism in all its shapes - the Romantic critics in general, and Friedrich Schlegel in particular, are chastised for despising Lessing's 'clear and positive knowledge of art' and promoting Romantic 'extravagances'.[36] On the other hand, in both the Hegel essay and his first novel, Ranthorpe (1847), in more expansive and rhapsodic mood, he paraphrases with approval the Romantic anti-realism of Jean Paul Richter's Vorschule der Aesthetik: 'in the divine world of art all is ideal, even tears; and in its battles no real blood flows from the wounded soldier, but celestial ichor from the wounded god'.[37]

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34. "Augustus William Schlegel," Foreign Quarterly Review, xxxii (1843), p.164.

35. "Augustus William Schlegel," p.164. This notion appears again in the Life of Goethe - see p.220, below.

36. "Lessing," Edinburgh Review, lxxxii (1845), p.463.

37. Ranthorpe (1847), p.114; "Hegel's Aesthetics," p.16.

The tension between rationalist and romantic (a convenient summary - the categories are not, of course, simple or clear-cut) in the early Lewes explains the central indecision in the Goethe essay. On the one hand, Lewes praises Goethe for his specifically non-Romantic qualities. As with Lessing, Lewes feels with Goethe a breath of intellectual fresh air: 'His intellect was eminently healthy - no cant, no sentimentality, no bigotry were allowed to rest there' (p.86). He speaks of the distinction between minds with an objective, and those with a subjective, tendency - the distinction dealt with at greater length in the Life of Goethe - and Goethe's objective mind seems to be a factor generally in his favour. It places him in the company of the greatest of great poets - Homer, Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare (p.119) - and makes it possible for his art to achieve a universality of scope which is denied to the subjective poet (Schiller, Shelley, Wordsworth, Byron), who mirrors not the world but merely his own personality and thoughts (p.121). On the other hand, Lewes largely endorses the common complaint of Goethe's coldness, his lack of 'enthusiasm'. Lewes speaks much of Goethe's irony, rightly seeing that irony as a central element in his genius; and when he speaks of it, it is almost always in tones of regret - it is 'that irony which chills so many pages of his works - which crushed so much enthusiasm, and which was the bitter legacy of great wisdom when supported by no faith in humanity' (p.85). Lewes exonerates Goethe from many faults, or at least explains that they are not, rightly speaking, faults in him, but he cannot forgive him for those anti-Romantic features which are also presented as his great strengths, for not being like Lewes's idea of Shelley, for instance: 'He committed no faults to demand

our pity; he did nothing heroic to wring from us applause' (p.88). Goethe's objectivity itself is ultimately turned against him - having emphasised the advantages the objective mind has over the subjective, Lewes seems to double back, saying that Goethe's objectivity accounts for his 'want of moral enthusiasm', and hence for the 'coldness often complained of in his works' (pp.126-127). Similarly, when speaking of Goethe's behaviour towards women, and of the way his actions were determined by cold common sense rather than generous passion, Lewes's strongest complaint is that this characteristic in life renders Goethe incomplete as an artist - eminently cool and sensible himself, he was unable fully to understand those emotions which over-ride common sense (pp.109-110).

The central statement of this Goethe essay is an elegiac plea for a kind of tolerance:

> Our hope is that friends and enemies, without abating their earnestness, without yielding in their opinions, should now shake hands over the tomb of this majestic fragment of humanity, and with a sigh for what was incomplete, tempering the fervour of their reverence for all that was so grand and beautiful, peacefully sit down together to enjoy the heritage of his immortal works! (pp.110-111).

In terms of the two contrasting images of Goethe which I talked about in my last chapter,[38] Lewes at this stage clearly belongs to that critical camp which sees Goethe as a gothic cathedral lacking its sky-pointing spire. For all that Lewes, like Blackie, stresses the need to concentrate on what Goethe was, rather than on what he was not (p.80), he does not see in Goethe a satisfying whole, as Blackie and Sterling eventually did. What he does see is admirable, and

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38. ch.3, p.100, above.

impressively self-consistent, but it is a fragment, with some vital components missing. Apart from his coldness, irony, lack of moral enthusiasm, over-prudence, and excessive, exclusive devotion to art, Goethe had a false notion of history. Interested in mankind only on an individual level, he has no feeling for the mass, no sympathy with 'the mighty and mysterious Plebs' or 'the majestic grandeur and the awful misery of Humanity' (pp.101-102). He therefore 'struck few notes in unison with the great passionate hymn for the future' (p.110). Lewes emphasises that his job is to describe, not to judge, but must still register his protest against that Goethean view of things which casts a cold eye on the progressive ideals - liberty, equality, humanity - which constitute the Idea of the times: 'Such is Göthe's conception of History: that it is a false and barren one we firmly believe, but enough for us that it is his' (p.101). This conception is repugnant not only to the 'Romantic' side of Lewes. Comtean positivism involves a firm belief in the possibility of human progress en masse, and Comte and the refreshingly un-Romantic Lessing are present in a list - Lessing, Herder, Michelet, Comte - of writers who have seen the 'real significance' of history (p.101).

Lewes is more critical of Goethe than is Carlyle, less willing to extend a general approval, but like Carlyle (and, undoubtedly, influenced by Carlyle) he ends up presenting wisdom as Goethe's greatest quality. Already in the 1841 essay on Shelley, when quoting from Goethe to support his argument, he had introduced him as 'the wise man, par excellence',[39] and in the Goethe essay he speaks of

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39. "Shelley," p.306, note.

wisdom as Goethe's 'greatest characteristic' - 'The extent and depth of his views, the weight of his opinions, we see nowhere equalled but in Shakespeare'. He goes on to follow Carlyle still further, in speaking of the poet, with Goethe a prime example, as a Vates, or seer - 'Does he not see as well as feel?' (p.129). Lewes would clearly not agree with Carlyle that Goethe uttered the 'Wisdom which is proper to this time',[40] but he does see him as a writer rich in deep insights, and eminently quotable - Lewes's early essays, for all his mixed feelings about Goethe, quote him frequently. Of Carlyle's Goethe essays, Lewes rightly says that they are 'exquisite exhortations to study, rather than information of what the student will find, or how to seek it', which 'did immense good in their time', but which leave the need for a rigorous study of Goethe's 'distinctive tendency' and the 'constitution of his mind' ("Goethe," p.80). Lewes goes some way towards providing such a study here, speaking intelligently and informatively about Goethe's attitudes to art, politics, and ethics, about his ideal of individual self-culture, and, in his discussion of Tasso (pp.104-105), about the biographical bearings of his literary works. As to Goethe's conduct and character as a man, Lewes strives to present an accurate, balanced, unprejudiced picture. He acknowledges Goethe's great kindliness (p.90), and insists that he was an egotist only in a much qualified sense (pp.91-92). He sees him as a 'consummate incarnation of intellect' (p.117), his feelings not weak in themselves but increasingly subordinate to his intellectual energies and to his prudence and love of order; hence the ease with which he

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40. See ch.1, p. 37 , above.

relinquished Friederike Brion and Lili Schönemann, actions spoken of here with some distaste, though without hysteria (pp.108-109). Lewes makes the sensible point that the great man is not necessarily good - 'Without asserting that goodness and genius are incompatible, we believe the common opinion, that they are synonymous, to be radically false' (p.116). This statement is part of the attempt which the whole article makes to establish the possibility of a half-way opinion of Goethe - in his uncertainty, Lewes does not want to be forced to take or leave in toto. This kind of evaluative position is, however, difficult for a critic to maintain, especially with Goethe, whose faults tend to drift into being virtues, and vice versa, and whose life, works, and values together form such an intricately interconnected whole. The difficulty shows itself within this article at those points where Lewes's tone seems to strain towards a more definite acceptance or rejection (Goethe is a cruel egotist on page 109, while on page 135 he presents a spectacle 'inconceivably grand'). It is also shown in the fact that as he worked on the Life, Lewes effectively abandoned that half-way position in favour of a wholesale approval where reservations are much fewer and slighter than in the article. Lewes makes a point still of being aware of faults, but the Goethe of the Life is substantially not just a genius but a good man also.

Lewes did not, as Sterling did in "The onyx ring", dramatise his uncertainty about Goethe in fiction. Goethe does, however, make what nearly amounts to a personal appearance, and a very important one, in Lewes's novel Ranthorpe, published in 1847. Ranthorpe is a story, with some autobiographical touches, of the struggles and romantic misadventures of a talented but initially weak-minded young

poet. Percy Ranthorpe reaches his lowest point when his first dramatic work, a tragedy called Quintus Curtius, is a disastrous failure in the theatre. He is about to fling himself off Waterloo Bridge, but is prevented by the benevolent eccentric Thornton, who scornfully dissuades him from suicide, takes him to his home, and, in the course of conversation, talks to him about Goethe, whom he has met in Weimar. Ranthorpe, becoming momentarily a personification of the common idea of Goethe which Lewes speaks of, (and, at that time, partly concurs in) in the 1843 article, suggests that Goethe "seems to have been cold and calculating", and Thornton replies:

> Seems to you; perhaps so! Göthe was no whining poet. He knew what sorrow was - knew what dark thoughts assail the despairing soul - but he was not one of your weak set, who whine, and whine, and despair, and die. Göthe wrote 'Werther,' but he did not act it! He struggled with his grief - threw it off from him - conquered it - trampled on it like a strong man. No thoughts of Waterloo Bridge could gain mastery over him. Bah! (41)

Thornton goes on to point out the general lesson which Goethe's life and works ought to teach: "That is the man you authors should venerate and imitate! He understood the divine significance of man's destiny - which is work. Man the worker is the only man fit to live". This is the major turning-point in the career of the erring but redeemable Percy. Thornton's words strike 'a responsive chord' in his heart, and he goes on to become a stable, self-mastering, hard-working creative writer in the image of Thornton's Goethe.

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41. Ranthorpe, p.171.

The influence of Carlyle here is plain. The transcendent value ascribed to work in the abstract, the reverence for Goethe's capacity for work, and the presentation of Goethe's early troubles as grim torments overcome only after violent struggle, are familiar features of Carlyle's early writings. There can be no doubt that the attitude to Goethe which Thornton expresses is essentially Lewes's own - already by 1847, his larger reservations about Goethe have mostly gone. In the Preface to the first edition of the Life of Goethe, Lewes says that he started work on it 'nearly ten years ago' - that is, in 1845 or 1846,[42] so that he must have been doing some close and purposeful study of Goethe in between the 1843 essay and Ranthorpe. In the Life itself he supports the view of Goethe which Thornton expresses, though in more sober terms. Both Ranthorpe and Lewes's second novel, Rose, Blanche, and Violet (1848), show Lewes laying a lot of emphasis on the value of will-power, particularly to the young man and even more so to the young poet, who must realise that art is labour and not just overflowing feeling. Both the early Percy Ranthorpe and Cecil Chamberlayne in Rose, Blanche, and Violet are artists of the feebler sort whose experiences teach this lesson, and in the lengthy, verbose passages of moralising, from characters and from the author, which occur in both books, the point is made again and again. In the Preface to Rose, Blanche, and Violet, Lewes presents the following as the moral he draws from life, and, more tentatively, as the moral of the novel he has written: 'Strength of Will is the quality

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42. Life, 1st ed., i. v. See also Kitchel, p.159.

most needing cultivation in mankind. Will is the central force which gives strength and greatness to character'.[43] Lewes had clearly learnt these lessons from his own experience of the struggles and labours needed to achieve success in the world of literature. Espinasse's anecdote, which I referred to before, apart from revealing some of Lewes's anxiety about the standard of his work, also shows him warning Espinasse, on the way home from the Carlyles', of the 'difficulties of a literary career'.[44] In the same episode, as we have seen, Carlyle had remarked, perhaps rather condescendingly, on Lewes's capacity for work, and certainly his work-rate, particularly in these precarious times of literary 'apprenticeship', must have been colossal, and shows no lack of a strength of will to succeed. Necessity and ambition, acting on a nature inherently energetic, made Lewes an outstanding worker in the 1840s, and he was glad to acquiesce in Carlyle's much-articulated belief that work was not only necessary, but, through and beyond its utility, a holy principle.

Percy Ranthorpe succeeds in the end, as did Lewes, but their careers are different because, as a reading of these two novels makes quite clear, Lewes did not possess the artistic talent which Ranthorpe supposedly does. The novels are an ungainly mixture of romance, melodrama, pompous moralising about life and art, and wordy analysis of motive. Lewes's intellectual qualities are essentially of a prosaic and analytic sort, and to generate an

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43. Rose, Blanche, and Violet, 3 vols. (1848), i. vi.

44. Espinasse, p.280.

imaginative or emotional power he relies on melodramatic incident and a fervour of vocabulary. These are youthful novels, themselves unsuccessful as attempts to find a suitable outlet for intellectual energy, which are largely concerned, as is so much of Carlyle's early writing, with the problem of achieving maturity, of emerging whole from the uncertainties and self-delusions of youth. Lewes uses, more conspicuously in Ranthorpe than in Rose, Blanche, and Violet, his knowledge of London literary circles, of fashionable hostesses, publishers, journalists, theatrical managers, both as a means of giving authenticity and to show that the young aspiring artist must adjust his dreams to fit with the possibilities of a non-ideal world before he can achieve anything solid. The real struggle for the artist, however, is an internal one, and, following Carlyle and Carlyle's interpretation of Goethe's idea of renunciation from Wilhelm Meister, Lewes presents this struggle as essentially a moral one. Cecil Chamberlayne fails as both man and artist, and is ultimately destroyed, because he is morally weak and self-indulgent; as an artist, though talented, he is 'unequal to the perpetually-renewing sacrifice which lies at the bottom of all great achievements in art, literature, or science'.[45] Lewes goes further than either Carlyle or Goethe in attempting, somewhat crudely and naively, to link this individual morality of renunciation, self-mastery, work, to a social morality of goodness to others, of high-principled behaviour in relationships. In the Preface to Rose, Blanche, and Violet, he rather clumsily tacks on these social aspects of morality to his statements about the supreme

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45. Rose, Blanche, and Violet, ii.122-123.

importance of unspectacular moral strength: 'Strength of character seldom, if ever, astonishes; goodness, lovingness, and quiet self-sacrifice, are worth all the talents in the world' (p.ix). Within the novels it is implied that individual self-mastery or lack of it determines not only individual success but behaviour to others as well - Ranthorpe's fidelity to his childhood love Isola, broken during his early infatuation with the fashionable world, becomes assured once he has become the mature, hard-working artist; and the attractive but weak and unsound Cecil Chamberlayne behaves badly in courtship and ends up reducing wife and family to destitution through his gambling addiction. This attempt to move the Carlyle-Goethe doctrines of renunciation and self-mastery towards the religion of humanity is to recur in the Life of Goethe.

The Life of Goethe and Lewes's middle period

James Sully, in his obituary notice on Lewes, divided his career into three parts: a literary period (1840-1853), a scientific period (1853-1864), and a philosophic period (1864-1878).[46] These divisions, which I am roughly following, are simplifications in that Lewes never kept exclusively to one of these areas of activity, but changes of direction certainly did take place (not instantaneously, of course, but gradually), and this way of characterising the different periods is as good as any. For my purposes the 'scientific period' perhaps ought to begin in 1852, the year of Lewes's article

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46. J. Sully, "George Henry Lewes," New Quarterly Magazine, new series, ii (1879), p.358.

"Goethe as a man of science".[47] The title indicates a new element in Lewes's understanding of Goethe - Goethe's scientific work is hardly mentioned in the 1843 article - and it is an extremely important element. "Goethe as a man of science" became the basis for a long and impressive chapter in the Life on Goethe's successes and failures as a scientific researcher, and altogether these aspects of Goethe's intellect and achievement have a considerable influence on the 'idea' of Goethe which Lewes finally forms. Lewes's own interest in science started early. In the Leader in January 1854, replying to T.H. Huxley's adverse criticism in the Westminster Review of his book Comte's philosophy of the sciences (1853), Lewes asserts that 'it is eighteen years since I first began to occupy myself - practically and theoretically - with Biology', and hence that he has a right to be taken seriously as a scientific writer.[48] In his mortification and desire to justify himself here, Lewes perhaps suggests a deeper and more continuous scientific endeavour than his in fact was in the early part of his life, but there is no reason to doubt that he was studying science with some seriousness as early as 1836, the time when, as he later retrospectively described himself, he was a youth working on 'anatomy and many other things, with vast aspirations, and no very definite career before him'.[49]

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47. "Goethe as a man of science," Westminster Review, new series, ii (1852), pp.479-506.

48. The Leader, v (1854), p.40.

49. "Spinoza," Fortnightly Review, iv (1866), p.385.

The touchiness of Lewes's reply to Huxley reflects the insecurity of his position as a paragon of versatility, a man who wrote on literature of all kinds and on many branches of science and philosophy. Lewes speaks, just before the quotation given above, of 'the natural but false assumption that, because Literature is my profession, therefore in Science I can only have "book knowledge"', falling in with 'the all but universal tendency of not allowing any man to be heard on more than one subject'. Frederick Locker-Lampson, in a rather acid recollection of Lewes, goes one step further in his notion of the way people reacted to Lewes's versatility: 'His adverse critics said that he was literary among men of science, and scientific among literary men'.[50] It is not difficult to understand why Lewes had such sympathy with Goethe as a scientist, though it should be emphasised that he did not hesitate to point out where Goethe was misguided, most obviously in the Farbenlehre. Goethe, like Lewes, suffered for his versatility in that because he was a poet no-one would take his scientific theories seriously - by wanting to be heard on more than one subject, he laid himself open to ridicule, and was ridiculed, for instance, in Britain by Sir David Brewster.[51] As Havelock Ellis suggests,[52] Lewes was in some respects a small-scale English Goethe (without the creative genius, of course), or at least corresponds to aspects of the Goethe he himself depicts. Both had a vast range

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50. F. Locker-Lampson, My confidences (1896), p.312.

51. See ch.3, p.122 , above.

52. H. Ellis, introduction to Lewes, Life of Goethe, Everyman ed. (1908), pp.viii-ix. Peter Conrad develops the idea in his review of a new ed. of Ranthorpe - "Romantic disabilities," Times Literary Supplement, 9 May 1975, p.520.

of interest and knowledge, were cheerful hard workers, had unorthodox but not atheistical religious views, and were notable for the way they continued to develop intellectually throughout their lives - William Bell Scott said of Lewes:

> He is nearly the only man among all my friends who has never ceased to advance. At first he was only the clever fellow, but at a very early time he became the literary adept, then the able investigator, and lastly, the scientific thinker and philosopher, one of the most trenchant and advanced minds in the science of this country. (53)

Like Percy Ranthorpe, Lewes had grown into a Goethean maturity of steady work, balanced conduct, and a multifarious activity, and like him, no doubt, he had been encouraged on his way to this state by the Carlylean vision of Goethe the renunciant. The affinities between Lewes and Goethe are not, however, generally speaking a matter of the former modelling himself on the latter or on any version of him. The Goethe-like qualities in Lewes were clearly there independently, the cause rather than the effect of his mature reverence for Goethe. As James Sully goes on to say in his obituary, behind the enormous variety of Lewes's work there is one 'dominant motive' - 'a supreme reverence for objective fact as the measure and touchstone of all theory'.[54] In Goethe Lewes finds, and eventually reveres, the same fundamental reverence for fact, and this shared reverence is the basis of the similarities

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53. W.B. Scott, Autobiographical notes, 2 vols. (1892), ii. 245.

54. J. Sully, "George Henry Lewes," p.375.

between them, though it is also, as I shall later show and as Leslie Stephen suggests in his article on Lewes in the Dictionary of national biography, the cause of some limitations to Lewes's understanding of the less fact-centred aspects of Goethe.

Supporting and strengthening this 'supreme reverence for objective fact' was Lewes's adherence to Comtean positivism. Comte's doctrines exercised an increasingly powerful influence on Lewes's thinking through the 1840s, and the influence was at its strongest during this 'scientific' period, though Lewes did always have some reservations, most particularly about the social doctrines in Comte's Politique positive, and was never a fully 'orthodox' positivist. The 'romantic', Hegelian features of Lewes's early writing have almost entirely disappeared by 1852, though the 'enthusiastic' frame of mind which is a characteristic legacy of Romanticism, and which is central to Lewes's early admiration of Shelley, is still present in Lewes's versions of positivism, in his insistence that this is a system which takes into account morality, the affections, the religious instinct, and the aspirations ofmankind for a finer future. Lewes was editor of the Leader, a weekly publication of enormous breadth of coverage and high intellectual merit, with Socialist and free-thinking tendencies but pledged above all to the free utterance of opinions of all shades,[55] from its foundation in March 1850 to the end of 1854, along with his friend (and, during these years, the breaker-up of his marriage)

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55. See "Prospectus of The Leader," The Leader, i (1850), p.22.

Thornton Leigh Hunt. Lewes contributed enormous amounts of copy to the Leader, including most of the material on the arts, both during his years as editor and afterwards. Among these contributions is an eighteen-part exposition of Comte's positive philosophy, appearing from April to August 1852, and issued in book form, considerably expanded, as Comte's philosophy of the sciences, in 1853. In the first of these articles, Lewes affirms his allegiance to the Comtean system: 'For ten years it has been with me, surviving all changes of opinion, and modifying my whole mental history; and my debt of gratitude is inexpressible in words'.[56] He also makes it clear that the reason he finds positivism satisfying, as I suggested,[57] is that the system is so comprehensive; firmly based on objective fact and scientific method, yet built to accommodate those areas of human experience normally thought to be untouchable by science. The system is hence of inestimable value to Lewes, the objective thinker who yet worships the affections as 'the Shekinah, the presence of God in the dwellings of men',[58] and is deeply convinced of 'the imperishable importance of high morality'.[59] Hence also it is likely

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56. "Comte's positive philosophy - part one. Biographical," The Leader, iii (1852), p.328; Comte's philosophy of the sciences (1853), p.2. Future references to this material will give the page number in the book version in brackets after the Leader citation. The wording in the two versions is not always identical; I quote in all cases from The Leader.

57. See p.182, above.

58. "The religion for our age" (articles on Ten sermons on religion by Theodore Parker, 3rd article), The Leader, iv (1853), p.212.

59. Rose, Blanche, and Violet, iii. 43.

to prove unpopular with the more fragmented minds of the majority of thinkers - 'Logic and sentiment - to use popular generalisations - have long been at war, and they will severally reject Comte's system, because it seeks to unite them'.[60]

Lewes's writings in the 1850s, and those in the Leader particularly, show something of a pre-occupation with religious questions, and it is worth attempting to summarise his religious notions at this time, as these notions play an important part in his assessment of Goethe. Three principal 'articles of faith' emerge from his statements about religion. Firstly, he believes that there is a religious sentiment deeply embedded in man's nature, which is the same in all men though it manifests itself in a great variety of kinds of belief, and which testifies, if not to the existence of God, at least to the fact that religion can never be done away with or done without. In his unfinished tale "The Apprenticeship of Life" (his second essay, Ranthorpe being the first, on the 'apprenticeship' theme as made popular by Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre), published in the Leader in 1850, he reverses the normal nineteenth-century pattern of childhood faith to adolescent doubt, showing the conversion to a vague liberal Christianity of Armand, a French boy who has been brought up by 'followers of the Encyclopedists'. The fact that Armand, indoctrinated by sceptics, nevertheless reaches out for, and eventually finds, religious explanations for the world, is said to prove what the French sceptics

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60. "Comte's positive philosophy - part one," The Leader, iii (1852), p.328 (p.5).

deny, that 'there is what has been happily called un fibre religieux in the human heart'.[61] It follows from this belief that the society of the future must have a religion, but that it must be a new kind of religion, which puts more emphasis on religious feeling, which is universal and therefore can be exercised communally, and less on religious belief, which varies from individual to individual. Later in "The Apprenticeship of Life", Armand says of the French Republic of 1793 that it fell apart because it had no faith to make it cohere - "The Republic was irreligious; without a religion how can society exist?"[62] Similarly in the Comte articles, Lewes says that Communism as at present preached is inadequate, because it does not attempt, as it could and ought, to accommodate recognition of the 'fibre religieux' within its proposed procedures - 'Just where man most obviously rises above the bee, Communism leaves him to the care of Priests and Teachers, who cannot agree among themselves'.[63] In an open letter in the Leader, addressed to David Masson, Lewes sets out his rather insubstantial ideas for a church of the future centred on religious sentiment: 'Inasmuch, therefore, as the religious sentiment in man is universal, enduring, and his religious opinions, or theories, are necessarily wavering and changeable..., the Church of the Future should endeavour to found itself on what man has in common (sentiment), admitting all possible varieties -

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61. "The apprenticeship of life - first episode. The initiation of faith," The Leader, i (1850), p.18.

62. "The apprenticeship of life - second episode. The initiation of love," The Leader, i (1850), p.212.

63. "Comte's positive philosophy - part two," The Leader, iii (1852), p.353 (p.12).

or heresies - in matters of opinion'.[64]

Secondly, Lewes has a belief, which can be loosely characterised as pantheistic, that the experienced facts of the universe, on which, following Comte, he places such exclusive reliance, are themselves divine revelation, the expression of God. The clearest expression of this belief, again from the Leader, is in his articles on Theodore Parker's Ten sermons, where he speaks of the common fear that science undermines religion - 'Yet how unwise this terror of Science! In studying the facts of nature we study the thoughts of God, for in the world of realities a fact is the direct speech of God'.[65] In the Comte articles, this belief becomes involved in a protest against 'mechanical' theories of the universe, and in particular against the term 'laws of nature', which seems to him to proceed from such theories. Against the mechanical theory he sets 'my own dynamic conceptions, which admit God only as Life, and the Universe as his Activity', and he directs the reader to seek support for these dynamic conceptions in Spinoza and Goethe, who 'teach us something better than the mechanical theory'.[66] Again, in one of his weekly reviews of current literature, talking about some articles in the Rambler, he asks 'When will men understand that all Truth is of God?'[67] Lewes

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64. "Epistola from G.H. Lewes to David Masson," The Leader, i (1850), p.470.

65. "The religion for our age," 2nd article, The Leader, iv (1853), p.139.

66. "Comte's positive philosophy - part six," The Leader, iii (1852), p.448 (p54).

67. The Leader, i (1850), p.878.

is seeking a synthesis of science and religion, and protesting both against that science which denies God and against that theology which asserts dogmas which are openly inconsistent with the facts revealed by science. Spinoza and Goethe are better props for him in this area than is Comte himself. Lewes objects to Comte's statements about astronomy, statements which place too much trust in the human reason and scoff at the primitive wonder we feel at observing the stars, the wonder expressed in the psalmist's assertion (contradicted by Comte, broadly endorsed by Lewes), that "The heavens declare the glory of God".[68]

Thirdly, as I have already indicated, Lewes believes that God reveals Himself pre-eminently in the human affections, in those emotions which hold mankind together. Comte's Religion of Humanity is behind this belief, though God generally speaking occupies a more prominent place in Lewes's scheme than in Comte's. As we have seen, Lewes speaks of the affections as the presence of God among men, and in the same passage he goes on to say that therefore the 'piety...which belongs to the affections is, perhaps, of all others the most needful'.[69] The piety of the affections as manifested in Lewes's writings includes, indeed is dominated by, a sense of the importance of high morality in social behaviour - it is not a question simply of cultivating the social emotions, but of using those emotions in such a way that we perform our duty to a social order that is based on inter-dependence. In "The Apprenticeship

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68. "Comte's positive philosophy - part eight," The Leader, iii (1852), p.497 (p.92).

69. 'The religion for our age," 3rd article, The Leader, iv (1853), p.212.

of Life", Armand argues against the St.-Simonian views on marriage of Hortense, the woman he loves - "man is not only an animal, he is also a social animal, and as such his duty is even higher than his instincts, and must control them. With love, therefore, is connected a responsibility, and that is marriage".[70] Lewes smiles at Armand's youthful rigidity on moral questions, and implies that more flexibility is desirable, but it is clear that Armand's seriousness about social duty is fundamentally right. Lewes speaks of Comtean positivism as a doctrine which asserts the supreme importance of moral concerns,[71] and welcomes the Politique positive for its re-emphasis of the crucial role that must be assigned to religion and morality in positivist schemes for the future, though he regards as misguided Comte's attempt to set out the details of future social forms[72] (this is an objection he also has to the schemes of communists).[73] Lewes was not himself a rigid, dogmatic moralist, any more than he was an orthodox Christian, but for all his flexibility, morality was undoubtedly something he saw as not only necessary, but sacred. His union with George Eliot, begun in 1854, is an apt symbol of his moral beliefs. It was a relationship offensive to conventional moral standards, showing a preparedness to adapt forms to circumstances, but it was also an intensely moral, and to all intents and purposes marital, relationship between two people who were both heavily pre-occupied with ethical concerns. The genuineness of

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70. "The apprenticeship of life - second episode," The Leader, i (1850), p.140.

71. "Comte's positive philosophy - part one," The Leader, iii (1852), p.328 (p.6).

72. "Comte's Système de politique positive," The Leader, ii (1851), p.731.

73. See "Epistola - communism as an ideal - to Stavros Dilberoglue," The Leader, i (1850), p.733.

Lewes's belief in the sacredness of social obligations is also impressively revealed by the scrupulousness with which he provided for his wife Agnes and her family after their separation.[74]

The Life of Goethe was the most substantial achievement of Lewes's 'scientific period', corresponding to the Biographical history of philosophy and Problems of life and mind in the first and third periods. In the Life, all the pre-occupations and beliefs I have been talking about make some kind of appearance, and become part of what is by now a thorough approval and admiration of Goethe, both life and works, with reservations present but making no significant impact on the general verdict. Lewes is never afraid of moving from the particular to the general or of airing his own views about the world, so that his statements about Goethe often merge with broader statements about life, art, science, morality, religion. Like Carlyle, though less obviously, he is ultimately preaching with Goethe as his text, and at some points the doctrine is distinctly Carlylean, though the general drift of it is different. As John Gross says, Lewes in his longing for intellectual certainty was predisposed towards the 'secular messiahs.... thrown up by the age'.[75] Carlyle had set the pattern for presenting Goethe as such a messiah, and Lewes, though more discriminating and generally more accurate in the picture he presents, is fundamentally following that pattern, holding up Goethe as a sublime example even though he never goes so far as to suggest that Goethe's works might be the corner-

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74. See Kitchel, pp.153-157.

75. J. Gross, The rise and fall of the man of letters (1969), p.71.

stone of a new social edifice for mankind. Auguste Comte, though a much larger influence on Lewes's thought than Goethe, was much less fitted for a secular messiah, because his life, despite the touching episode of his love for Clotilde de Vaux and the change it brought about in his thinking,[76] did not present an impressive and instructive spectacle, parallel to his intellectual achievement, as Goethe's did. The philosophy Lewes is propagating in 1855, and for the rest of his life, is nevertheless essentially a modified and extended Comtean positivism. The four major divisions of this body of thought as manifested in the Life of Goethe, which I shall use as headings though of course the different areas tend to fade into each other, are concerned with science, with art and the criticism of art, with morality, and with religion.

Science

Scientific method is the centre of positivism. As in science, so in all areas of study, no theory about the world is admissible unless it is elaborated from observed facts, or verifiable by reference to such facts, or preferably both. The doctrine is reductive in the sense that it forbids speculation (though not belief) about the unknown and unknowable, but expansive in that it claims that all aspects of human experience can ultimately be dealt with by scientific method, and all knowledge grouped into one massive but unified body of doctrine. The fatal limitation in the Comtean viewpoint as we now see it is that it is based on naive notions as

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76. See The history of philosophy, 4th ed., ii. 671-675.

to the distinction between fact and non-fact. By speaking of facts, of objectivity and an exclusive rationality of method, the positivist claims a solid authority which often seems spurious, especially in those areas such as psychology and the social sciences where scientific method has not had much in the way of unquestionable success. The positivists were not, of course, the only nineteenth-century thinkers who claimed that kind of authority. Of the two most prominent nineteenth-century students of Goethe other than Lewes, the transcendentalist Carlyle and the modestly rational Matthew Arnold, one speaks of 'general veracities'[77] and 'the inner sphere of Fact',[78] and the other of 'the endeavour...to see the object as in itself it really is',[79] both gesturing towards something rock-like and incontrovertible which must be found and then clung to like the scientist's experimentally-obtained data. Those in search of intellectual certainty tended to reach out not only for secular messiahs but also for those particles of truth which they could regard as irreducible.

In his essay on "Goethe as a man of science", Lewes presents Goethe as a man 'fully penetrated by the spirit of positive philosophy',[80] a spirit which manifests itself not only in his scientific researches and theoretical statements about science (for instance in the essay of 1793, "Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt

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77. Carlyle, History of Frederick the Great, i. 353.

78. Past and Present, p.13 ("The sphinx").

79. Arnold, On translating Homer, Complete prose works, i, 140.

80. "Goethe as a man of science," pp.505-506.

und Subjekt", to which Lewes refers with approval), but in his poetry as well. In fact, both here and in the chapter "The poet as a man of science" in the Life, Lewes comes near to saying of Goethe what, according to Locker-Lampson, Lewes's adverse critics said of him - that he is a literary man among scientists and a scientist among literary men-, though with Lewes this would hardly be an adverse comment. Using the distinction Goethe himself makes between Geoffroy St. Hilaire and Cuvier (quoted in "Goethe as a man of science", pp.483-484), Lewes characterises Goethe as a synthetical, deductive reasoner in science, proceeding from generalities to detailed observation rather than starting with a mass of observed fact as the analytical, inductive reasoner does. His realm is the philosophy of science rather than science itself; and although he does resort to experiment for the purpose of verification, his approach is such that, capable of making important discoveries, he is also capable of making large-scale mistakes like the anti-Newtonian colour theory in the Farbenlehre. On the other hand, Lewes checks any suggestion that Goethe was 'a "German Metaphysician" - a man who played with symbols, and neglected facts - a man who tried to supply the slow process of Observation by the facile rapidity of Reasoning'.[81] To support this denial, Lewes refers to Goethe's poetry - 'No one conversant with his poetry, and the intense feeling for concrete reality which animates it, will suspect him of any predilection for vague speculation' (p.485). Not only is the poetry informed with the spirit of positivism, of

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81. "Goethe as a man of science," p.485.

inductive science, but the scientific writing itself is poetic - in the Life, Lewes calls Goethe's Metamorphose der Pflanzen an 'exquisite little treatise', and observes in a note 'He has also a poem on this subject, but it is scarcely more poetical'.[82] Goethe is a positivist both as scientist and as poet, no dilettante but a man who exhibits 'the absolute fusion of high scientific capacity with the highest poetical power',[83] and that fusion can be an inspiration to the positivists in their struggle against the spirit of narrow specialisation among both scientists and non-scientists.

As Hock Guan Tjoa says in a recent study of Lewes, Goethe's science was 'an empiricism with soul-satisfying "ideal construction"',[84] satisfying to Lewes because it both gives the proper weight to observed fact and involves ideas of an impressive breadth and generality. This was the combination of virtues which positivism aimed at - the aim was to present 'a Doctrine which is positive, because elaborated from the sciences, and yet possessing all the desired generality of metaphysical doctrines'.[85] Lewes is hence able to understand and sympathise with Goethe's scientific endeavours, and his well-informed, intelligent, and lucid chapter on "The Poet as a man of science" is perhaps his most distinguished individual contribution to knowledge of Goethe in England. He seeks out the coherence behind the astonishing diversity of Goethe's activities in a positivist spirit, as Goethe, with his notion of the "Urpflanze",

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82. Life, p.328 and note.

83. "Goethe as a man of science," p.479.

84. H.G. Tjoa, George Henry Lewes: a Victorian mind (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London : Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), p.68.

85. The history of philosophy, ii. 692-693.

or typical ideal plant, and of the corresponding 'Type (allgemeines Bild), according to which the whole animal kingdom may be said to be constructed',[86] sought the coherence behind the diversity of nature. He is able to show both the special value and the special inadequacy of the poet as a man of science, taking both back to the 'native direction of his mind...towards the concrete phenomenon, not towards abstractions' (p.340). This tendency of mind is positively helpful in the 'life sciences', in botany and physiology, where, as Goethe's achievements in these sciences show, 'Concrete observations' can lead straight into important theoretical principles (p.341). In physics, however, where mathematical abstractions are a necessary intermediary, the tendency is counter-productive - Goethe's erroneous theory of colour is to be explained by his contempt for mathematics, which are in fact necessary to any understanding of the refraction of light: 'He desired to explain the phenomena of colour, and in Mathematics these phenomena disappear; that is to say, the very thing to be studied is hurried out of sight and masked by abstractions. This was utterly repugnant to his mode of conceiving Nature' (p.340). Goethe had a predilection for general conceptions about nature, but only for those that he could feel on his pulses, most fundamentally the idea that there is a unity of pattern or type in all the forms and processes of nature, an idea which led him to discover the presence of the inter-maxillary bone in man (previously thought to exist in other animals but not in man), and to formulate his theories of the metamorphosis of plants and of the vertebral

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86. Life, p.357. Page numbers from the Life are from now on given in the text.

structure of the skull.

Lewes's verdict on Goethe's science is a judicious but enthusiastic one: 'As a thinker in science Goethe was truly remarkable, and as a worker not contemptible' (p.354). His most remarkable achievement was the invention of a new and important branch of science, morphology, through his work on the metamorphosis of plants (p.353). Goethe's scientific work is seen as part of a recent intellectual revolution in many spheres - geology, physiology, history, aesthetics - whereby the study of development came to replace the study of perfected forms (p.354). The most famous product of this revolution, Darwin's Origin of species, was not to appear until 1859, but in 1852, in the essay on "Goethe as a man of science", Lewes makes the connection between Goethe's morphology and the evolutionary theory, or development hypothesis, of Lamarck - Goethe was part of that progressive movement which 'conceived evolution, as opposed to the old idea of creation, to be the organic process of the world'.[87] It is somewhat surprising that Lewes does not suggest a link between these scientific development studies and the central importance of development within the human individual as a theme in Goethe's literary art, most obviously in Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre and Dichtung und Wahrheit. Goethe himself was well enough aware of the link - in his Italienische Reise he speaks of his own development in vegetational terms: 'Möge meine Existenz sich dazu genugsam entwickeln, der Stengel mehr in die Länge rücken und die Blumen reicher und schöner hervorbrechen'.[88]

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87. "Goethe as a man of science," p.496.

88. Goethe, Italienische Reise, part 2 ("Neapel, den 22. März 1787"), Hamburger Ausgabe, xi. 217.

Elsewhere in the Life, as in the 1843 article, Lewes makes much of Goethe's doctrine of 'self-culture'. In 1856, the year after the Life, Lewes actually contributed a tale called "Metamorphoses" to Blackwood's, based on just that idea of human development as analogous to processes in non-human nature. The hero, Victor, undergoes a transformation of character, while remaining essentially the same man, which Lewes compares to the metamorphosis of chrysalis into butterfly, which the great naturalist Swammerdam has described as 'no transformation at all, but a development'.[89] Perhaps the reason for the surprising failure to suggest this obvious connection in the Life, and for Lewes's general lack of interest in comparing scientific and artistic results in Goethe's work as opposed to showing a unity in the mental tendencies which produce those results, is that Lewes the advocate of Goethe in England has a special interest in showing that Goethe deserves an eminence as scientific thinker independent of his eminence as poet.

Art and criticism

Lewes's acquirements and intellectual pre-occupations serve him well in his discussion of Goethe as a scientist. His achievement as a critic of Goethe's imaginative writing seems to me more questionable, though nevertheless very considerable in relation to the Goethe-criticism of his time. A large proportion - probably, as William Myers's comments suggest,[90] too large - of work on Lewes in

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89. "Metamorphoses: a tale," Blackwood's Magazine, lxxix (1856), p.685.

90. W. Myers, review of A.R. Kaminsky, George Henry Lewes as literary critic, Victorian Studies, xiii (1969-1970), pp.229-230.

this century has been concerned with the nature and importance of his literary criticism.[91] Alice R. Kaminsky[92] and Morris Greenhut[93] concentrate entirely on the literary criticism, R.L. Brett[94] and Hock Guan Tjoa[95] devote a lot of attention to it, and Lewes the critic features in studies of broader scope by Richard Stang,[96] René Wellek,[97] John Gross,[98] and Franklin Gary.[99] Opinions differ as to Lewes's stature as a literary critic, but there can be no doubt that his articles by and large, though mostly produced under a great deal of pressure, were of a standard well above the average. He was particularly successful at picking out works of enduring quality from the enormous mass of contemporary literature that he reviewed - a good example of this ability is his enthusiastic review of the unknown Herman Melville's Moby Dick in 1851.[100] Discussion of Lewes's criticism tends to centre on the question of how far the criticism was systematic, or coherent as a body. Wellek presents Lewes as one of a few critics in the mid-

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91. For a useful summary account of secondary literature on Lewes, see D. Roll-Hansen, "George Henry Lewes and his critics," English Studies, lx (1979), pp.159-165.

92. A.R. Kaminsky, George Henry Lewes as literary critic (Syracuse, New York: 1968); Literary criticism of George Henry Lewes, ed. A.R. Kaminsky (Lincoln, Nebraska: 1964); A.R. Kaminsky, "George Eliot, George Henry Lewes, and the novel," P.M.L.A., lxx (1955), pp.997-1013.

93. M. Greenhut, "George Henry Lewes and the classical tradition in English criticism," Review of English Studies, xxiv (1948), pp.126-137; "George Henry Lewes as a critic of the novel," Studies in Philology, xlv (1948), pp.491-511; "George Henry Lewes's criticism of the drama," P.M.L.A., lxiv (1949), pp.350-368.

94. R.L. Brett, "George Henry Lewes: dramatist, novelist and critic," Essays and Studies, new series, xi (1958), pp.101-120.

95. Tjoa (note 84, above), chapter 2, section 2.

96. R. Stang, The theory of the novel in England (ch.3 note 81, above), pp.79-86, 171-176.

97. R. Wellek, A history of modern criticism: 1750-1950, 4 vols. (1955-1966), iv. 149-151.

98. J. Gross (note 75, above), pp.70- 75.

99. F. Gary, "Charlotte Brontë and George Henry Lewes," P.M.L.A., li (1936), pp.518-542.

100. Lewes, "Herman Melville," The Leader, ii (1851), pp.1067-1069.

century (the most important of the others is Eneas Sweetland Dallas) who were interested in putting criticism on a scientific basis. He also describes him as 'the first English exponent of the theory of realism in the novel'.[101] There certainly is in Lewes's critical writing a repeated emphasis on the need for a consistent method in criticism, analogous of course (once he has adopted Comte) to the scientific method that is glorified in positivist doctrine. Articles like "Hegel's Aesthetics" (though Lewes soon turned away from Hegel and his a priori theory of art), "Augustus William Schlegel", "Realism in Art",[102] and the series "Principles of success in literature",[103] all contain this emphasis, and there are important statements about critical procedure in the Life of Goethe. Once he has passed through his early enthusiasm for Hegelian idealism, the predominant direction of Lewes's theoretical statements, as Wellek's second comment indicates, is towards realist principles as a standard of excellence in literature, and towards a corresponding insistence on anti-metaphysical, 'common-sense' critical methods as the most effective and least dangerous.

Lewes's interest in theories of art and of criticism is much greater than that of most mid-century critics, but, as most of the writers I have referred to discover,[104] his theories did not take

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101. Wellek, iv. 150.

102. "Realism in art: recent German fiction," Westminster Review, new series, xiv (1858), pp.488-518.

103. "The principles of success in literature," Fortnightly Review, in six parts, from i (1865), pp.85-95, to ii (1865), pp.689-710. Published in book form (1891), ed. F.N. Scott, and (1898) ed. T.S. Knowlson. The edition referred to hereafter is Knowlson's.

104. See in particular Tjoa, p.75, and Kaminsky, G.H.L. as literary critic, p.25.

him particularly far, and he never became a really systematic critic. The great majority of his criticism - unlike his scientific work, over which he could spend more time and care - was after all fragmented, ad hoc, and written to deadlines. As R.L. Brett[105] and A.R. Kaminsky[106] suggest, Lewes is a philosophical critic in the sense that his criticism always rests on certain general principles which tie up with his thinking in other areas, and his critical attitudes and methods change as he progresses intellectually. In most of his criticism, the principles came in some way from Comtean positivism, or at least reflect distinctively positivist attitudes of mind. Literary criticism is not present as such in Comte's hierarchy of the sciences (though aesthetics figure in a small way - Part Two Section Ten of Lewes's Comte's philosophy of the sciences is on "aesthetic, scientific, and philosophic evolution"), and the activity clearly poses some problems for Lewes, as it both demands and partly repels a scientific rigour of method. In the Life of Goethe, however, writing in the period when his adherence to Comte was at its strongest, he confidently equates criticism of art with scientific investigation of nature. He is protesting, as he often does in the Life, against the procedures of the German 'Romantic' critics, against 'that Philosophy of Art which consists in translating Art into Philosophy', and his statement of the true critical method shows how much his views have changed since 'Hegel's Aesthetics":

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105. Brett (note 94, above), p.106.

106. Kaminsky, G.H.L. as literary critic, p.46.

> In studying a work of Art, we should proceed as in studying a work of nature: after delighting in the effect, we should try to ascertain what are the means by which the effect is produced, and not at all what is the Idea lying behind the means. (p.449)

In accordance with positivist doctrine, which forbids enquiry into final causes because such things are beyond the scope of our observation, criticism in the Life of Goethe, and in most of Lewes's review articles, concerns itself with the 'how?' rather than the 'why?' in the interpretations it offers, though the line between the two is not always clear or easily drawn.

A substantial part of the 'how?' is found in the events of Goethe's life. Like the Biographical history of philosophy, the Life of Goethe is positivist in method in that it places the author's works in the context of known facts about his life. Lewes took a lot of trouble over presenting an accurate version, not only of Goethe's life but also of the relationship between life and works. In the Preface to the first edition of the Life, Lewes tells how he had at first based his first three books firmly on Dichtung und Wahrheit, accepting Goethe's own account of his early life, but later, finding from his study of Goethe's letters that Dichtung und Wahrheit was misleading both in some facts and, more importantly, in the tone in which the old man described early experiences, rewrote these chapters, challenging Goethe's account at many points.[107] The technique, both biographical and critical, is well illustrated by Lewes's treatment of Werther and the events out of which it arose. He begins his account of the Wetzlar episode

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107. Life, 1st ed., i. viii-ix.

by pointing out how useless the cool, dismissive version in Dichtung und Warhheit is for gaining any impression of what Goethe's feelings were at the time (p.112). Fortunately, Goethe's correspondence with Kestner, the Albert of Werther, was published in 1854, just as Lewes was re-writing his book, and he makes considerable use of that material in his reconstruction of the events. He then gives the story of Karl Jerusalem as told in a letter from Kestner, and shows how Goethe's and Jerusalem's experience were together worked up into Werther. On the way he again attacks Dichtung und Wahrheit, this time on the details of relationship between life and work. The 'rigour of dates' shows us that Werther was not written while Goethe still suffered from his love for Charlotte, as a means of escape from Wertheresque suicidal sensibility, but after he had, by the force of his own character, strengthened himself and put those feelings behind him (pp.142-143). This point, of course, has bearings on Lewes's notion of Goethe's moral qualities, which I shall discuss later. Having established the context of Werther, the facts which will illuminate the work of art as we receive it, Lewes simply gives a brief synopsis, comments in general terms on the simplicity of structure and beauty of style, and fires a characteristic single shot at the German critic Rosenkrantz for looking in Werther for 'meanings more recondite than the author dreamt of' (p.152). There is virtually no 'interpretation' of the kind we expect from the literary critic, no detailed reading or analysis, but the account is effective in the way it meticulously and discriminatingly fills in the background which is so important to an understanding of Werther, and would have been much more effective at the time when

the background, now so well-known, was hardly known at all.

The biographical 'angle' is the one Lewes most often takes with Goethe's works, and of course it is a good one, not only because Lewes is writing a biography at the same time as doing criticism, but also because Goethe was an especially auto-biographical or confessional creative writer - Lewes was well aware of the famous statement in Dichtung und Wahrheit, 'Alles was daher von mir bekannt geworden, sind nur Bruchstücke einer grossen Konfession.'[108] Biographical criticism deals both with the way events from the author's life appear in the fictional work and with the history of the composition of the work and how that has affected its finished form. With Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, after his usual fling at philosophical criticism, Lewes announces that he will 'stand fast by historical criticism' (p.393), and in this case deals mostly with compositional history, using the known fact that Goethe wrote the first six books before going to Italy and then resumed work much later, and speculating from it that Goethe's whole intentions for the work changed, that he added the symbolic and didactic parts, the Bruderschaft vom Turm, and then altered the earlier parts to fit into a symbolic whole (pp.393-395). Lewes's aversion to symbolism leads him to simplify and over-state, but again the 'historical' method, attractively scientific in appearance with its orderly movement from fact to hypothesis, produces a convincing and interesting reading that would be entirely new to readers in 1855, fifty-six years before the actual first, non-symbolic version, Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung, was

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108. Goethe, Dichtung und Wahrheit, part 2, book 7, Hamburger Ausgabe, ix. 283. See Lewes, Life, p.47.

published for the first time. Similarly with Die Wahlverwandtschaften, Lewes points out the biographical context, Goethe's passion for Minna Herzlieb, and sheds light on the formal oddity of the novel by explaining that it started as a Novelle and was then expanded (pp.504, 509).

The biographical and historical approaches are the most commonly used in the Life, but there are others. Lewes's discussion of Hermann und Dorothea begins with a synopsis of the Erzählung of 1732 which was Goethe's source - Lewes compares Goethe with Shakespeare in the way he 'converts lifeless material into immortal life' (pp.408-409). Much of the discussion of Iphigenie auf Tauris is comparative, asserting the profound un-Greek-ness of Goethe's play, its complete remoteness in spirit from Euripides's treatment of the story. With Faust (I am talking here of the discussion of part one), Lewes uses all of these lines of approach. He briefly mentions a biographical tie-up with the struggles of Goethe's own soul (p.478). He summarises the complicated chronology of the work's composition (p.446). He mentions the Faust legend and tradition, Goethe's composite source and a subject of inexhaustible fascination for poets of all kinds (pp.446, 447). Most of his time, however, is spent on comparison. Making the point, one which he thinks very important as a clue to the structure of Faust and to the way it was composed, that it has such colossal appeal because it both contains a universal and eternal human problem and presents a wonderfully diverse and comprehensive picture of our 'social existence', he compares it with Hamlet, which similarly combines a profound intellectual appeal with a grand diversity of spectacle (pp.447-449). Less effectively, and, as Rosemary Ashton

says, unwisely transplanting material from a separate article written long before,[109] Lewes then gives a lengthy comparison of Goethe's treatment of the legend with Marlowe's in Doctor Faustus and Calderón's in El Magico Prodigioso, pointing out how each author produces a version (not surprisingly) 'conformable with his genius and his age' (pp.469-477).

This undigested material, together with the three-page digression about translation which immediately precedes it, gives the feeling that, having set himself so doggedly against discussions of the "idea" of literary works, Lewes has some difficulty finding enough things to talk about instead. Positivist empiricism revolts against the abstractions of metaphysics and theology, and Lewes's critical method, positivist in spirit and embodying a protest against the 'Romantic school' of philosophical criticism, involves frequent emphasis on what he chooses not to talk about. Part of this protest is the 'analysis' (synopsis) which Lewes gives of all the works he discusses. Lewes sensibly assumes that many of his readers will have hardly any knowledge of Goethe, and in accordance with his policy of providing as much solid, uncontroversial information as possible with his criticisms, he gives short plot summaries of each important work. In a particularly aggressive moment during his 'analysis' of Hermann und Dorothea, he actually uses the plot summary itself as a propaganda weapon, apologising for its inadequacy as a conveyer of the charm of the poem, but asserting that for the reader of imagination such an analysis gives more idea of the poem

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109. Ashton, The German idea, p.139. The article is "The three Fausts: Göthe, Marlowe, Calderon," British and Foreign Review, xviii (1844), pp.51-92.

than would 'an aesthetical discussion such as philosophical criticism indulges in' (p.414).[110] Lewes's criticisms are often valuable, his comments intelligent and his information helpful and carefully researched, but his critical method is a somewhat limiting one. It is clearly right for the scientist to ignore final causes, but when the creator being dealt with is not an unseen God but a known human author, some discussion of the "idea" underlying his works might be worthwhile. Lewes himself clearly feels this limitation to some extent, because despite himself he does offer suggestions as to the "message" of Faust part two, Hermann und Dorothea, "Prometheus", and Wilhelm Meister; these suggestions I will discuss later.

Turning from Lewes's critical method to his idea of how the artist ought to proceed, we find a similar pattern. In a review article of 1852, Lewes makes an unconvincing attempt to show artistic creation as an activity distinct from but similar to the activity of the scientist: 'Science is the expression of the forms and order of Nature; literature is the expression of the forms and order of human life'.[111] This analogy clearly will not work - the one kind of 'expression' is too radically unlike the other, - and Lewes does not attempt such an analogy again; even making the critic look like a scientist is hard enough. Nevertheless, Lewes expects from the artist, and especially the literary artist, as strong a commitment to 'realities' as he would expect from the scientist. In both the Life of Goethe and the article "Realism in art" of 1858, Lewes uses

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110. Cp. Lewes's Schlegel essay of 1843; see pp.183-184, above.

111. Lewes, "The lady novelists," Westminster Review, new series, ii (1852), p.130.

Goethe's idea that the true activity of the artist is representation (this is how Lewes misleadingly translates Gestaltung - he also quotes in support George Sand's "L'art n'est qu'une forme").[112] The idea is that the artist - or at least the good artist - is not an inventor, a creator of something from nothing, out of the depths of his consciousness, but one who re-presents material that is already there. The material, for Lewes, must be reality, the facts of the world as we observe them, and in "Realism in Art" he completes the formula in his own sense: 'Art is a Representation of Reality'.[113] The doctrine is specious in the way that Comtean positivism (in the background as usual) is generally specious: 'reality' is such a hazy concept, and covers such a multitude of things, that it is ultimately of little help as a touchstone. However, it is clear enough what kinds of art Lewes is protesting against when he insists that art should represent reality - it is that imitative, conventional art which presents 'peasants with regular features and irreproachable linen',[114] or else the exotic and fantastical art characteristic of the German Romantic school, which disdains reality and the present, and goes to the middle ages, to the East, or to Catholic legend, for inspiration (Life, pp.403-404). Lewes's artistic principles are moral as well as aesthetic. The artist represents reality, and reality for him can only be what he has himself experienced. If he puts into his art what he has not truly known in his life, he is insincere, a liar. The moral

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112. Life, p.152 and note; "Realism in art," p.493.

113. "Realism in art," p.493.

114. "Realism in art," p.493.

aspect of Lewes's realism comes out most clearly later, in the "Principles of success in literature" of 1865, the keynote of which, as R.L. Brett points out, is that art and morality are inseparable .[115] The three main "principles of success" are vision, sincerity, and beauty. Lewes claims that 'No talent can be supremely effective unless it acts in close alliance with certain moral qualities', and his statement of the necessity of sincerity is as follows: 'Personal experience is the basis of all real literature. The writer must have thought the thoughts, seen the objects (with bodily or mental vision), and felt the feelings; otherwise he can have no power over us'.[116]

Goethe is in most respects an exemplar of the way the artist ought to proceed, and indeed both his practice as a writer and his own dicta about art clearly played a large part in the formation of Lewes's realist principles. Goethe repeatedly insisted that reality must be the artist's material,[117] and in his own art he consciously followed this principle. In his discussion of Die Laune des Verliebten, Goethe's first extant work, Lewes applauds Goethe's life-long practice of writing from his own experience in terms similar to those used in the statement of the principle of sincerity which I have just quoted: 'His own life was uniformly the

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115. Brett, p.111; Lewes, Principles of success in literature, Knowlson ed., p.6.

116. Principles of success, pp.6, 24.

117. See, for instance, J.P. Eckermann, Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens (ch.2, note 13, above), i. 54 ("Jena, Donnerstag den 18. September 1823").

text from which he preached. He sang what he had felt, and because he had felt it; not because others had sung before him' (Life,p.47). As in the 1843 article, in an early chapter called "Mental Characteristics", Lewes makes his generalised distinction between intellects predominantly 'objective' and those predominantly 'subjective', following Friedrich Schlegel and Coleridge in saying that the terms 'Aristotelian' and 'Platonic' could also be used. Goethe, of course, is objective or Aristotelian, and there is no suggestion now, as there was in 1843, that this objectivity is partly a limitation because it involves a lack of 'moral enthusiasm'. Moral enthusiasm is no longer a requirement with Lewes, and both at the end of this chapter and in his discussions of Wilhelm Meister (pp.399-400) and Die Wahlverwandtschaften (pp.505-506), he specifically praises Goethe for the absence of moral bias in his works, for the way he presents life as it is, with its 'wondrous complexity of impulses' (p.505), rather than simplifying or falsifying in the light of moral pre-conceptions. In every page of Goethe's works may be read 'a strong feeling for the real, the concrete, the living; and arepugnance as strong for the vague, the abstract, or the supersensuous' (p.52), and this 'concrete tendency' determines his choice of subjects (he chooses those within which he can embody his own experiences and feelings in the real world), his handling of character (he portrays 'men and women instead of demigods and angels'), and his style (he uses noticeably un-metaphorical language, presenting pictures rather than imagery, what the thing is rather than what it is like) (pp.52-53). The artist is not, of course, a mere reporter. As well as sincerity, he must have vision - the ability to perceive beauty or significance in realities which others would see

as uninteresting or vulgar - and also the power to produce beautiful re-presentations. Goethe is an artist in the full sense. He is 'so great an artist that the simplest realities have to him significance' (p.152), as he shows in scenes like the bread-cutting in Werther or the water-drawing in Hermann und Dorothea (pp.152,413), and he is also able to create forms, pre-eminently in the lyric poems, where the beauty of the thing described is re-created as 'part and parcel of the very tissue of the poem', not merely as ornament (p.481). Goethe combines a supreme artistry with a fidelity to the world of realities, so that Lewes can describe Philina in Wilhelm Meister as 'one of the most bewitching and original creations in fiction, whom we know as well as if she had flirted with us and jilted us' (p.397).

Carré sees Lewes as completing the picture of Goethe for the English, left incomplete and unbalanced by Carlyle's essays with their emphasis on Goethe as sage and prophet, by showing Goethe the artist.[118] Clearly there is a lot of truth in this view, but there are two points I would like to make about it. In the first place, Lewes's contribution is not as different from Carlyle's as it might appear. Though he emphasises Goethe's pre-occupation with art, and approaches his works as artistic products, as Carlyle never did, his artist Goethe is in a sense a sage and prophet through his art. Because Lewes's realist bias in art is so closely connected to his fundamental positivist beliefs, the attachment to the real and concrete which he finds in Goethe's art (and, of course, in his science) is to him the highest wisdom, as well as the guarantee of a

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118. Carré, Introduction, p.xiv.

high degree of artistic success. Carlyle isolated Goethe's wisdom, and said to the public 'Behold, and learn!', and Lewes in effect says the same when he points to the excellences of Goethe's art - not suggesting particularly that artists should follow Goethe's example, but generally that people should adopt the attitude of mind which clings to realities and finds the highest beauty in them. The point will become clearer as I discuss Lewes's remarks about Goethe in relation to morality and religion, and show how artistic realism fits with Lewes's notions in those areas.

In the second place, as Carré admits,[119] Lewes himself can be accused of presenting an unbalanced picture of Goethe, because of his lack of interest in some aspects of the Goethean wisdom. Lewes identifies features of Goethe's mind and character, and from them builds up ideas of his true tendency; if he deviates from this tendency, he is being false to himself. A simple illustration of this procedure is Lewes's treatment of Goethe's relationship with classical and oriental art. The observation Lewes makes about Iphigenie auf Tauris, the Römische Elegien, and the West-Östliche Divan, is that though Goethe has a remarkable ability to get inside other cultures and write German in their spirit, he manages at the same time to remain himself, to remain German and modern in feeling (pp.264, 319, 522-23). This is the true tendency - originality and sincerity remaining unblemished despite thorough immersion in foreign ways of thought and art. In an article about the classicism of Goethe and Schiller, published the year after the Life, Lewes indicates that Goethe did not always follow this true tendency. When he did not,

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119. Carré, p.269.

as in the Achilleis fragment and in the parts of Iphigenie where he tried to stay closest to Greek drama, he went wrong, and produced sterile, academic imitation.[120] In two Leader reviews, Lewes had made the same points about Matthew Arnold's theory and practice - the 1853 Preface is misguided because we must always remain true to ourselves and the present, keeping the past under control, and the 'excellencies' of "Sohrab and Rustum" 'are not derived from the Greek, although most of its defects are'.[121] A more important, and disputable, example of this kind of argument is Lewes's treatment of the more abstruse and symbolic parts of Goethe's works, such as the latter part of Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre and most of the Wanderjahre, Die natürliche Tochter and Faust part two. Lewes does not like symbolism, obscurity, or enigma in art, any more than he likes sterile imitations of classical poetry, and when such features appear in Goethe, that most open-air and fact-centred of poets, it must be a case of false tendency. Instead of attempting to explain Goethe's symbolism, as a misguided German philosophical critic would (and as, incidentally, Carlyle had, with some success, in his essays on the Novelle and on "Helena"), Lewes concerns himself with showing how the use of the symbolic mode is an aberration, and suggesting the causes of the aberration - Goethe was influenced by the more reflective poet Schiller (p.402),[122] or he wanted to flatter

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120. "Weimar and Jena," Saturday Review, ii (1856), p.137.

121. "Schools of poetry," The Leader, iv (1853), p.1146; "Arnold's poems," The Leader, iv (1853), p.1171.

122. Much as he praises the friendship, Lewes did feel that Schiller tended to seduce Goethe from his true path. In his copy of a translation of the Goethe-Schiller correspondence, read presumably in the late 1840s, Lewes puts an exceptional three lines and tick beside Goethe's statement, at an early stage of the friendship, that 'It seems to me quite strange to find myself theorizing' - Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe, from 1794 to 1805, translated by G.H. Calvert (New York, 1845), p.21, right hand margin, Lewes's copy, Dr. Williams's Library (see note 22, above).

the German philosophical tendency (p.393), or, in the case of Faust part two, he turned to reflection and symbolism as his creative powers waned in old age (p.542).

The limitations both of Lewes's critical method and of his ideas of excellence in art are revealed by his dismissiveness towards these more difficult parts of Goethe's output. He is partly aware of this limitation, and expresses some embarrassment about his inability to like Faust part two (p.541). I am not denying that Lewes has a right to dislike enigma in art, or that many would agree with him that Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, or Faust part two, has an artistic poverty, a poverty of style and construction, which proceeds from a radical falseness of conception (pp.532, 544). What I would say is that Lewes's rational, common-sense, positivist habits of mind prevent him from having a full, balanced picture of Goethe's genius, much as Carlyle was prevented by his earnest, pessimistic, anti-rational, basically Calvinist mentality.[123] Lewes's mental predispositions were undoubtedly less prejudicial to a proper understanding of Goethe than Carlyle's were, but his view of Goethe as a 'spontaneous, instinctive poet' (as opposed to Schiller, the 'reflective, critical poet'), whom reflection can only retard or mislead (p.438), clearly needs some qualification in its turn, and

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123. Another marginal comment, again attacking Henry Hallam, from the more romantically-inclined younger Lewes, can, not entirely unfairly, be turned against the mature positivist critic. Lewes calls Hallam's criticism 'the very twaddle of commonsense - commonsense the boasted being about the worst possible criterion for any work without its own peculiar sphere' - Hallam, Introduction... (see note 22, above), iii. 672, bottom of page, Lewes's copy, Dr. Williams's Library.

puts Lewes behind Carlyle and some less prominent contemporary Goethe-critics[124] as an interpreter of the more abstruse Goethe.

Morality

In his Goethe essay of 1843, Lewes speaks of a something in Goethe's character which 'with all our admiration yet repulses our love'.[125] In the Life, he again speaks of Goethe as one who, with his mighty intellect and calm strength, is more likely to arouse admiration than that love which responds to a hearty human warmth and capacity for generous error, but his own judgement, for no really clear reason (even in 1843, after all, he was prepared to admit that Goethe was a man of great kindness and of strong feelings), has changed completely: 'But if a man unites the mastery of Will and Intellect to the profoundest sensibility of Emotion, shall we not say of him that he has in living synthesis vindicated both what we preach and what we love?' (pp.35-36).[126] This change of view had, of course, already taken place by the time Ranthorpe was written (1847), and the Goethe of the Life is substantially Thornton's Goethe, a man who can only seem cold to those who do not understand him properly or who are unhealthily subject to the cult of sensibility. This Goethe of the 'living synthesis' is in many of his aspects carried straight over from Carlyle - Carlyle too had spoken of a perfect

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124. See, for instance, ch.2, pp.92-96, above.

125. "Character and works of Göthe," pp.87-88.

126. George Eliot seems to have experienced a similar change of attitude in the course of her participation in the Life. She writes to Sara Hennell that Lewes's book should 'make you love Goethe as well as admire him' - "GE to Sara Sophia Hennell," 23 June 1855, George Eliot Letters, ii. 204.

balance, sensibility without weakness or morbidity and solid strength without coldness: 'a trembling sensibility has been inured to stand, without flinching or murmur, the sharpest trials'.[127] Lewes quotes at the very beginning of the Life Merck's statement about Goethe that 'what he lived was more beautiful than what he wrote' (p.2), and throughout the biography, though anxious to make it clear that Goethe had faults and thus avoid a false idealisation, he presents Goethe's life as a spectacle of outstanding moral beauty and impressiveness. He treats coolly and briefly the weary old controversies about Goethe's treatment of women, the immorality in his works, and his lack of patriotic fervour. Though prepared to admit occasionally that Goethe was at fault - the insufficiently disguised presentation in Werther of his love for Charlotte Buff is rather beyond the pale (pp.156-158), and so is the imagined adultery scene in Die Wahlverwandtschaften (pp.506-507), - Lewes not only insists that the flaws are trivial in relation to the grandeur of the whole, but also, in most of the cases where people have claimed that Goethe did wrong, actually disputes the claim.

Convinced in a general way that Goethe was not only great but good as well, Lewes becomes an apologist without quite realising it. In his discussion of Goethe's desertion of Friederike Brion, for instance, he disclaims any desire to exonerate Goethe - 'he himself acknowledged his fault' - but does in fact make a partial attempt to do so. Goethe must bear the blame for arousing Friederike's affection in the first place, but he was right to break off the connection when he did. The affair was a youthful infatuation such

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127. Carlyle, "Goethe" (1827), p.23 (see ch.1, note 33 , above).

as we all go through, in no way related to that 'exquisite companionship of two souls striving in emulous spirit of loving rivalry to become better, to become wiser, teaching each other to soar' which is the basis of true marriage (some reflected glow from Lewes's new union with George Eliot is generally thought to colour these words), and therefore it would have been wrong, immoral, for Goethe to have married Friederike (in the same way, perhaps, as Lewes now thought he had been wrong to marry Agnes Jervis) (pp.99-102). Similarly with the question of Goethe's political indifference, Lewes first shrugs off the accusations of those patriots who wanted Goethe to be a patriot also with the familiar argument (implied rather than stated) that all the individual can do is fulfil his own nature and destiny, but then produces various pieces of evidence, including remarks made by others and by Goethe himself, which show that in fact Goethe was not indifferent to political matters, nor lacking in a love and concern for his country (pp.513-515). On principle, Lewes would be prepared to find Goethe at fault in such matters as these - no man is perfect - without losing his reverence for him, but in fact the number of cases where he actually does find him at fault is very small. He has no desire to present a picture of perfection, but his sympathy with Goethe by this stage is so total that he comes near to doing so.[128]

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128. Lewes also half-conceals one potentially damaging fact from his readers. In a letter of 1855 to J.S. Blackie, he admits 'Yes, the liaison with the Frau von Stein did become more than platonic, as you will see I quietly indicate in one passage'. He felt, however, 'forced to keep that part in a subdued light because the British public would have gone into fits at the open avowal' - "GHL to John Stuart Blackie," 19 December 1855, George Eliot Letters, viii. 147.

The two categories of moral impressiveness which Lewes perceives in Goethe can be roughly described as strength and goodness. The Carlylean emphasis on the high importance of strength of will which is so conspicuous in Ranthorpe and Rose, Blanche, and Violet is still very much present in the Life of Goethe. Goethe is presented as a 'giant-worker' (p.279), in whom 'naked vigour of resolution, moving in alliance with steady clearness of intellect, produced a self-mastery of the very highest kind' (pp.9-10). Like Carlyle, Lewes is a firm believer in the Goethean doctrine of Entsagen, renunciation, though he does not distort the meaning of that doctrine quite as Carlyle does. Speaking of the universal appeal of the Faust legend, Lewes says that man, faced with the problem of the apparent futility of human endeavour and aspiration, will always be tempted to sacrifice the future to present pleasure as Faust does. The real solution to the problem, or as near to a solution as we can come, though not presented in Faust part one (the poet, after all, has no obligation to solve problems), is to be found in Goethe's maxims and in his life:

> His doctrine of Renunciation - dass wir entsagen müssen - applied by him with fertile results in so many directions, both in life and theory, will be found to approach a solution, or at any rate to leave the insoluble mystery without its perplexing and tormenting influence (pp.478-479).

The 'profound truth' which Lewes finds brought out in Goethe's "Prometheus" fragment (one of those cases where despite himself Lewes looks for the 'idea' of a work of art) is that 'what we can do we are; our strength is measured by our plastic power' (p.178). We are very close here to Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh, with his rejection of the impossible precept Know thyself in favour of "this partially

possible one, Know what thou canst work at";[129] Carlyle, too, found this 'profound truth' in Goethe. The sphere of Goethe's activity, where his massive strength of will exercised itself, was art, and Lewes spends some time insisting (against that popular opinion which regards art merely as a question of amusement) that art is a serious business, on which Goethe expended serious and monumental labour, deliberately choosing a life of hard work because '"To scorn delights and live laborious days," with no other reward than the reward of activity, the delight of development, was one of the necessities of his nature' (p.516).

Goethe's strength of will manifests itself not only in a preparedness to work hard, but in his progressive notion of the individual's life - he enjoyed both the 'reward of activity' and the 'delight of development'. Lewes follows Goethe's own example (he quotes from Goethe's letter to Lavater about his "desire to raise the pyramid of my existence" - p.260) in putting a lot of emphasis on "self-culture" as the principle of Goethe's existence. He not only worked, but perpetually struggled to achieve better and higher things, never resting satisfied with a past achievement. The time at which these ideas of earnest, laborious self-culture fully emerge is around 1779, when the wildness of Goethe's first arrival in Weimar has died down and the thirty-year-old poet has reached that crucial stage (not such an obsession with Lewes as it was with Carlyle, but still much spoken of) at which, if the individual is to progress fruitfully, he must put youthful unrest behind him, renounce simple

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129. Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, p.132 ("The Everlasting No").

desires, and work. The metaphor Lewes uses for this process is a scientific one - what happens to Goethe in 1779 is a crystallisation: 'in the recesses of his mind much that was fluent becomes crystallised by the earnestness which gives a definite purpose to his life' (p.259). The chapter in which Lewes speaks of this crystallisation is called "New birth", a title that recalls Carlyle's statements about the change which must take place both in the individual and in society.[130] Lewes's emphasis differs from Carlyle's, and ties in closely with his own positivist and realist principles, when he speaks of an attachment to realities as a crucial part of the exemplary maturity that Goethe achieves. Lewes tells the story of how Goethe weaned the morbid misanthrope Plessing from his self-destructive state by making him fix his thoughts on external objects and by finding him active employment. What is interesting about this anecdote is 'the practical illustration it gives of his [Goethe's] fundamental realism, which looked to nature and earnest activity as the sole cure for megrims, sentimentalisms, and self-torturings. Turn your mind to realities, and the self-made phantoms which darken your soul will disappear like night at the approach of dawn' (p.242). In a similar spirit, Lewes points out as significant the fact that as Goethe went through the process of crystallisation, he took up the serious study of science: 'He was trying to find a secure basis for his aims; it was natural he should seek a secure basis for his mind; and with such a mind that basis could only be found in the study of Nature' (p.278). An adherence to realities, to

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130. See ch.1, p. 29 , above.

the facts of nature, has a moral value, in that it helps strengthen will and banish unprofitable thoughts and desires. The 'fundamental realism' which Lewes found in Goethe's works is present also in his life, and is not only philosophically, scientifically, and artistically, but also morally, a principle of great importance.

I showed before how Lewes argued from the 'rigour of dates' that Werther must have been written after Goethe had put Wertherism behind him.[131] He also says that the 'true philosophy of art' would in any case lead us a priori to this conviction, because true art cannot be created in a state of extreme emotion - 'The artist is a master, not a slave; he wields his passion, he is not hurried along by it; he possesses, and is not possessed' (p.142). The idea is not a new one with Lewes - Percy Ranthorpe at one stage is described as unable to create because he is too much in the grip of anguish: 'he [the poet] cannot play while he is learning - he cannot write while he is suffering - he cannot sing while his heart is bleeding'.[132] Wordsworth's emotion recollected in tranquillity is not far away here, but with Lewes the emphasis is more moral, not so exclusively on the needs of the poetic imagination. The measure of Goethe's moral strength is that he is able to re-create in all their fulness and intensity his experiences and emotions, while remaining apart himself, the masterful, controlling artist. Lewes sees two sides to Goethe's character - calm strength of will on the one side, intense sensitivity and impressionableness on the other. The two sides

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131. See p.217, above.

132. Ranthorpe, p.114.

are dramatised in a series of antithetical pairs of characters in the works, the 'calm, self-sustaining characters' and the 'weak wavering' ones, respectively - Götz and Weislingen, Albert and Werther, Carlos and Clavigo, Jarno and Meister, Antonio and Tasso, the Hauptmann and Eduard, Mephistopheles and Faust (pp.150-151).[133] Separated in art, and often in bitter conflict with each other (for instance in Werther, Tasso, and Faust), in life the two sides of Goethe's character, as Lewes presents him, exist together in fruitful collaboration, and because Goethe has the sensitivity as well as the strength, his adult stability, when he achieves it, does not bring artistic sterility. This is the 'living synthesis' which we can both admire and love, so different from the one-sided nature of a Byron - Lewes again follows Teufelsdröckh, with his "Close thy Byron; open thy Goethe",[134] in setting the strong and healthy Goethe against the weak, self-centred, hysterically-complaining romantic poet: 'Byron, utterly without self-command, is fond of heroes proud and self-sustaining. Goethe, the strongest of men, makes heroes the footballs of circumstance' (p.150).

Lewes is further away from Carlyle in his insistence on Goethe's goodness. He was convinced of a human goodness and kindness in Goethe which Carlyle was not especially interested in, and apart from substantially defending Goethe against the charges of immorality and political indifference normally brought, he repeatedly brings

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133. There are similar antithetical pairs of characters in both Ranthorpe and Rose, Blanche, and Violet - Harry Cavendish and Percy Ranthorpe, Captain Heath and Cecil Chamberlayne.

134. Sartor Resartus, p.153 ("The Everlasting Yea").

forward evidence of his large but unobtrusive generosity to his fellow men. One whole chapter, called "The real philanthropist", is devoted to this generosity, and mostly taken up with the story of an unnamed protégé whom Goethe helped and provided for in his distress, showing great tact and delicacy as well as humanity. In the light of this story, 'the epithets of "cold" and "heartless", often applied to Goethe, sound like blasphemies against the noblest feelings of humanity' (pp.248-255). Lewes still murmurs slightly about Goethe's 'want of historical philosophy', which made him see only the temporal and not the eternal aspects of the French Revolution (p.368), but there is no suggestion any more, as there was in 1843, that Goethe is morally lacking because he has no sympathy for the masses of mankind. He is, in fact, compared favourably with Herder, who had a love of mankind in the abstract, but little love for individuals. Goethe was the reverse of Herder in this respect, and again his 'concrete', realist tendency is shown to have good side-effects: 'He had, instead of this, the most overflowing love for individual men. His concrete and affectionate nature was more attracted to men than to abstractions' (p.81). Close study of Goethe documents, and particularly of his correspondence, seems to have had the effect on Lewes that it had on Empson, Sterling, and others[135] - somewhat chilled in 1843 by Goethe's mighty self-control, by 1855 he is fully convinced of the personal warmth and humanity of the man, and this conviction profoundly modifies his general verdict.

Some of the least convincing parts of Lewes's interpretation of

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135. See ch.3, pp.128-130,160-163, above.

Goethe are those where he tries to find this humanity embedded in the works, to connect up Goethe, in works as well as in life, to the warming current of the religion of humanity. In Hermann und Dorothea, for instance, he finds 'a Hymn to the Family, a solemn vindication of the eternal claims which, as a first necessity, should occupy men' (p.417), a reading based more on the fact that the poem deals with incidents connected with the French Revolution without making any political point than on what the poem does contain. Like Carlyle but in a different way, Lewes Christianises Goethe's doctrine of Entsagen and thus partly falsifies it. The renunciation which is recommended in Wilhelm Meister is a giving up of simple, immediate desires in favour of a conscious and careful self-development so that the individual can achieve his full potential rather than wasting himself in short-sighted rushing around after present happiness. Carlyle turns this into a puritan self-denial, a mortification of the flesh in accordance with the rulings of a stern Calvinistic God. Lewes turns it into a step on the way to altruism, to that Christian charity to others which was, of all the doctrines of Christ, the one most readily taken over by Comte into his religion of humanity. Lewes presents the moral life as advocated in Goethe's works as follows:

> We must first learn Renunciation; we must learn to limit ourselves to the Possible; in this first restraint lies the germ of self-sacrifice: in giving up claims too high for attainment, we learn to give up claims for the sake of others (p.521).

I am not suggesting that the real Goethe and his works were inhumane, but that he was less interested intellectually in altruism than Lewes presents him as being, that Lewes, like Carlyle, was making him into a more specifically moral genius than he was.

In both Wilhelm Meister and Faust Lewes finds a total message (not, of course, preached, but inculcated by artistic means) in accordance with this morality of bearing in mind the claims of others. With Wilhelm Meister he is not very confident, tacking on a further stage of moral progress, beyond self-culture, without offering any evidence from the text for his claim: the 'deep and healthy moral meaning' behind the whole narrative is contained in Wilhelm's progress 'from mere impulse to the subordination of reason, from dreaming self-indulgence to practical duty, from self-culture to sympathy' (p.400 - my emphasis). With Faust he has Faust's dying speech, and his land-reclaiming activities generally, to point to as evidence of a highly moral meaning: 'the toiling soul, after trying in various directions of individual effort and individual gratification, and finding therein no peace, is finally conducted to the recognition of the vital truth that man lives for man, and that only in as far as he is working for Humanity can his efforts bring permanent happiness' (p.549). Faust certainly dies expressing joy at the possibility of draining a swamp so that people can live there, but the angels make it clear that he is saved not by his social conscience but by his continued striving:

> Wer immer strebend sich bemüht,
> Den können wir erlösen. (136)

In Wilhelm Meister also, Goethe is primarily concerned with individual effort, individual self-culture, and only incidentally with the good we can do for others. The kind of structure Lewes has in mind, a

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136. Goethe, Faust part two, act 5, ll.11,936-11,937, Hamburger Ausgabe, iii. 359 ("Bergschluchten").

pyramid with goodness to others at the apex, supported by self-mastery, renunciation, self-culture, and so on, is ultimately not in line with Goethe's vision of human life.

Religion

All three of the 'articles of faith' which I identified in Lewes's statements about religion find their way into the Life of Goethe, and become part of his interpretation of the life and works. The first of these beliefs was that all men share a religious sentiment which is the core of all systems of belief and immeasurably more important and precious than actual doctrines. Goethe is exemplary in that he has 'deep religious sentiments, with complete scepticism on most religious doctrines' (p.518). This combination is the right and proper one (that is, the one which the free-thinking Lewes would himself lay claim to), but it has led to confusion because Goethe, uncommitted to any set of beliefs but attracted to many, can appear a follower of Voltaire at one moment, a pietist at another. A community of sentiment might bring him close to pious souls like Lavater and Fräulein von Klettenberg, but no intellectual consent to their beliefs can be assumed even during the time of closeness (p.165).[137] People can therefore be misled into forming over-simple notions of his religious position, and the commonest simplification has been the

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137. A letter of George Eliot's from a later period shows her contrasting this view - Lewes thinks that Goethe's 'personal individual bent was towards the clear and plastic exclusively', and that he entered into the experience of the mystic 'simply by force of his sympathetic genius' - with her own tentative feeling that Goethe really did have 'a strain of mysticism in his soul' - "GE to Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe," 11 November 1874, George Eliot Letters, vi. 89.

view that he had no religion. Filled by now with a sense of religious warmth in Goethe's works and life, Lewes can flatly deny this claim in terms which again assert the supremacy of religious sentiment: 'The man who can read Goethe's works and not perceive in them a spirit deeply religious, must limit the word religion to the designation of his own doctrines' (p.517). As for Carlyle, Goethe is for Lewes an example of how man can go on believing without the support of traditional doctrines. Goethe began to doubt at an early age - Lewes gives the anecdote from Dichtung und Wahrheit about the six-year-old boy's doubts as to the benignity of God after hearing of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 (p.22) - and continued to give his doubts full rein, while remaining in the truest sense religious. The extension of the spirit of Protestantism, which Lewes quotes Goethe as requiring (p.519), whereby the individual is allowed complete freedom of opinion, fits well with Lewes's notions about the church of the future,[138] and was probably an influence in their formation.

The influence of Goethe, and of Spinoza behind him, clearly played a large part in the formation of the second 'article' - that the realities of the universe are divine, a revelation of God. This belief is closely connected with Lewes's theory of art, and it is worth looking at how the two fit together, as another illustration of the way Lewes presents Goethe as an artist, but as such an artist that he is sage and prophet also through his art. Lewes's insistence on realism in art is not as strict and limiting as it might seem,

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138. See p.201, above.

because he follows Goethe himself[139] in proposing an ideal which is inseparable from the real, a 'vision of realities in their highest and most affecting forms'.[140] In the article "Realism in Art", Lewes contends that 'Realism is... the basis of all Art, and its antithesis is not Idealism, but Falsism'.[141] Lewes has no interest in exact verisimilitude, or 'detailism' as he scornfully calls it,[142] and though realities must be the artist's material, the art will be best when the realities are idealised in the sense of being presented in their highest forms. The artist must depict the true essence of the reality he deals with, removing features that are accidental, not essential. In 1853, reviewing Talbot Gwynne's The life and death of Silas Barnstarke, Lewes complains about the miser Silas being made to die of the plague: 'It is doubtless true, that in life a miser is as liable to the Plague as any one else; but in Art, which...is a selection of typical elements, that is not the end of a miser'.[143] Presumably the happier fate of a later miser, also called Silas, was more convincingly artistic to Lewes. "Realism in Art" was not written until 1858, and the theory of real and ideal was perhaps not quite developed at

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139. See, for instance, Italienische Reise, part 1 ("Venedig, den 8. Oktober [1786]"), Hamburger Ausgabe, xi. 89 - (of a colossal statue of Marcus Agrippa) 'Wie doch eine solche heroische Darstellung den reinen Menschen Göttern ähnlich macht!'

140. Principles of success in literature, p.79.

141. "Realism in art," p.493.

142. Principles of success, p.80.

143. "Two novels," The Leader, iv (1853), p.740.

the time when the Life of Goethe was written, but the central notions are already there, the desire for a realism which is not entirely earth-bound. Goethe's Hermann and Dorothea, not porcelain peasants but belonging to the best type of real peasant youth, are 'ideal characters in the best sense, viz., in the purity of nature' (p.415). Götz von Berlichingen and Werther are superbly accurate presentations of the spirit of the time when they were written, but unlike the mass of more extravagant Sturm und Drang literature which surrounds them and comes out of the same spirit, they will survive as art - 'they are both ideal expressions of the age, and as free from the disease which corrupted it, as Goethe himself was free from the weakness of his contemporaries' (p.131). The trouble with the theory as a critical tool, of course, is that we rely on largely subjective judgements to tell us what is falsism and what idealism in the good sense. It is again, as with so much positivist doctrine, an over-simple notion of the division between real and non-real which makes the theory unsatisfactory. As Richard Stang says, once Lewes starts to talk about selection of typical elements and of highest and most affecting forms, he is in danger of moving from a realist towards an idealist position: 'If the implications of such statements are developed fully, one would end up in the camp of the idealists'.[144]

The proximity of these theories to specifically religious notions is revealed by Lewes's description in "Realism in art" of Raphael's "Madonna di San Sisto", a 'perfect epitome' to illustrate the true idealism which is realism with an added dimension. The Christ-child

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144. R. Stang, The theory of the novel in England, p.175. See ch.3, p. 153 , above.

in the picture shows 'the intensest realism of presentation, with the highest idealism of conception' - the child is a real child, but there is in his features an 'indefinable something' (a phrase which encapsulates the weakness of the theory) which marks him off as divine.[145] Raphael's genius has found and represented the ideal in the real, the divine in the human, and Goethe's genius does the same - 'He animated the universe with God; he animated fact with divine life; he saw in Reality the incarnation of the Ideal....he saw in Art the highest representation of Life' (Life, p.52). Lewes rightly sees a fundamental monism (though he is not using that terminology at this time), running through all the various aspects of Goethe's temperament and activity, and unlike Carlyle he has no deep-seated temperamental Manicheanism, no sense of the power of evil or the distance of man from God, to prevent him from properly understanding Goethe's more optimistic tendency of mind. Lewes's own anti-Manichean optimism is expressed when he speaks of the child Goethe after the Lisbon earthquake, his doubts temporarily inducing a sense of God as a wrathful Old Testament deity - that sense could not remain for long in a 'deeply reflective mind' under the influence of 'modern culture , which teaches that Evil is essentially a narrow finite thing, thrown into obscurity on any comprehensive view of the Universe; and that the amount of evil massed together from every quarter must be held as small compared with the broad beneficence of Nature' (pp.22-23). Nature is broadly beneficent because it is the expression of a beneficent God. In the Comte articles Lewes spoke of his own 'dynamic' conception of the

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145. "Realism in art," pp.493-494.

universe, citing Goethe and Spinoza as authorities for such a conception,[146] and in the Life of Goethe the dynamic conception appears again, as the substance of Goethe's 'poetical Pantheism', a modified inheritance from Spinoza: 'the whole universe was conceived as divine; not as a lifeless mass, but as the living manifestation of Divine Energy ever flowing forth into activity.... The world was not made, once and for ever, as a thing completed, and afterwards serenely contemplated. The world is still amaking' (p.520). Goethe's God is immanent, not transcendent, the 'divine life' which is to be found in 'fact' as we actually experience it: 'In his conception of the universe he could not separate God from it, placing Him above it, beyond it, as the philosophers did who represented God whirling the universe round His finger, "seeing it go"' (p.52).

Goethe's labours in science and art are thus in a sense expressions of an all-embracing religious faith. In both spheres he shows that reverence for the real, the concrete, the living, which is characteristic of the man for whom the real universe is the expression of God. His notion in science of a unity of pattern running through all nature, and his ability in art to represent the real in its ideal, essential form, show this reverence in more direct ways - not only is he instinctively drawn to facts, but facts ultimately reveal to him wholeness, harmony, divinity. Not only the science and the art, but also the moral qualities and notions can be linked with religious ideas. Lewes's third article of faith, that God reveals himself pre-eminently in the human affections, the social emotions,

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146. See p.202, above.

is of course represented as held and acted on by Goethe, as I have partly shown in my discussion of the goodness and humanity which Lewes finds in Goethe's life and works. The religion of humanity is only part of a larger religion which sees God in all creation, and Lewes presents Goethe as a devotee of both: 'His worship was Nature worship, his moral system an idealisation of Humanity. The human being was the highest manifestation of the Divine on earth, and the highest manifestation of Humanity was therefore the ideal to which morality tended' (p.521). The human ideal is to be attained, or striven towards, by living the moral life which Goethe recommended and himself lived - the life which goes on from renunciation, a limiting of oneself to the possible, to self-sacrifice and the giving up of claims for others.[147] Self-sacrifice is a distinctively Christian principle on which, as I have suggested, Lewes puts rather more emphasis in general than Goethe would, though of course passages can be found (Lewes quotes one just after my last extract) where he expresses reverence for the principle, which he was also undoubtedly capable of practising. Lewes does, however, also speak of the Hellenic, non-Christian bearings of Goethe's idealisation of humanity. He describes as Hellenic Goethe's belief that 'Human nature was...a holy fact, and man's body a temple of holiness' (p.520), and when comparing Goethe to Schiller he sees their ideas, their respective realism and idealism, as corresponding to the outward resemblance of their features to a Greek ideal and a Christian ideal. Schiller was 'always pining for something greater than Nature, wishing to make men Demigods', while Goethe was 'always

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147. See p. 238 , above.

striving to let Nature have free development, and produce the highest forms of Humanity' (pp.380-82).

Goethe seems a Greek ideal, both physically and intellectually, when compared with Schiller, but Lewes is careful to make clear that the contrast between the two is only a relative one. Goethe was not a realist, or a Hellenic type, pure and simple. As we have seen, Lewes repeatedly emphasises that even when Goethe writes in a classical mode, the sentiment is always modern and German. The Goethean belief which Lewes does label Hellenic is, in effect, a denial of the fall of man, a claim that humanity is good and holy and capable of being so without the aid of a grace sent from a separate God. It is an optimistic view, and perhaps it is optimism above all which Lewes has in common with Goethe, the idea that the facts of nature and of human nature will take us straight to the divine without anything extraordinary or supernatural happening in between. Certainly Lewes is able to understand this calm optimism better than can the explosive and ultimately pessimistic Carlyle. The Life of Goethe is itself an exercise in the expanded realism which Lewes finds in Goethe's art and recommends to other artists. Lewes strains himself to see Goethe as he really was, to respond to his life and works as facts of nature, but by finding and representing the essence of his subject, he also idealises in the right way, because Goethe is reality in one of its highest and most affecting forms - 'his life, amid all its weaknesses and all its errors, presents a picture of a certain grandeur of soul, which cannot be contemplated unmoved' (p.2).

The later Lewes and conclusion

After 1855 (apart from revising the Life for the second edition of 1864), Lewes concerned himself little with Goethe. As James Sully suggests,[148] he was chiefly occupied from the mid 1850s with science, and later with the philosophy of science. The important works are three popular (but also serious and rigorous) scientific studies - Seaside studies (1858), The physiology of common life (1859-1860), and Studies in animal life (1862), - the more philosophical Aristotle, a chapter from the history of sciences (1864), and finally the three massive Series of Problems of life and mind (1874-79), a broadly positivist philosophical examination of problems concerning psychology and the other sciences. Apart from reviews, which he continued to write though with decreasing frequency, and the not particularly successful attempt to establish a theory of literary excellence in "Principles of Success in Literature", Lewes did not write on literary topics after the Life of Goethe, no doubt partly influenced by the accelerating success of George Eliot. Like Carlyle, he turned away from literature, and from Goethe (though like Carlyle he continued to refer to him with reverence), to other things after a certain point. Lewes's intellectual progress was, however, unlike Carlyle's in that there was no turning away from art towards a concern with immediate social problems which art could not deal with. Lewes followed a steadier and more even course, and what he is doing in Problems of life and mind follows on clearly from what he was doing in the Life of Goethe.

Lewes's scientific and philosophical works continue to show that

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148. See p.194, above.

combination of anti-metaphysical attachment to realities and desire for unifying, all-embracing theories which he found in Goethe's science and, in a different sense, in his art (the combination is, of course, characteristic first and foremost of Comte's positivist doctrine, always the master-influence on Lewes though his doubts about the political parts of Comte's work continued to increase). In the First Series of Problems of life and mind, sub-titled The foundations of a creed, Lewes elaborates 'Reasoned Realism', which is 'the doctrine of this work'. The doctrine is called 'Realism, because it affirms the reality of what is given in Feeling; and Reasoned Realism, because it justifies that affirmation through an investigation of the grounds and processes of Philosophy, when Philosophy explains the facts given in Feeling'. Part of this investigating of the processes of philosophy is a comment on the way reason tends to distrust the logic of feeling and to rely too heavily on the logic of signs, and here we can see a philosophical extension of Lewes's aesthetic objection to symbolism in art. What reasoned realism essentially asserts is that the logic of feeling must be the only true logic, because felt reality is the only reality we know - such non-felt realities as the logic of signs might propose simply have no existence for us, and the notion of noumena as opposed to phenomena, of the Ding an sich, is not worth considering.[149] Such a reliance on felt reality in forming philosophical theories does not, however, entail a fragmented idea of the universe. Lewes is deeply convinced, like Goethe, that there is a unity and continuity

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149. Problems of life and mind, First Series, 2 vols.(1874-1875), i .176-183 (sections 74-82).

behind all phenomena, however separate and disparate they may seem. At the end of the Foundations of a creed, the philosophical introduction to his psychological theories, Lewes states his basic intention in the work as the 'unification of all the modes of Existence', and as an illustration of the kind of connections he will be making, suggests a familiar-looking pyramid of phenomena with the phenomena of high human morality at the apex: 'we have every ground for believing that Conscience is evolved from Sensation, and that Moral Ideals are evolved from Appetites; and thus we connect the highest mental phenomena with vital Sensibility, Sensibility with molecular changes in the organism, and these with changes in the Cosmos'.[150] The phenomena of consciousness have a physiological, and hence a chemical basis, and so there is no real distinction between consciousness and existence, or, in broader terms, between subject and object. As Lewes argues that part of his doctrine, he significantly enlists Goethe on the side of his monistic viewpoint, quoting from the poem "Epirrhema":

> Nichts ist drinnen, Nichts ist draussen,
> Denn was innen, das ist aussen,
> So ergreifet ohne Säumniss,
> Heilig öffentlich Geheimniss. (151)

On the testimony of his contemporaries, James Sully and the positivist Frederic Harrison, Lewes was not so much an original thinker in science as an extremely good expositor and filler-out of ideas that were mostly already current. Sully sees Lewes's hypothesis, presented in both The physiology of common life and Problems of life and mind,

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150. Problems, First Series, ii. 504 (section 62).

151. Problems, First Series, i. 194 (section 90); Goethe, "Epirrhema," Hamburger Ausgabe, i. 358. The spelling and punctuation given here are Lewes's.

that all nervous structures have the same fundamental properties - another instance of a Goethean search for unity of pattern - as his most considerable individual contribution, but says that what he does best is presenting new aspects of old problems, emphasising neglected truths, and working out half-perceived principles.[152] Frederic Harrison, in a review of Foundations of a creed, speaks very highly (as does Sully) of the work, but makes it clear that much of what Lewes says has been anticipated by Herbert Spencer and by Harrison himself - Lewes's reasoned realism, for instance, is not unlike Spencer's transfigured realism.[153] The danger for Lewes, with his highly ambitious philosophical aims, was that his statements would be regarded by thinkers more exclusively scientific than himself as dubious where they were not self-evident, and for all the high and obviously genuine respect in the remarks of Sully and Harrison, that is more or less the impression one gets from them. The Introduction to Foundations of a creed is an extraordinary manifesto in which Lewes expresses his intention of taking positivism further than Comte did. Instead of rejecting and ignoring metaphysical problems, as Comte did and as Lewes himself used to, he will show how even metaphysical problems can be solved by the positive, scientific method. The intellectual world at the moment is in a state of deep unrest because science is regarded as separate from other modes of thinking, and particularly from our religious conceptions. Though Lewes wants to avoid Comte's mistake of attempting to legislate

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152. J. Sully, "George Henry Lewes," pp.370, 374-375.

153. F. Harrison, "Mr. Lewes's Problems of life and mind," Fortnightly Review, xxii (1874), pp.89,97.

for the future,[154] he believes that the unrest can be cured by a rigorous application of positive method to all problems, and that ultimately man can have a religion, a creed, which, instead of resting on incredibilities and proclaiming the intrinsic worthlessness of man, will be founded on science and (the anti-manichean optimism taking us back to Lewes's idea of Goethe) 'proclaim the supreme importance of this life, the supreme value of human love, and the grandeur of human intellect'.[155] What Frederic Harrison says about Lewes's inroads into metaphysical problems is that they are unlikely to satisfy the metaphysician, because Lewes actually only offers part solutions, and, effectively preaching to the converted, still leaves to the metaphysician the most dimly alluring parts of his problems - 'That which Mr. Lewes tells him to throw away as so much offal, is his choice bit'.[156] Similarly, Sully denies the possibility of a "scientific monism" such as Lewes wants when he attempts to reduce the concomitance of feeling and nervous change to a case of "twofold aspect" - such a reduction, and such a monism, is a metaphysical and not a scientific matter, and again the scientist finds Lewes's attempt to unite science and metaphysics unsatisfactory.[157]

The extent to which Lewes's ideas on the philosophy of science are clearly continuous with his ideas about Goethe tends to make

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154. See Lewes, "Comte and Mill," Fortnightly Review, vi (1866), pp.396-397.

155. Problems, First Series, i. 1-6.

156. Harrison (note 153, above), p.95.

157. J. Sully, "Problems of life and mind," The Academy, xvii (1880), p.309.

one suspicious of him as a critic of Goethe. To a degree, obviously, it is true that in his writings about Goethe, for all his insistence on scientific objectivity, his eye is only partly on his object and partly on his own ideas as they develop through his examination of the object. I have indicated the kind of distortions, or at least critical shortcomings, which this state of affairs leads to. Because Lewes is a more rigid aesthetic realist than Goethe, he cannot do full justice to the more abstruse parts of Goethe's output - even more than in Problems of life and mind, he leaves to the metaphysician (or 'philosophical critic') the metaphysician's choice bit. Because morality has such a dominant role in all his thinking (in the Spinoza article of 1866 he insists that 'no rational system can be constructed which does not conform itself to the highest prevalent conceptions of the moral law'),[158] he tends to over-emphasise the moral element in the works and life of the less morally pre-occupied Goethe. He is also strongly influenced, as a thinker in general but particularly as a critic of Goethe, by Carlyle, and takes over into his idea of Goethe some of Carlyle's over-awareness of earnest, anti-Epicurean laboriousness and self-mastery as aspects of Goethe's temperament and achievement. Nevertheless, Lewes has a much stronger claim to an authentic community of spirit with Goethe than Carlyle has, and for that reason - given that both Lewes's and Carlyle's ideas of Goethe are conditioned to quite a large extent by their own temperaments and intellectual tendencies - he gives, by and large, a more accurate idea of what Goethe was like to the British reader than Carlyle did. As Frederic

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158. "Spinoza," p.399.

Harrison said, Lewes's over-riding intellectual concern was with 'the great and burning question of our time, the contrast between Spiritualism and Materialism'.[159] Carlyle's over-riding concern was, essentially, the same, but the suggestions Lewes made towards a possible reconciliation of the two, through a rigorous but not reductive realism in all spheres, were much more congruent with the intellectual traditions in which Goethe belonged than was anything proposed by Carlyle.

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159. F. Harrison, "Obituary. G.H. Lewes," The Academy, xiv (1878), p.543.

Chapter Five

THE MID-CENTURY AGAINST GOETHE: 1846-1865

The publication of Lewes's Life of Goethe in 1855 was well timed. The book, according to Lewes, sold nine hundred copies in the first six weeks[1], and it was reviewed, often at great length, in virtually all the British periodicals of the time. British interest in Goethe, as manifested in periodical articles, in translations, and in other publications, remained at a high level throughout this period. Morgan and Hohlfeld's statistical chart of the number of items about German authors in British periodicals by decades from 1750 to 1860 shows a slight drop from the 1830s to the 1840s in the number of articles about Goethe, but then another increase from the 40s to the 50s.[2] B.Q. Morgan's similar chart of numbers of translations from the German (this chart, though, goes beyond 1860) shows consistently high numbers of Goethe translations through the 1840s and 1850s (though here we have a drop in the 50s, from 69 to 57), followed by a considerable drop in the 1860s, but then a recovery to higher levels than had ever been reached before in the 1870s and 80s.[3] What these statistics show is that the flurry

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1. "GHL to John Stuart Blackie," 19 December 1855, George Eliot letters, viii. 147.

2. Morgan and Hohlfeld, p.78.

3. Morgan, p.15.

of interest aroused in Britain by Goethe's death and by the noisy championship of Carlyle did not, as one might perhaps have expected, give way to apathy in the following decades. As many contemporary writers indicate, Goethe never became a popular writer in Britain in the way Schiller to some extent did, but he continued to be much discussed, to be regarded as a phenomenon of considerable importance to the nineteenth century. A writer in the Westminster Review in 1851 claimed that Goethe's 'personal influence' as 'a man, and a spiritual presence in the world', had 'increased, rather than diminished, since his death'.[4] The People's and Howitt's Journal published in 1850 a translated extract from a French study of the Spanish drama by Philarète Chasles, in which Chasles, comparing Goethe's Faust to Calderón's El Magico Prodigioso, says that 'Goethe's genius belongs to 1850, although he may have lived in 1750'.[5] These views were by no means universally held, but there is a general feeling, even with Goethe's adverse critics, that he, or at least the issues he raises, is of great contemporary significance. Lewes, as many of his reviewers testify, satisfied a widely-felt need for accurate and comprehensive information about a figure so important and so patchily known, and Lewes's Life in turn stimulated more interest and discussion.

Carl Dawson, in a recent book about English literature in the year 1850, comments that Goethe was 'very much in the air' in Britain in that year, and that hence people would be expected to see the connection between Clough's "Dipsychus" and Goethe's Faust.[6] The statement

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4. "Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret," Westminster Review, liv (1851), p.536.

5. "The Spanish Faust," People's and Howitt's Journal, new series, iii (1850), p.320.

6. C.Dawson, Victorian noon: English literature in 1850 (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979), p.90.

is undoubtedly true. The assertions of contemporary writers about German literature, though they may exaggerate somewhat, indicate a general sense that, as Rosemary Ashton says at the end of her thesis, English culture had come to include modern German culture after the efforts of early importers like Coleridge, Lockhart, De Quincey and Carlyle.[7] Herman Merivale, in 1850, claims that even Englishmen who have read no Goethe will have absorbed his ideas via English writers. 'Line upon line, precept upon precept, his writings have forced their way into our own literature, and he is as much one of the fathers of the present educated generation of Englishmen as our own Gibbon, or Johnson, or Wordsworth'.[8] A reviewer of Goethe's correspondence with Reinhard (a German publication in German), in the Athenaeum and also in 1850, suggests that a study of Goethe and perhaps also of the German language (the only English versions of Goethe's correspondence extant at the time were of Bettina von Arnim's spurious Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde and of the Schiller correspondence) is now a standard part of a liberal education.[9] These statements can be contrasted with J.S.Mill's remark to Carlyle in 1832, speaking of a weak obituary of Goethe in the Examiner: 'So rare in this country is any, even the most common-place, knowledge of Germany, that none of the other papers gave any observations at all on the extinction of the greatest man then living in Europe'.[10] Mrs. Gaskell's learned provincial eccentric Mr.Holbrook, in Cranford (1853), supposedly quotes Goethe in translation (though he pronounces the name 'strictly in accordance with

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7. Ashton, Ph.D. thesis, pp.373-376.

8. H.Merivale, "Göthe's festival," Edinburgh Review, xcii (1850), p.192.

9. "Correspondence between Goethe and Reinhard, from 1807 to 1832," The Athenaeum, xxiii (1850), p.1272.

10. "To Thomas Carlyle," 29 May 1832 (letter 51), The earlier letters of John Stuart Mill 1812-1848, Collected works of John Stuart Mill, general ed. F.E.L. Priestley (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1963-), xii.105.

the English sound of the letters'), and the narrator, Mary Smith (who presumably knows the correctpronunciation) seems to find nothing odd in the presence of the German poet along with Shakespeare, Herbert, Byron, and Tennyson, in Mr.Holbrook's impressive repertoire of quotations[11]. Goethe, a relatively modern genius of ever-rising reputation whose name was likely to be found in virtually any magazine one opened, was very much more of a cultural presence to the mid-Victorians than he is to British people now.

The extent to which the 'average' educated Englishman would be expected to know the German language at this time is difficult to ascertain. Thomas Arnold introduced an hour per week of German language tuition in the Upper School at Rugby in 1835,[12] but Arnold,led by his work on Roman history to detailed study of Niebuhr, was perhaps untypical in his pre-occupation with the importance of German. Credentials presented on the title pages of two volumes meant to aid the English learner of German tell us of some other institutions which, some years later, were employing people to teach the language. M.Behr, editor in 1850 of a German text of Iphigenie with notes and vocabulary, 'arranged for the use of the German student', describes himself as 'Professor of the German language and literature at Winchester College'.[13] G.G.Zerffi, a writer on history and art of some merit, who was born and brought up in Hungary but settled in England from 1849, produced a similar edition of Faust part one in 1859. He also is a 'Professor of the German language and literature', and at an intriguing variety of institutions - the Royal Medical College, Westbourne College, Bayswater, the Metropolitan

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11. E.Gaskell, Cranford (London: Oxford Univ.Press, 1972), p.32 (ch.4, "A visit to an old bachelor").

12. See J.Simpson, Matthew Arnold and Goethe (1979), p.13.

13. Goethe's Iphigenie auf Tauris, ed. M.Behr (1850), title page.

evening classes for young men at Crosby Hall, and The Elms and Park House Ladies' Colleges.[14] The impression one gets from this list is that such Professors were greatly in demand by 1859, at least in London, though Zerffi's duties at each of these colleges were presumably not very heavy. Diana and Mary Rivers in Jane Eyre (1847) struggle away, with the help of a dictionary, at the "crabbed but glorious Deutsch" of Schiller's Die Räuber, with the idea that they will be able to teach the "elements" of German in the future and earn themselves more money than they are doing now.[15] The Literary Gazette reviewer of 1853 who says that 'Every schoolgirl has become familiar with the [German] language'[16] is clearly exaggerating, but it can safely be assumed that by the 1850s such familiarity was by no means an uncommon accomplishment. When Carlyle learnt German in 1819, he was taking a somewhat eccentric step to satisfy some private curiosities and hopes.[17] For thorough-going intellectuals coming to maturity in the mid-century, such as George Eliot, Froude, Clough, or Matthew Arnold, learning German was absolutely mandatory,[18] and large numbers of less intellectual mid-

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14. Goethe's Faust, ed. G.G.Zerffi (1859), title page.

15. C.Brontë, Jane Eyre (Oxford: Oxford Univ.Press, 1969), pp.424-426 (vol. 3 ch.2).

16. "The poems of Goethe," Literary Gazette, xxxv (1853), p.449.

17. See ch.1, pp.14-15, above.

18. George Eliot's Will Ladislaw, a less than thorough-going intellectual of the 1820s, tells Dorothea that "the Germans have taken the lead in historical inquiries", and indicates that a knowledge of German would diminish both the laboriousness and the futility of Casaubon's work on the "Key to all mythologies" - Middlemarch, Illustrated Copyright edition, 3 vols. (1908-1911), i.318-319, 338-340 (book 2, chs.21 and 22).

Victorians were doing so as well, either voluntarily or because their parents, governesses, or schoolmasters thought they ought to.

English translations of Goethe's works, however, continued to pour out. There was never any danger that more widespread knowledge of German would make the translations obsolete, and as more Englishmen learned German, more tried out their skill in translations of Goethe, usually of Faust part one. In 1847, the year when Matthew Arnold probably purchased the complete works of Goethe in German,[19] Henry George Bohn was beginning his series of cheap reprints of standard works, Bohn's Standard Library. Bohn was an extremely successful publisher and bookseller, born in London in 1796, the year after his father, also a bookseller, left his native Germany and settled in England. The Standard Library, described in its Prospectus as 'undertaken with the view of presenting to the educated public, works of a deservedly established character, accurately printed in an elegant form, without abridgement, and at the lowest possible price that can remunerate the Publisher' (the price in 1848 was 3/6d a volume),[20] came to include a fourteen-volume set of Goethe's works in translation, started in 1848 and completed in 1890,[21] though most of the popular and important works appeared quickly, and well within the period I am dealing with. Bohn was a reputable publisher who employed competent translators, and the translations of Goethe which he used nearly all receive approval in B.Q.Morgan's Critical Bibliography. Bohn's Goethe is not entirely

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19. See Simpson, p.20.

20. Prospectus of Bohn's Standard Library, attached inside front cover of The auto-biography of Goethe, translated by J.Oxenford (1848).

21. See Morgan, p.149, for details.

complete, but it covers all the standard works and much more, and no comparable set of translations of Goethe, either for comprehensiveness or for quality, has been produced since. A recent sumptuous edition of Dichtung und Wahrheit in translation turns out to be a reprint with very few alterations of John Oxenford's Bohn translation of 1848.[22] With the Bohn translations, Lewes's Life, and later, in 1859, Aytoun and Martin's on the whole successful translation of selected lyric poems, facilities for the non-German-speaking reader of Goethe became very good during this period, having been virtually non-existent as recently as the early 1820s. Lucretia van Tuyl Simmons, writing in 1919, regretted that the most complete set of translations of Goethe's lyric poems, produced by Edgar Alfred Bowring in 1853 (and later incorporated in Bohn's Goethe), was so inadequate as translation, and hence that a large proportion of Goethe's greatest work had remained effectively inaccessible to those without German,[23] but experience right up to the present has left the impression that it is quite impossible to convey accurately both the substance and the spirit of these poems in translation, and that the best solution may be that adopted by Penguin Books, who give the German text followed by a concise prose translation.[24]

Increasing knowledge of Goethe brought, on the whole, increasing respect. Very few writers from the early 1830s onwards would have denied Goethe's literary genius, and by the 1840s most were prepared to grant him some kind of wisdom, of intellectual stature, as well. Goethe's name is linked with Shakespeare's strikingly often in the review articles of the mid-century, and one of the articles I shall be

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22. The autobiography of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, translated by J. Oxenford, with an introduction by K.J.Weintraub, 2 vols. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

23. L.van Tuyl Simmons, Goethe's lyric poems in English translation prior to 1860 (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1919), pp.56-64.

24. Goethe: selected verse, ed. D.Luke (Harmondsworth: Penguin Poets, 1964).

considering, by David Masson, is actually called "Shakespeare and Goëthe". In some of these cases, of course, Goethe is being compared unfavourably with Shakespeare, but even then the fact that such a comparison is entertained indicates the height to which Goethe's status is ascending. It should be remembered that in 1824 the neophyte Carlyle only tentatively reported the notion, becoming current in Germany, that Goethe was to be ranked with Shakespeare and Homer, and that De Quincey dismissed the idea with utter scorn.[25] Respect had become almost universal by the middle of the 1840s, but respect did not necessarily mean approval or liking. Periodical criticism of Goethe continues to be lively and revealing through the mid-century because he is treated not simply as a great artist but as an important phenomenon, and his importance is defined in negative as well as in positive terms. The historian W.L.Burn, in The age of equipoise: a study of the mid-Victorian generation (1964), expresses the view, now standard among historians, that the 1850s and 1860s in England were on the whole, as contrasted with the more urgent, feverish, "romantic" 1830s and 1840s, characterised by stability and equanimity - Englishmen had discovered that 'a high degree of contentment could be obtained without the attainment of all that one had once hoped for and that life was tolerable, despite the advent of much that one had feared'.[26] This view would seem in general to be supported by the character of English Goethe-criticism in the later period as contrasted with the earlier, though in any case, irrespective of other historical circumstances, one might have expected such a contrast in criticism of an author who passes from being a novelty

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25. See ch.2, pp. 57 , 68 , above.

26. W.L.Burn, The age of equipoise: a study of the mid-Victorian generation (1964), p.87.

with possibly exciting, possibly dangerous characteristics, to being an established modern classic - the mere passing of time is likely to bring calmer, more balanced appraisals. The debate about Goethe's standing, both artistic and moral, is mostly a less heated one in the 1850s than in the 1830s but it is still definitely a debate. Carlyle had succeeded, as S.S.Prawer puts it, in turning Goethe into 'one of the great Victorian culture-heroes',[27] and as I have indicated, G.H.Lewes, though he looks and in some ways is more balanced and objective, effectively presentsa figure just as massively and crucially heroic if somewhat different in outline. Culture-heroes necessarily embody messages for the times, and moreover, to many critics, they bear heavy responsibilities by virtue of the talents that have been entrusted to them. Approval or disapproval of Goethe remains for many writers in the mid-century a very weighty matter indeed.

It is convenient to divide the writers about Goethe in this period into those against and those for Goethe, because although in terms of sheer numbers of articles and other items the favourable critics outweigh the unfavourable, the hostile critics tend to write more interesting and thoughtful criticism. It is a sign of the increasingly solid reputation of Goethe in England in the mid-century that the more serious anti-Goethe-ites generally write as if the onus were on them to prove their point - the position is in a sense, though not straightfowardly or entirely, the reverse of what it was when Carlyle was writing his Goethe-articles in the 1820s and early 1830s. A division of the material along the lines of chapters two and three above would be less convenient, because there is comparatively little reviewing of individual works in this period - the works, at least the major ones, were no longer novelties

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27. S.S.Prawer, "Impregnating the Victorian mind" (review of Ashton, The German idea), Times Literary Supplement, 20 June 1980, p.693.

to be introduced to the British reader, and critics were much more interested in giving general assessments of Goethe. Both positive and negative critics, of course, often have reservations which qualify their general verdict, but the occurrence of genuinely mixed opinions is rare. Goethe is a phenomenon, a Thing, and most critics make it quite clear whether they regard him as a Good Thing or not.

The English Review and the late 1840s

If Goethe's greatness is accepted, his unsoundness, if he is seen as unsound, makes him potentially very dangerous to society. In 1848, the year of the alarming revolutionary eruptions in France and Germany, the strongly Conservative English Review published an article called 'The German Mind", nominally a review of works by Gervinus, Hegel, Lessing, Goethe (the Works in German), Gutzkow, and Strauss, but in fact a meditation on recent intellectual developments in Germany and how they have contributed to the 'late catastrophe' there (p.377), with much emphasis on the part played by Goethe.[28] The author is a high Tory of an extreme and bigoted sort, but intelligent and clearly very well read in German literature even of the most "progressive" kind. What is particularly interesting in this article is how close its criticisms of Goethe are, both in detail and in general drift, to those made by essentially liberal-minded(in politics and in religion) critics like Herman Merivale, Sarah Austin, and Richard Holt Hutton. The positive ideals are different, but the sense of what is negative and destructive

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28. 'The German mind," English Review, x (1848), pp.357-389.

in Goethe is very similar. The fundamental idea, with these four critics and with many others, is that in Goethe supreme talents have gone to waste, that having started with exceptional advantages he has developed disastrously wrongly. This writer sees the wrong development as quite specifically important historically. Germany, weak at the centre since the Reformation because of the thin and watery quality of its national religion, Lutheranism (Anglicanism, it seems, with its 'combination of Catholic spirituality with scriptural reality and earnestness' which can 'at once satisfy both mind and heart', is the only acceptable modern form of Christianity - p.367) had been sliding inexorably towards democracy and rationalism, the two closely related dissolvers of society, through the eighteenth century. Goethe came to maturity at a crucial time, joining a national intellectual awakening which so far was fundamentally un-Christian because of the weakness of the national religon, but which Goethe could have transformed - 'one master-spirit arose, on whom a dread responsibility must ever rest: who might have saved his countrymen from the abyss of infidelity, had he turned in faith to his God' (p.366). Goethe went in the wrong direction, towards Pantheism and Epicureanism, and Germany continued to slide and is now 'rotten almost to the core, and cannot be saved, we fear, from the consuming fire of civil anarchy' (p.376). Goethe's political views were surprisingly sound, but sound for the wrong reasons and therefore useless to the nation-true religion and right politics must be hand-in-hand, the joint expressions of 'that principle of reverence for order and degree, on which the scheme of the visible universe may be said to be founded' (p.359). Goethe's political views seem to have been favourable to absolutism, but these views 'had little influence on his nation, which rightly attributed their existence to that egotism which sought for nothing beyond its own

personal satisfaction' (p.370).

Carlyle, Lewes , and many other writers about Goethe, place a lot of emphasis on what can be conveniently spoken of as 'adolescence' (though in fact the process is imagined as taking place at any stage between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five) - the time in a man's life when he struggles through doubt and confusion to achieve an adult stability.[29] With Carlyle, a parallel is implicitly drawn between the adolescent state in individuals and similar confused self-conscious states in societies.[30] This English Review writer makes the same link more explicitly and crudely - the adolescent Goethe wavers between various possible beliefs and ways of life, and the adolescent Germany wavers with her future master-spirit. In order to be able to blame Goethe as much as possible, the author presents a very curious version of his adolescence, in which he is seen as fully in control of his development at every stage, and deliberately, out of a fundamental badness of heart, going the wrong way at each turning. Cold Lutheranism made it difficult for the adolescent German of this time to embrace Christianity as he should, but Goethe was a superior spirit who, as his writings show, was well aware of the beauty of Christianity and the weighty arguments for its truth, who was able to avoid the snares of rationalist German philosophy and should have been able to see the falseness of the syllogisms of Pantheism, but who chose otherwise: 'nevertheless he willed (he has not told us wherefore) to reject Christianity altogether' (pp.366-370). The author makes his own guess as to the wherefore: Goethe, congenitally egotistical,

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29. See ch.1, pp.18-19, above.

30. See ch.1, pp.28-29, above.

is 'too comfortable, too "bequem" for Christianity: too easy, too cosy, too selfish, too Goetheian [sic]. Repentance, he says, is a bore, and sorrow for past errors is altogether needless, because it cannot recall what has been' (p.369). Having rejected Christianity, Goethe naturally turned into a 'confirmed and selfish sensualist' who sports with the 'holiest affections', seeks only his own gratification, uses his great powers without any sense of the responsibilities they impose, and subtly undermines both the faith and the morality of his countrymen (and, potentially, 'superior minds' everywhere) with his 'quiet sneers', so much more powerful than the direct anti-Christianity of Voltaire (pp.369, 357-358). Goethe eventually, and Schiller likewise, embraced a morality 'such as a Pagan writer of the fourth century might have been supposed to draw, who had become familiar with Christian virtue, and adorned his own philosphy with its semblance'. The morality, not being founded on revealed religion, is pernicious, and so is the Pantheistic religious faith which Goethe finally settled for (pp.371, 369-370).

These views are extreme, and present some amusing logical oddities. In effect, the complaint is that Goethe was not Christian enough to see that it was his plain duty to become a Christian. Many of the assumptions behind this article, however, are held in common with more flexible British Goethe-critics of all political and religious shades. Great mental powers should be used for great social purposes - Carlyle, though he had nothing specific in mind, thought Goethe's works could be the foundation of a new social edifice, and a radical reviewer in the Manchester Literary Times, also writing in 1848 and as far removed politically from the English Review as he could be, holds Goethe up as a negative example, a great genius whose

'moral influence might have done more towards the emancipation of his country from its aristocratic trammels', but who passed his life instead in 'comparative slumber'.[31] There is a crucial turning point early in every man's life, and the direction taken there determines the moral and spiritual quality of the life - Carlyle and Lewes both see Goethe forcefully putting doubt and unrest behind him and settling to cheerful hard work, and a writer in Sharpe's London Magazine in 1849, unhappy like the English Review with the course that was taken though not in so specific a way, sees the 'natural and unselfish emotions of a youthful heart' giving way to the inexorable and unscrupulous forward surge of the 'mighty man of genius'.[32] It is an offence to be an intellectual anachronism, and there are certain beliefs and values, appropriate to the present time, which every man, especially every great man, ought to hold - John Sterling blamed Goethe at one stage for living a Pagan life at a time when it was man's duty to be Christian,[33] and J.S.Mill, though his comment is not a moral one, remarks on the futility of Goethe's attempt to make himself an Ancient Greek in modern times, when the thinker has so much more accumulated thought to cope with; Goethe's failure to reproduce in his own works the Greek symmetry he so much admired shows 'the utter impossibility for a modern, with all the good will in the world, to tightlace himself into the dimensions of an ancient.'[34]

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31. "The autobiography of Goethe," Manchester Literary Times, no.5 (1848), p.34.

32. 'E.O.', "The youth of Goethe," Sharpe's London Magazine, viii (1849), p.239.

33. See ch.3,p.158, above.

34. "To Harriet Mill," 24 February 1855 (Letter 224), The later letters of John Stuart Mill 1849-1873, Collected works, xiv. 346.

Behind all of these assumptions, and behind a great deal of nineteenth-century Goethe criticism, is the notion of the agreement or non-agreement of head and heart in the modern world. The writer in the English Review holds up Anglicanism as an ideal because it is a form of religion satisfactory both to the intellect and to the deepest feelings.[35] Goethe could appreciate the intellectual rightness of Christianity, but his idle and egotistical heart held him aloof from what his mind assented to. He thus failed to emerge from 'adolescence' with a proper modern synthesis of head and heart, adopting an anachronistic system of beliefs satisfactory to his own cold feelings but not to any truly modern intellect (the syllogism of the Pantheists is such a transparently poor one), and failing to perform the social duty which he might have performed, that of showing that the greatest intellect of the time endorsed, and shared, religious emotions which all men could feel, but which many thought to be intellectually unacceptable. Carlyle and Lewes, of course, thought Goethe had performed just such a duty, not by endorsing old forms of religion but by showing the possibility of a new form of religious belief and new synthesis of head and heart for the nineteenth century.

Herman Merivale, Edward Kenealy-1850-1854

A.H.Clough complained to Emerson in 1848 that "Carlyle has led us all out into the desert, and he has left us there".[36] The charge is, of course, a somewhat unfair one. If the secure slavery in the land of

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35. See p. 265, above.

36. Reported by E.E.Hale, James Russell Lowell and his friends (Westminster, 1899), p.136.

Egypt which Clough is thinking of is a belief in the old religious truths and moral values, then Carlyle was only one of a number of recent Moseses, - Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, Kant, Hegel, Goethe. Clough, however, was one of those earnest young men at Oxford in the early 1840s, on whom Carlyle exercised such a dominating influence,[37] and Carlyle's writings certainly are conspicuous for the way they cast doubt on the old beliefs and standards and gesture towards a promised land of new ways of thinking and acting without quite making clear where it is or how it can be reached. A writer in the People's and Howitt's Journal in 1850 describes astutely and amusingly the "fix" in which Carlyle has landed so many of his readers - 'Mr.Carlyle is a little apt to frighten us all from our daily work by swearing that we are all wrong, and going post to destruction; and when we, in our bewilderment, implore him to show us a more excellent way, he bids us go back and mind our own business'.[38] Carlyle's most influential book was Sartor Resartus, written at the height of his admiration and gratitude towards Goethe, full of Goethe's praise and of insistence that Goethe should be read - "Close thy Byron; open thy Goethe".[39] Matthew Arnold speaks of Goethe's voice, the greatest of the century, coming to young men of the 1840s through Carlyle.[40] If Carlyle were to be accused of leading the Israelites out and leaving them, the same accusation could be brought against Goethe, or at least against the Goethe whom Carlyle had presented to the British.

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37. See ch.4, p. 168, above.

38. 'Parson Frank', "Thomas Carlyle," People's and Howitt's Journal, new series, iii (1850), p.242.

39. See ch.4, p. 236, above.

40. See ch.4, p.168, above.

Herman Merivale, in perhaps the most powerful and intelligent attack on Goethe in the whole of the period I am studying, makes just this kind of accusation.[41] Merivale's starting-point is the Goethe centenary festival which had been taking place in cities all over Germany in 1849. He has heard reports which suggest that the festival as a whole, an extraordinarily large, elaborate, and expensive affair, was a miserable failure, marked by a series of practical calamities and, more importantly, a total lack of enthusiasm and spontaneity in the people attending (pp.188-190). The explanation Merivale gives for this lack of enthusiasm is that the Germans, taught for years to see Goethe as 'the first practical philosopher of his day - the Liberator of the age from prejudice and barbarism; - the great Teacher, from whom men were to learn how to direct their energies aright, how to achieve that perfect balance or harmony of the faculties and passions in which he placed the supreme good of his system', have experienced his failure to deliver what he seemed to promise. No-one questions his high prowess as an artist, but as to the 'vaunted "world-philosophy" of the accomplished Epicurean' (with epithets like this, and with some other passing remarks, Merivale betrays a deep personal distaste for Goethe which somewhat reduces the effectiveness of an otherwise balanced and closely argued article), that has become as 'vain and wearisome' as the systems it was supposed to replace, and there is a 'painful suspicion' that much of the weakness and degeneracy of the present upper classes in Germany is due to the 'enervating influence' of Goethean

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41. H.Merivale, "Göthe's festival," Edinburgh Review, xcii (1850), pp. 188-220. Merivale re-printed this article, under the title "Voltaire, Rousseau, and Göthe", in his Historical studies (1865), pp.130-185. A note at the bottom of p.130 speaks of Lewes's 'masterly' life of Goethe, which has 'had a great effect in forming and modifying English opinion respecting him'. 'after reflection', however, Merivale has decided that his own views are still worth re-publishing.

doctrines (pp.190-191). Merivale is all in favour of the idea of the hero as man of letters, and at the very end of his article delineates his ideal: we should wait for one who will speak 'with authority' (Jesus Christ, who taught 'as one having authority, and not as the scribes'[42], is recalled here, and we are reminded of Carlyle's explicit linking of Goethe and Christ[43]), collecting 'all that is true in modern moral philosophy' and incorporating it with the idea, the "leading principle", of man's relation to God, creature to creator, subject to sovereign, agent to master (pp.219-220). The English Review's assumptions are here again - genius should serve society, we need a truly modern doctrine that will satisfy head and heart -, and Merivale, the staunch Liberal[44] who sympathises with the revolutionaries of 1848, to whom the Goethe festival will seem especially hollow (p.190), joins the English Review in presenting Goethe as a modern genius who did the reverse of what he should for society, though Merivale argues less extravagantly. Merivale does not write about 'adolescence' here, but seventeen years before, in 1833, he had produced his own rather curious version of how Goethe went wrong on emerging into maturity.[45]

Merivale shows more awareness than does the English Review of the nature of Goethe's seductiveness - the writer in the latter warns English people against falling under influences which had such disastrous effects in Germany (p.387), but his account of Goethe does not give any sense of a serious moral danger. Merivale presents his own idea of a historical

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42. Gospel according to St.Matthew, ch.7, v.29.

43. See ch.1, p.40 , above.

44. See Dictionary of national biography on Merivale, and ch.3, pp.135-136, above.

45. See ch.3, pp.137-140, above.

context for Goethe, connecting him with Voltaire and Rousseau, the two great influences preceding him. Goethe's philosophy of 'the cultivation of self', of the 'refined enjoyment' of the world, was just what the world wanted, having grown tired of Voltaire's 'mechanical Deism' and Rousseau's 'unreal but generous Sentimentalism' - Goethe arrived just when a 'new religion' was required, and preached it most effectively (pp.201, 219). Like Walter Schirmer,[46] Merivale rightly points out that Goethe's literary influence has been slight, and his moral and philosophical influence much greater (p.219)-he has given mankind not only new subjects for thought, but 'new ways of thinking and feeling' (p.192). Goethe is 'the ablest and most successful of modern teachers in the school of Epicurus' (p.209), who has preached a way of life made up of a period of strict self-discipline followed by a tranquil enjoyment of all pleasures sensual and intellectual, a subjecting of all irregular impulses to 'a course of disciplined self-indulgence' (pp. 217-219; 203). The absurdity and baseness of the system can easily be seen, but after reading a lot of Goethe (as Merivale clearly has, though his reading of Goethe's moral message seems still, as in 1833, to be based almost solely on Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre) one tends to be drawn into sympathy by the sheer force and charm of Goethe's artistic genius. Besides, the system is in fact a very clever one which appeals to the pride of self-conquest and of self-devotion to an exclusive priesthood - 'of all false religions, his is the most subtle, the most tempting, the most attractive' (p.217). Goethe does not, as would his own Mephisto, take the crude course of mocking such qualities as purity and enthusiasm, with which he can have no real sympathy (Goethe's friendship with Schiller is a genuine and pleasing one, but Goethe cannot have truly appreciated the lesser genius's highest qualities), but takes the subtler and more attractive line of creating

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46. W.F.Schirmer, Der Einfluss der deutschen Literatur auf die englische im 19. Jahrhundert (Halle, 1947), pp.2-3.

'artificial virtues out of the weaknesses of humanity', canonising 'saints of a new and questionable order' instead of those old saints with their purity and enthusiasm (p.203). Once again, there has been a terrible waste - 'genius of the highest order was never employed in developing a system more seductive to human weakness' (p.219).

Goethe's political indifference, his encouragement of a repressing of 'all political faith whatever', can be rightly objected to according to Merivale (p.215). His worst crimes, however, lie not in teaching aloofness from political movements, but in the effect which his philosophy of 'the deification of Self' has had on 'the interior relations of society, and on the moral progress of man'. He has sapped (perhaps consciously, perhaps not) the foundations of ethical laws which he pretends to reverence, and preached the 'merest irreligion', thinly disguised with some 'Pantheistic colouring' (p.216). Merivale mentions particularly Wilhelm Meister and Die Wahlverwandtschaften, quoting about the latter a statement from Vilmar's Geschichte der deutschen klassischen Literatur - the novel teaches that "subordination to duty is mental disease, obedience to sentiment is mental health" (p.217). Other critics of the time were prepared to go some way with Merivale's moral objections to Goethe's works. Jane Sinnett, reviewing the Bohn translation of Die Wahlverwandtschaften in the Westminster Review in 1854, coolly remarks on the 'disdain which it pleased him [Goethe] to manifest for the simple and irrefragable principles of ethics', but she also finds 'comprehensiveness, depth, and beauty' in the comments on life, art, and poetry which the book contains.[47] The same writer (probably), reviewing a German piece of Goetheana by Düntzer, a member of the 'orthodox church of the Goethe religion', suggests that we should examine Goethe's behaviour to those near him before we grant him, as Düntzer does arguing from the works, 'all the

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47. J.Sinnett, "Goethe's novels and tales," Westminster Review, new series, v (1854), pp.624-625.

qualities of heart that fitted him for the highest degrees of love and friendship'.[48] Already, though, we are moving away from the idea that Goethe and his works represent a moral danger - Merivale's graveness, though by no means unique within this period, begins to look old-fashioned even when compared to the attitudes of other negative Goethe critics. Mrs.Sinnett sees moral deficiency in Goethe's life and works, and so does the poet and essayist William Caldwell Roscoe, who, reviewing the first German edition of Goethe's correspondence with Kestner in the National Review in 1855, sees in Goethe a lack of 'warmth, depth, and permanence of feeling', and a corresponding inability to 'extend his knowledge of the heart through the heart' which partially disables him artistically.[49] Similarly, Walter Bagehot (in remarks which George Eliot, rather surprisingly, thought highly of[50]) sees Goethe as mixing with people but not being of them - this apartness becomes a defect in his works as compared with Shakespeare's or even Scott's.[51] The suggestion, however, with all these comments, is that Goethe himself is the loser, that his moral and emotional defects make him less than complete as a person and as an imaginative writer, not that he undermines others by the attractiveness of his faulty nature.

Another reviewer of Die Wahlverwandtschaften, in the urbane Gentleman's Magazine, goes further still in lack of concern about the moral effect of Goethe's works, saying that it is better to have this work available in translation (as it now is, for the first time) than just contributing to the 'myth' of Goethe through rumour, and that in any case, 'The construction of the story, its utter absurdity and

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48. J.Sinnett (probably), "Pictures of Goethe's friends," Westminster Review, new series, iii (1853), pp.631-632.

49. W.C.Roscoe, "Goethe and Werther," National Review, i (1855), pp.204-205.

50. See "GE to Sara Sophia Hennell," 18 August 1853, George Eliot letters, ii, 115. Neither George Eliot nor the editor of the George Eliot letters shows knowledge of the authorship of these remarks. The article is firmly attributed to Bagehot in vol. iii of the Wellesley Index.

51. W.Bagehot, "Shakespeare," Prospective Review, ix (1853), pp.417-418.

ridiculous moral or immoral puzzles, render it unlikely to seduce any one from the plain paths of duty and of ordinary good-sense'.[52] This novel, indeed, with its story of adulterous passion and its free talk about the nature of the marriage bond, which Henry Crabb Robinson in the 1820s and early 1830s had thought certain to offend the British public,[53] seems actually to have caused very little stir in 1854. Thackeray, in Vanity Fair (1847-1848), had invoked a conventional notion of German slackness in moral matters by showing the fallen Becky Crawley easily finding acceptance in Pumpernickel, in 'a country where Werther is still read, and the Wahlverwandschaften [sic] of Goethe is considered an edifying moral book',[54] but this passing sneer is far removed from Merivale's deep concern over the effect Goethe's works have had on the 'moral progress of man'. In the 1850s as compared with the 1830s moral outrage is less common as a negative reaction to Goethe's works, and limiting comments on Goethe's artistic achievement more so. A reviewer of the Bohn translation of Torquato Tasso, for instance, praises the 'psychological truth' in Goethe's portrayal of Tasso, but does not understand those who rank Goethe '"far north" of Shakspeare's self',[55] the Athenaeum finds no evidence in the wit of the Xenien of Goethe and Schiller to suggest that either would have been 'snapped up for contributors by the editor of the London Punch',[56] and the Literary Gazette, reviewing Bowring's translations of Goethe's lyric poems, finds 'exquisite felicity' in some, but emphasises that not all are gems and some are distinctly worth-

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52. "Novels and tales by Göthe," Gentleman's Magazine, new series, xli (1854), p.399.

53. See ch.2, p. 74 , and ch. 3, p. 106, above.

54. W.M.Thackeray, Vanity Fair (Oxford: Oxford Univ.Press, 1908), p.857 (ch.lxvii, "Which contains births, marriages, and deaths").

55. "Goethe's Tasso," Chambers' Edinburgh Journal, new series, xvi (1851), pp.87-88.

56. "The Xenia of Göthe and Schiller," The Athenaeum, xxv (1852), p.1351.

less.[57] The moral debate about Goethe certainly continues through the mid-century, but the less elaborate criticisms increasingly tend to pass over it.

Merivale becomes linked through his ideas about Goethe to the Toryism of the English Review. He has an even stranger ally in the lawyer-poet Edward Kenealy, whose enormously long and weirdly imaginative poem Goethe: a new pantomime appeared in 1850.[58] Kenealy was born in Cork in 1819, studied at Trinity College Dublin, then moved to London and became a brilliant and successful barrister. His career collapsed in 1873, when he conducted the defence of Orton, the almost certainly fraudulent claimant to the Tichborne estate, so violently - insulting the bench and making groundless imputations against witnesses - that he was disbarred in 1874. In 1875 he was elected Independent M.P. for Stoke-on-Trent, his principal ticket being the innocence of the Tichborne claimant, now a popular issue, but at the next general election in 1880, shortly before his death, he lost the seat. While at Trinity College (1835-1838) he experienced serious religious doubts,[59] and he soon ceased to be a Catholic and indulged in much theosophic speculation. For all his hostility to Goethe, Goethe's works clearly made a deep impression on him. The incomplete "Autobiography" which his daughter Arabella presents as part of her Memoirs has many points in common with Dichtung und Wahrheit - the tone is somewhat similar, there is speculation about the influence of childhood experiences on his adult character, and in particular

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57. "The poems of Goethe," Literary Gazette, xxxv (1853), pp.449-450.

58. E.V.Kenealy, Goethe: a new pantomime (1850).

59. A. Kenealy, Memoirs of Edward Vaughan Kenealy (1908), p.85.

there is a description of his delight in a puppet theatre he was given when aged eleven (pp.35-36, 51). On the other hand, the journal which Arabella Kenealy also quotes from contains remarks like "what a flunkey-soul" and "He does not give one the idea of honesty" occasioned by readings of Dichtung und Wahrheit (pp.206, 191). Both sides of Kenealy's feeling about Goethe come out in the new pantomime. The poem is a loose imitation of Faust, longer than both parts of the original together, with scenes of a corresponding format, with the same use of many different kinds of metre, the same epic scale and multitude of characters, natural and supernatural, with high tragedy similarly neighbouring low humour and contemporary satire. The soul whose fate is being decided is not Faust's but Goethe's own. We start shortly before his death, then follow him through experiences which will lead towards his judgement. Much of the time Goethe is accompanied by the Mephistopheles of Faust, who acts as a commentator. The poem is inspired by Goethe, but it is violently hostile to Goethe - one accusation after another is heaped on him, and there is no doubt at all that Goethe will be damned, until the poet, Cennfaeladh (which is Irish for O'Kenealy[60]), undertakes to save him and does so.

The conception is a very clever one, and there are some ingenious touches in the references back to Goethe's original - at one point Mephistopheles points out Faust himself roasting in hell, contrary to Goethe's fictions (p.264) - but Kenealy is really a rapid versifier rather than a poet, and the pantomime soon becomes tiring with its long-winded bombast. Moreover, eccentric though Kenealy is in other ways,

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60. Ibid., p.28.

and unusually savage though his dramatic denunciations are (Gilbert Waterhouse describes Heine's satirical Doktor Faust, ein Tanzpoem, of 1847, as 'almost a demonstration of pious homage' in comparison[61]), Kenealy's criticism of Goethe in the poem is actually not original at all, and adds very little to the case built up by Menzel, Moir, Merivale, and others. Once again Goethe is the man given exceptional, heavenly genius and failing to use it as he ought - a Spirit tells how his soul was lit with 'immortal Light',

> But the glorious gifts of God
> In the mire of passion he trod (p.13).

Goethe's Guardian Angel laments the change from his glorious, innocent childhood and youth to a manhood devoted to 'the dark Idols of Earth', after a brief struggle with the evil world and with his own passions (pp.32-34). Gretchen, Goethe's early love in Frankfurt (connected, of course, both for Goethe and for Kenealy, with the Gretchen of Faust) figures largely in the poem, as Goethe's love for her is to Ke nealy his only true, unselfish love. Goethe on his death-bed speaks a long elegy about Gretchen, and Gretchen pleads for him, arguing the strength and beauty of their love in his favour, to the Elohim and before a court presided over by Minos, where she succeeds in gaining a reprieve. Goethe, however, is still prone to backsliding after death, as he has been throughout his life. At one stage Mephistopheles shows him a vision of Paris and Helen, but comments that he can always be enticed away by his passions "From the ideal-lovely to the actual" (p.223), and at the end of the first act he seems to be finally damned when he is seduced by the beautiful witch Calypso while Cennfaeladh sings a long Irish ballad (pp.336,341). There is a lot of emphasis on Goethe's political indifference -

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61. G.Waterhouse, "Goethe's Irish enemy: Edward Kenealy," in German studies presented to Leonard Ashley Willoughby (Oxford, 1952),p.207.

Freedom, which is man's birthright,
Ne'er found favour in his sight (p.14)

and on his fawning ambition, a fault which his most hostile British critics usually allow him to be free from. Altogether, Kenealy's fury tends to be rather unfocused. He clearly knows at least Faust and Dichtung und Wahrheit very well, but produces distortions such as the idea that Goethe deserted Gretchen out of social pride (p.108) - there seems little reason to doubt Goethe's own version of the story in Dichtung und Wahrheit, according to which the fifteen-year-old Goethe had little choice in the matter, apart from the fact that Gretchen herself made it clear that she thought of him only as a child. Kenealy is too occupied with his own wild visions and poetic pretensions to produce any interesting comment or interpretation.

Reviewers of Lewes - Sarah Austin, Richard Holt Hutton

Lewes writes in his Life of Goethe as one who is hoping, by presenting common-sense, balanced views based on comprehensive and up-to-date knowledge, to give definitive answers to the moral questions asked about Goethe, and thus put a stop to tedious and ill-informed debate about Goethe's treatment of women, his "coldness", his political indifference. His book may have helped towards the eventual demise of this kind of talk, but in the short term it had the effect of reviving the moral debate and generally stimulating negative opinions of Goethe by challenging them so powerfully - as I have said, Lewes makes fewer

concessions to moralising criticism of Goethe than he claims to be making,[62] and many of his reviewers were able to see the advocate underneath the judicial robes. Tait's Edinburgh Magazine applauds Lewes's achievement, but suggests that while working on Goethe he has been 'somewhat dazzled, somewhat blinded by the fascination of the master-mind, and has given a verdict more lenient and tender than the sober, every day folks of the world, less generously enthusiastic than himself, will be disposed to accept'.[63] The Literary Gazette has rarely read a more 'faithful and lifelike' biography, but complains that Lewes palliates Goethe's treatment of Friederike Brion - this reviewer joins some others in presenting the Sesenheim episode, the most picturesque and touching of the love stories in Dichtung und Wahrheit, as a crucial turning-point in Goethe's life[64] (Kenealy's eccentric choice of Goethe's 'desertion' of Gretchen as an equivalent turning-point is less popular, but represents a similar set of ideas), and certainly Lewes's treatment of that episode is a striking example of his apologistic tendency. Lewes receives praise, often high praise, from virtually all his reviewers, but amongst these reviewers there are, interestingly, more generally negative than generally positive attitudes to Goethe - not a reflection of the general pattern in this period,[65] but of the kind of discussion which Lewes's book in particular called forth. The positivist and vaguely pantheist criteria on which Lewes praises Goethe, after all, were by no means universally acceptable in mid-Victorian England. Few critics pause to examine

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62. See ch.4, pp.230-231, above.

63. "Gθethe [sic]: his life and character," Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, xxiii (1856), p.144.

64. "The life and works of Goethe," Literary Gazette, xxxvii (1855), pp.691-692.

65. See p.263 , above.

Lewes's ideological assumptions, but one who does, in the Eclectic Review, expresses objections which other criticisms aimed at Goethe may be said to imply.

This reviewer concerns himself mainly with religious questions, and is upset by Lewes's attitude to Christianity as clearly expressed in the Life - 'We can assure the biographer of Goethe that the patronizing, down-looking spirit of his remarks, when they bear on the opinions of the Christian world, are neither appropriate nor telling. Questions of this kind require above all things to be seriously and respectfully treated'.[66] The tone is wrong, and so are the opinions which Lewes unnecessarily presents to the reader in his own right. Lewes is wrong in his monistic statements about the "broad beneficence of Nature" and the narrow finiteness of evil (p.456)[67], and wrong to represent Christianity as diabolising nature as opposed to Hellenic religion which divinises nature - the truth is that 'heathenism deified nature, and nature only', while Christianity 'elevated nature, the body, and every word and work, by drawing it into the sphere of the super-sensuous' (p.463). Like Kenealy, with his vision of Goethe damnably tempted from the ideal to the actual, this author is directly opposed to Lewes in seeing Goethe's attachment to 'reality' as limiting. This attachment 'constituted the merit and charm of his writings', but it made him faulty in various crucial ways - an isolated observer of men, without 'genuine sympathy and outgoing of the soul', restricted to passion in his loves, incapable of 'sympathy with the highest aspirations of man-religion and liberty', and ignorant of the 'supernatural and spiritual' (pp.448-449).

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66. "Goethe," Eclectic Review, new series, xii (1856), p.470.

67. See ch.4, p.244 , above.

Goethe's, and Lewes's, conviction of the smallness of sin, and advocacy of mutual tolerance,[68] shows a dangerously defective morality, ready to grasp at Christ's "Let him who is without sin amongst you cast the first stone", but forgetting that the woman taken in adultery was told to go and sin no more (p.458). The British Quarterly Review has a similar sense of Goethe as deficient because of his exclusive attachment to realities - 'Of the material he was insatiable, for the spiritual he had little relish' - of this realism making him ignore the 'demands of the spiritual nature', which demands include a longing for freedom and justice in human society.[69] Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, in the review I have already quoted, finds (after Goethe's fatal decision to desert Friederike and the possibilities of married bliss to add true warmth of feeling to his life and writing) the lack of true sympathy which proceeds from his chosen intellectual stance - 'The gifts of his intellect were matured on the ashes of his heart' (p.144). Fraser's Magazine and the New Quarterly Review and Digest find moral faultiness, the result of bad ways of thinking, manifested in works and in life. The former asserts, indirectly attacking Lewes's principles, that 'however "objective" a poet may be, it is his business not to dwell upon vice and unregulated passion as a familiar matter-of-course thing',[70] and the latter sees an analytic mind producing cold and heartless behaviour - 'when he had classified the rose, and determined the genus of the violet, he recked little whether he had frayed or torn the petals, or dissipated the scent in the examination'.[71]

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68. The reference is to Lewes's discussion of Die Mitschuldigen, Life, p.54.

69. "Lewes's Life and works of Goethe," British Quarterly Review, xxiii (1856), pp.504-505.

70. "The life and works of Goethe," Fraser's Magazine, lii (1855), p.640.

71. "The life and works of Goethe," New Quarterly Review and Digest, v (1856), p.13.

Sarah Austin, stirred by Lewes's book to commit herself on Goethe's "character and moral influence" as she had previously avoided doing,[72] shares with these reviewers the conviction that there is some fundamental mistake in Goethe's way of looking at things.[73] One of the most significant early importers of Goethe, and a lover of his works for many years, Mrs.Austin finds her duty painful (p.226) and denies none of Goethe's high qualities - like both Carlyle and Lewes, she finds a wonderful and exceptional combination of gifts: great genius and calm perseverance, wild fancy and common sense, passion and self-control (p.195). Reluctantly, though, she joins the English Review, Merivale, Kenealy, and many others,in seeing a terrible waste of these gifts, a use of them to the wrong kind of purpose. Goethe was aware that great gifts impose great responsibilities, and was conscientious enough in his own way, but he conceived those responsibilities wrongly, and he did so because he was unaware of the importance of the great maxim that 'nothing is truly sublime but Moral Greatness'. This maxim is the corner-stone of Mrs.Austin's liberal Christianity - it is by virtue of moral greatness alone that we can claim any 'kindred with the Divine' (pp.196-197). It would seem at first sight that Mrs.Austin's theology is not so different from Lewes's - he, after all, reverenced moral greatness and found in moral duty a holy principle. Mrs.Austin's morality, however, is of a stricter and more Manichean variety, and includes an emphasis on moral evil which sets it apart from both Lewes's and Goethe's way of thinking - she speaks grimly of the 'social deterioration' which may result from failure to maintain 'an inviolable respect for the rights and interests of others, a

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72. See ch.3, pp.132-134, above.

73. S.Austin, "Goethe's character and moral influence," Edinburgh Review, cvi (1857), pp.194-226.

fervent zeal for all that can contribute to the welfare of mankind, and an equally fervent abhorrence of all that augments the sum of misery upon earth, or tends to the debasement of our species' (p.197). Goethe is not a conscious offender, a deliberate underminer of society - he never did or said what he believed to be wrong, and Mrs.Austin repeatedly dissociates herself from the cruder accusations against Goethe which Lewes attacks (pp.197, 212, 223). Goethe suffered from a 'defective sense of moral obligation' (p.198), a 'moral obtuseness' (p.204), which led him to behave badly - in deserting Friederike (pp.200-202), in using the Wetzlar episode as literary material in Werther (pp.204-207), in not expressing forthright political ideals, not using his great powers to champion the cause of freedom, when Germany was suffering under the vile oppressor Napoleon, one of those times when 'neutrality is forbidden' (pp.212-215) - without realising that what he did was wrong.

I have said before that Mrs.Austin's moralistic liberalism has much in common with Merivale's.[74] Like Merivale, she denies that Goethe's mentality is 'objective'[75] - he is, in fact, supremely subjective, the characters in his works 'illustrations of his own character and conduct', and his attitude to people and events characterised by an exclusive regard for his own 'internal development' which treats relationships as experiments (pp.221-222). She follows Merivale also in presenting Goethe as one who has led his disciples into the desert and left them there, promising much and performing little. The literary artist (despite what Lewes says) cannot claim a neutrality in moral or political matters as the sculptor, musician, or scientist can, because

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74. See ch.3, pp.135-136 , above.

75. Merivale, "Göthe's festival," p.204.

he necessarily deals directly with human relations and human destiny (p.219). In Wilhelm Meister and Die Wahlverwandtschaften Goethe unquestionably addresses himself to questions of social morality, and in the early works - Götz, Werther - he seems to express a quite proper dissatisfaction with the petty and false restrictions of society. Goethe's great crime is that he comes to combine a dissident tendency, which has made his books 'among the most active dissolvents of society', with a negative conservatism in politics and an utter failure to propose a new, purer and more practicable morality, separated from the 'alloy of false and hypocritical pretences, or sentimental delusions', to replace the older forms of social morality on whose validity he rightly casts doubt. Mrs.Austin comes close to echoing Clough's words to Emerson about Carlyle: 'Goethe brings great social questions into a state of doubt, confusion or indifference, and leaves them there' (pp.223-225). Goethe had 'the courage, the opportunity, the power, not only to shake antiquated prejudices, which he has abundantly done, but to establish truths on their ruins', but he exercised instead 'the fatal privilege of confounding right with wrong, of turning the current of opinion into false channels, and giving to the world a false measure of greatness' (pp.223,226).

Sarah Austin was sixty-four years old when she wrote this article, Merivale forty-four when he wrote his "Göthe's Festival". Richard Holt Hutton, born in 1826, is a younger critic who shares with these two moral earnestness and liberal attitudes in politics and in religion, who like them sees crucial moral limitations in Goethe's life and work. His statements, however, in his review of Lewes's Life,[76] have a

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76. R.H.Hutton, "Characteristics of Goethe," National Review, ii (1856) pp.241-296.

different emphasis from those of the other two; in particular, he does not talk of Goethe with reference to the influence he had or might have had. In my third chapter I tentatively distinguished between two 'generations' of Goethe-critics - the older, more relaxed critics, not extravagant in their praise or blame, and tending to apply artistic rather than moral criteria (Crabb Robinson, William Taylor, Gillies, Jeffrey), and the more earnest and morally pre-occupied younger critics coming to maturity in the 1820s and 1830s (Carlyle, Empson, Moir, Merivale, Blackie, Sterling, Mrs. Austin).[77] Equally tentatively (there are always exceptions, and dates of birth among British critics of Goethe do not fall neatly into tight clusters), I would suggest a third 'generation', born in the ten years after 1815 and thus 'forming their minds' mostly in the 1840s, still very serious about morality in life and art, but less disposed to present simple views, straightforward hopes and fears, on these subjects. This 'generation' would include Lewes, George Eliot, David Masson, Hutton, A.H.Clough, and Matthew Arnold. It is the middle group, by and large, who speak of Goethe as a potential, or actual, saviour or dissolver of society, and one can speculate about the effect on these writers in their impressionable twenties of the millennial hopes and fears surrounding the Reform Act of 1832 and Catholic emancipation in 1829, and of the gradual spread of Romantic ideas about the prophetic role of the imaginative artist, either from English writers (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley) or from German (Novalis, Fichte, Tieck). The earnest but less millennially-minded Hutton was an extremely distinguished and respected man of letters with all the credentials of a 'progressive' Victorian. He was the son of a Unitarian minister, trained to follow his father but eventually (by

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77. See ch. 3, pp.107-108,111, above.

the early 1860s) becoming a liberal Anglican closely associated with F.D.Maurice. He graduated at University College London in 1845 and spent semesters at Heidelberg and Berlin universities in 1846 and 1847. He was co-editor of the National Review (with Walter Bagehot) from 1855 to 1864, and of the Spectator from 1861 to shortly before his death in 1897. He was noted for his broadly-based championship, in the Spectator and elsewhere, of Christianity against agnostic and rationalist teachers, and in politics, as in most other matters, his opinions were very close to those of his friend Gladstone, though he and the Spectator felt obliged to break with Gladstone over the Home Rule Bill of 1886.[78]

Hutton's review of Lewes is a very impressive piece of criticism, deeply hostile to Goethe but showing, as John Hogben wrote in a monograph on Hutton shortly after his death, a good understanding of the almost mesmerising fascination which Goethe can have as man and artist.[79] Hutton speaks of Carlyle as a good instance of this fascination - a non-moral, daemonic power over people, proceeding from '"eyes behind the book"' - in action. Carlyle is fascinated by an author who ought not to attract him at all, and his articles on Goethe show 'a helpless desire to fix on some characteristic which he could infinitely admire' (pp.241-242,246). Later, in an obituary on Carlyle, Hutton says that Carlyle sympathised with Goethe 'in large degree for the negative tendencies of his thought and criticism', and links that sympathy to his sympathy with the destructive actions of Cromwell, Frederick the Great, Mirabeau, and Danton.[80] Hutton himself praises Goethe, not as the sweeper away of antiquated beliefs and ideals, but for more neutral

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78. See W.B.Thomas, The story of The Spectator 1828-1928 (1928), pp.78-80, 237.

79. J.Hogben, Richard Holt Hutton of 'The Spectator': a monograph (Edinburgh, 1899), pp.75-77 .

80. R.H.Hutton, 'Thomas Carlyle,' The Spectator, liv (1881), p.214; re-printed in Brief literary criticisms by the late Richard Holt Hutton, ed. E.M.Roscoe (1906), p.202.

qualities: he has great understanding of ordinary human feelings (p.260); his works show geniality, 'large charity', intellectual wisdom, a 'thorough truthfulness of mind' (p.278); his life was full of 'generous self-denials for others' sake' (p.278); and both his poetry and his scientific researches show a capacity for intensely vivid insight into minute details (pp.286-287). The final judgement, however, takes away much more than it gives - Hutton has clearly escaped the daemonic power: 'Let us grant that he was the wisest man of modern days who ever lacked the wisdom of a child; the deepest who never knew what it was to kneel in the dust with bowed head and broken heart'. He is above us but in crucial ways below the most ordinary of us - deficient in 'qualities in which few are so deficient', 'perhaps the wisest man totally devoid of moral humility and personal faith whom the world has ever seen' (pp.296, 294). Like increasing numbers of adverse critics of Goethe in this period, however,[81] Hutton writes of Goethe as one to be pitied rather than censured for his faults. Despite his comments on the fascination Goethe exerts , Hutton expresses no fears about the influence he will have or has had on society - his tone is more one of sympathetic condescension than of indignation. The leading idea is that in his life and hence in his works also Goethe suffered from flattened moral perspectives. Life at Weimar was bad for Goethe, not only because the atmosphere there was 'stagnant with moral evil', but because there was no moral ideal there for him to look up to, nobody who was not essentially inferior to himself - it was 'a literary world in which all the talent was of the same kind as his own, but far beneath it' (pp.274-276). An inborn lack of awe and reverence thus became fixed in him for good, and the artistic effectiveness

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81. See pp. 275-277, above.

of his works suffers. Hutton argues against the now popular view, supported by Lewes, that the artist should ignore 'moral partialities' and paint life 'as it is'. Hutton is not in favour of the moralisings of 'Edgeworthian art', but he wants to see moral contrast, characters to set off against the weak and self-indulgent ones (Werther, Wilhelm, Tasso) who are strong rather than (as Hutton finds Albert, Jarno, and Antonio) just hard. Without such contrast, which Hutton finds only in Götz among Goethe's works, art becomes 'feeble, watery, wavering' (pp.264-267). One might ask whether there is not this kind of contrast in Iphigenie auf Tauris (dismissed by Hutton as lacking any 'successful delineation of human character' - pp.282-283) between the weak and tortured Orest (and also the pragmatic Pylades) and the pre-eminently moral heroine Iphigenie with her 'reine Menschlichkeit', and whether a biographical interpretation of this play might not indicate that Goethe did find, in Charlotte von Stein (morally dubious though she might seem in some ways), a Weimar personality to look up to and revere, at least for a time.

Contrary to Lewes, then, Hutton finds a regrettable 'crystallisation' taking place in Goethe's first years at Weimar. He traces a downward progress (though he does later concede that Goethe in old age was more 'complete' as a man than ever before - p.293), to be found reflected in the development of Wilhelm Meister. Wilhelm 'begins a kind-hearted enthusiastic milksop, and ends a kind-hearted milksop, with rather more experience and more judgement, but without any enthusiasm and with far laxer morality. If this be Goethe's notion of progress, it gives but a painful idea of Goethe' (p.277). Hutton shares my view[82] that the progress

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82. See ch.4, p. 239 , above.

Lewes finds in Wilhelm Meister 'from self-culture to sympathy' is an invention of Lewes's (p.277), and finds self-culture itself a harmful and repulsive ideal - in connection with Goethe's desertion of Friederike he protests against 'the miserable dream of keeping the course of his inward development free from all foreign interference', and he suggests that a selfless, devoted love of God or man would have done Goethe more good than his 'sickly pottering with the "pyramid of his existence"' (pp.262-263). In his life Goethe seems to have been better than his works might suggest, but his human sympathies and generous self-denials subsist in spite of the principle of 'unmoral self-mastery as an end' on which he consciously moulded himself (p.278). Hutton thus, like the reviewers I have quoted from the Eclectic Review and Tait's Edinburgh Magazine, finds Goethe's life not a gloriously harmonious structure such as Carlyle and Lewes had presented but a hollow and depressing fancy-pyramid, a waste of fine materials. The Eclectic Review specifically disagrees with Lewes's idea that Goethe experienced a 'New Birth' at the age of thirty, suggesting that there was no real change in character - Goethe merely set new objects before himself and concentrated his energies on attaining them.[83] Tait's Edinburgh Magazine comments on the unpleasant contrast between the 'glorious promise' of Goethe's youth and his unattractively cold and serene aspect in old age - this reviewer is far from seeing the life as a 'beautiful whole' as Lewes does.[84] A more individual part of Hutton's contribution is his ingenious attempt to settle the 'tiresome dispute' over whether Goethe's is an objective or a subjective genius. In fact,

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83. "Goethe" (note 66, above), p.468.

84. "Goethe: his life and character" (note 63, above), p.136.

Hutton says, it is both, and he uses the image of reflections in water to explain - 'you find in all his poems at once a vague indefinite self, reflecting a defined and clearly outlined influence which impresses that self'. His imagination is essentially passive, a reflecting medium, unlike Shakespeare's, which 'went voluntarily forth to throw itself into new forms and moulds' (pp.279-280). The contrast between this and the less subtle and more morally-directed treatments of this issue by Merivale and Sarah Austin is a typical one.

Perversion and poetry: 1855-1859

The reviews of Lewes's Life contain most of the common features of negative British Goethe-criticism in the 1850s, and indicate the two main types of attitude that are to be found - Goethe is a serious, insidious danger or he is an erring, mis-directed unfortunate. The former attitude can be seen in fine and forthright shape in William John Conybeare's three-decker novel Perversion: or, The causes and consequences of infidelity. A tale for the times, published in 1856. Conybeare, born in 1815 (though he ought really to belong to the second rather than the third of my 'generations'), was an Anglican clergyman of weak health - he wrote the novel in retirement the year before his death - who was the first Principal of the newly formed Liverpool Collegiate Institution from 1842 to 1848. Perversion, less scandalous in subject-matter than its title and sub-title suggest, is a novel of very little artistic merit about mental perversion and religious infidelity, with a rambling and improbable plot designed to show by what processes the wicked (George Armstrong, who changes his name to Archer in volume two) and the less wicked (Charles Bampton, the weak and highly

unsympathetic hero) become infidels in these times, and what the consequences of such infidelity are likely to be - ' moral deterioration, and the loss of happiness and of peace'.[85] Amongst the causes, or possible causes, of infidelity are to be found various influential figures of recent times, including Comte ('and his English disciples' - vol.i, p.197), Carlyle, and Goethe. The range of Conybeare's prejudice is extensive, but depth of knowledge or understanding is not part of his ammunition. An atheistical and unscrupulously commercial Mormon elder called Lyman, dedicated to the manipulation of popular religious conviction for profit, talks to Armstrong about the successful tactics of Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh - 'Observe how skilfully he prepared the English public to listen to his pantheistic doctrines, by gradually insinuating them under the phrases of customary Christianity' (i.252-253). The extraordinary idea that Carlyle (undoubtedly self-deceived about his religious convictions) was deliberately setting out to deceive the English public is rightly protested against as an 'extravagant calumny' in a review by Richard Monckton Milnes,[86] and is part of what George Eliot, in her review, describes as 'the readiest imputation of the worst motives to all kinds of people'.[87] Not all reviewers, however were as resistant to Conybeare's wisdom as these two. The New Quarterly Review and Digest welcomed Perversion as a 'good and a noble book' and a very timely one, which succeeds in making ridiculous both 'the refined, educated scepticism of the day' and 'popular pantheism'.[88]

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85. W.J.Conybeare, Perversion, 3 vols. (1856), Preface (vol. i, no page no.).

86. R.M.Milnes, "Perversion, etc.," Edinburgh Review, civ (1856), p.527.

87. G.Eliot, "Perversion," Westminster Review, new series, x (1856), p.261.

88. "Perversion. A tale for the times," New Quarterly Review and Digest, v (1856), p.292.

Goethe is a favourite of Augustus White, a student at Oxford and the author of some obscure and indecent poetry, whose views Bampton hears when he attends a meeting of the "friends of light", a group of sensual free-thinkers at the university. White praises Goethe, it would seem, principally because Goethe is known to have lived in sin and favoured the nude in art. He places him alongside George Sand - the two are 'the chief restorers of paganism in Europe' (ii.98-103). We discover, when well into volume three and heading for the lapsed Bampton's re-conversion, that Bampton had put the principles of "the friends of light" into practice while at Oxford - in the streets of Southampton he meets his former servant-girl mistress Bessie Gray, now a prostitute, and, in her 'squalid shamelessness' an 'embodied reductio ad absurdum of the ethics of resuscitated paganism' (iii.227). The moment of repentance has arrived, and with the help of Hawkins, an Evangelical hospital chaplain of saintly thought and deed, Bampton moves towards Christianity. Hawkins is particularly harsh on Goethe and his 'resuscitated paganism', telling how when he was experiencing religious doubt and affliction he discovered the uselessness of "the old pagan anodyne which is administered (in new bottles, and under a changed label) by Goethe and his disciples", explaining how the gospel of Goethe, "the new Messiah of pantheism", comes to nothing more than "the old saws of epicurean philosophy, which the world tried and found wanting two thousand years ago", and asserting that the life of the poorest and most ignorant Methodist convert is more truly noble than that of "the Jupiter whom our modern pagans worship, the cold and selfish egotist of Weimar (iii.254, 267-268). Goethe is a "selfish egotist", and could no doubt be called a "pagan epicurean" - the accusations are weightily tautologous, but they are nothing new. Goethe is again an anachronism, a pagan when it is men's duty to be Christian, and again he is

characterised as leading people (particularly doubting 'adolescents') out into the desert and leaving them there. The fact that Goethe figures so largely in Conybeare's picture of contemporary perversion, however, is an interesting indication of his prominence in mid-Victorian culture, especially as Conybeare gives no sign of knowing German or having a special profound knowledge of Goethe's works.

The less spiteful and broader-minded George Gilfillan, a Presbyterian minister and writer who achieved a considerable popular success with his three Galleries of literary portraits (1845, 1850, and 1854), also sees Goethe as a part of contemporary British thought, though only vicariously, through the discipleship of Carlyle. His Christianity and our era (1857) is, like Conybeare's, a book for the times, and though in essay form, is somewhat similar in its enumerating of the various modern non-Christian forms of belief (Atheism, Pantheism, Deism, Positivism, Carlylean Pantheism, and, rather surprisingly, spiritualism or Newmanism), and assertion of the actual indisputable supremacy of true Christianity. Carlyle is accused of patronisingly including Christianity in a 'museum of all religions', and of placing it below 'Goethe's calm, mild version of truth-calm, certainly, even as the undisturbed snows of the Andes are calm in their eternal cold, and mild even as are the moonbeams that slumber on these regions of supernal silence and death!'[89] Goethe's iciness had also appeared in the more generous Literary portrait of Carlyle in 1845, where Gilfillan talks of Goethe's 'profound calm, like the light of sculpture, or of snow'.[90] Alpine images of frigidity are not rare in

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89. G.Gilfillan, Christianity and our era: a book for the times (Edinburgh, 1857), p.188 (ch.5, "Substitutes for Christianity").

90. G.Gilfillan, A gallery of literary portraits (Edinburgh, 1845), p.125 ("Thomas Carlyle").

British Goethe-criticism - Lewes's reviewer in the New Quarterly Review and Digest calls Goethe a 'cold, glacial theory of a man, very grand and Alp-like'.[91] The image is a good one because it conveys vividly that combination of superiority and inferiority which Hutton talks about - the mountain-top, the glacier, the eternal snows, are elevated above the rest of the world, but suffer from the cold and rarefied atmosphere up there, and from a necessary isolation. The inferiority of Goethe's 'version of truth' to the Christian version is also discussed by James Douglas of Cavers in his Passing thoughts (1855), a volume of essays written in old age, including one on Goethe. Goethe was misled by the errors of thinkers he knew only imperfectly (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz) and was unable to achieve true insight and true greatness, because these are to be achieved not by bringing the soul into contact with the 'imaginary spirit of the universe' but by 'waiting upon God'.[92]

In 1859 Theodore Martin and William Edmonstoune Aytoun, two Scottish men of letters who had also co-operated on the highly popular humorous poems collectively called the Bon Gaultier Ballads (book form 1845), published as a volume their translated selection Poems and Ballads of Goethe, which had originally appeared fifteen years before in Blackwood's Magazine[93]. The poems thus translated aroused more positive than negative feelings about Goethe, and the negative remarks

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91. "The life and works of Goethe" (note 71, above), p.11.

92. J.Douglas, Passing thoughts (Edinburgh, 1855), pp.4,9 ("Goethe").

93. Poems and ballads of Goethe, translated by W.E.Aytoun and T.Martin (Edinburgh and London, 1859); Blackwood's Magazine, lvi (1844), pp.54-68, 417-432, and lvii (1845), pp.165-180.

are generally of the pitying rather than the censuring and warning type. The Athenaeum has 'no liking for Goethe's faults', and describes his "Holy Family" lyric as a 'sensuous, carnal and very sceptical poem', but protests against the softening, bowdlerising translation which is given in this volume - we should be presented with Goethe as he is; and for all his awareness of his faults, this reviewer also speaks lyrically of the beauties of Goethe's poetry, its 'consummate simplicity and stillness', 'Greek distinctness and clearness', 'linking of fair words to fair thoughts'.[94] The Saturday Review likewise finds the poems beautiful in their musical clarity, but remarks parenthetically that Goethe, a thoroughly selfish man, has no understanding of suffering and only deludes himself that he has experienced and can describe it [95] - again we have Hutton's idea that Goethe is deficient in common kinds of wisdom, has never knelt in the dust with 'bowed head and broken heart'. The London Quarterly Review expresses similar views, but more subtly developed.[96] This intelligent and apparently knowledgeable reviewer cannot read any of the poems without 'a feeling of melancholy' (p.132), seeing Goethe as a lonely man who, afraid of the weakness of his character and sensitiveness of his nerves, has used his intellectual strength to mould his life severely and cut his emotions off from himself (pp.124-125). Not naturally "objective" (p.124), "Greek" (p.131), or even "sensuous" (p.131), he has unspontaneously adopted these characteristics as part of an artistic ideal of self-development. The result is a life, and works, which, tried by any other standard than

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94. "Poems and ballads of Goethe," The Athenaeum, xxxii (1859), p.216.

95. "Goethe's poems," Saturday Review, vii (1859), p.187.

96. "Goethe's ballads and minor poems," London Quarterly Review, xii (1859), pp.121-145.

Goethe's own purely artistic standard (for instance according to the 'teaching of religion and the universal rules of morality'), 'must be pronounced a failure', though if we do adopt his own standard, the astonishing magnitude of his achievement becomes clear (pp.122-123). Another consequence is that he can never be a popular writer - Aytoun and Martin's volume, designed as a volume of popular songs, is therefore misconceived (pp.127-128). This reviewer joins Tait's Edinburgh Magazine[97] in speaking of Goethe as a poet without genuine popular appeal. His thought is subtle though his style is simple: his philosophy is cold and sceptical; he is the 'aristocrat or the savant of poetry', and therefore, 'No peasant's cottage will ring with the refrain of his songs; no popular gathering will be stirred to enthusiasm by the inspiration of his sentiments; no untutored eye will be opened to a sense of art by his images of beauty ' (p.145).

Goethe and Friederike Brion: the early 1860s

The Goethe-controversy, initially stirred up afresh by Lewes's Life, has largely died out by the end of the 1850s, and the few negative articles I have been able to find in the period 1860-1865 are all from the year 1860. Clearly, as Merivale said in 1865,[98] Lewes's widely read biography did form and modify contemporary British opinions, despite the early rejoinders of those whose opinions were already formed in 1855.

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97. "Goethe: his life and character" (note 63, above), p.143: Goethe appeals only 'to the few strong souls who can bear the excess of the intellectual and imaginative faculties over the heart and its affections'.

98. See note 41, above.

The comprehensiveness of Lewes's coverage, and the convincing reasonableness of his arguing, no doubt had the effect both of discouraging dabblers from speaking and of damping down much of what British hostility to Goethe remained. The temporary dip in the 1860s in numbers of English translations of Goethe[99] could then be seen as both effect and cause of a temporary slackening of interest. The ethical debate was all but over, and new kinds of debate had not yet started. A notice in the Saturday Review of a German book reviewing Faust-criticism (criticism multiplies rapidly, and the number of removes away we are here from Goethe himself is somewhat dizzying) mentions the old controversy, strong in the 1830s and early 1840s, but rather dormant since, as to whether Faust part two is 'a mine of profound though hidden wisdom' or 'a disconnected series of fantastic dreams' (the Saturday Review thinks the latter), but the only other question referred to is a purely artistic one - the reviewer agrees with the German author that Goethe's intentions changed in the course of writing Faust part one, and hence that the work lacks formal wholeness.[100]

A publication of 1860 which drew the attention of a few reviewers back to the moral debate over the quality of Goethe's life was Goethe in Strasbourg: a dramatic nouvelette, by the artist and naturalist Henry Noel Humphreys. This work (which I shall discuss later, as Humphreys himself is unquestionably on Goethe's side) centres on the much-disputed question of whether Goethe's treatment of Friederike Brion shows a badly flawed moral nature or an admirable single-minded

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99. See p.255, above.

100. "Goethe's Faust, seine Kritiker und Ausleger," Saturday Review, x (1860), p.492.

devotion to artistic achievement, and hence on more general questions of how the artist should live, whether an attitude of mind which takes art so seriously as to place considerations of artistic success at the head of all lists of priorities is either morally justifiable or even, ultimately, conducive to the highest kinds of artistic achievement. To answer the specific question here we do not, of course, have to answer the general one. Lewes had presented the view that the twenty-one-year-old Goethe's love for Friederike was a youthful infatuation and not the stuff of which marriages are made.[101] Humphreys, however, though he smudges the issue by making the final outcome of the story depend not on Goethe's will but on destinal forces operating through chance, brings back the notion of Goethe sacrificing Friederike's, and his own, happiness in the interests of his higher mission, and the most intelligent reviewer of Goethe in Strasbourg, in the Saturday Review, reproves Humphreys for turningback the clock after Lewes had shown newly objective and reasonable ways of looking at Goethe's conduct: 'The English public would only be going back if it bowed down to an idol into the inside of which it has once calmly looked'.[102] This reviewer, though his opinion of Goethe is in general much lower than Lewes's, follows him in short-circuiting the argument about Goethe's treatment of Friederike, explaining the desertion in purely personal terms - Goethe, gifted with 'passion, but not affection', was naturally disinclined to fetter himself by an early marriage. He does, however, take the occasion to protest against the doctrine of deliberate self-culture as propagated by Goethe and as crudely and naively revived by

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101. See ch.4, p. 231, above.

102. "Goethe in Strasbourg," Saturday Review, ix (1860), p.571.

the idolatrous Humphreys. As Lewes's biography has shown, there was 'much that was really great' in Goethe's effortful self-discipline, but the idea of self-culture is a 'dangerous toy' which, if taken up by mortals more ordinary than Goethe, can lead to a 'peculiarly unamiable form of selfishness'. Goethe the dangerous and destructive influence seems about to appear, but there is little alarm in this review - England, in any case, is safe from the moral confusion which Goethe's doctrines might produce: 'one of the very best fruits of English good sense is that, although advocated by such distinguished champions, the theory of conscious self-development has been so entirely rejected' (p.571).

A brisker and less thoughtful reviewer in the Spectator likewise finds Goethe in Strasbourg tainted with the indefensible view that Goethe's devotion to art can be held to justify any of his actions, and sees the later marriage of the 'cold-blooded coxcomb' Goethe to 'no more congenial a companion than a female sot' as just retribution for his earlier inexcusable treatment of women.[103] A writer in Macmillan's Magazine who signs him (or her-)self Y.K., is like Humphreys, and presumably as a response to Humphrey's nouvelette, moved to imaginative creation by the poignancy of the Sesenheim episode, but seems to imply a less sympathetic attitude to Goethe's actions. The poem has two stanzas, the first instructing Friederike to wander in the fairy bower of Goethe's love while she may, enjoying the 'truth of the glorious youth' for a summer day, before the latter awakes from her enchantment and takes his 'great clear spirit of

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103. "Goethe in Strasburg," The Spectator, xxxiii (1860), p.454.

flickering fire' elsewhere. The second stanza introduces a 'lightly spoken' speech of pardon for Goethe, which could be imagined as spoken by Friederike herself or by a Humphreys-like justifier. The pain Friederike will suffer is spoken of as slight and, in relation to the calling of the butterfly Goethe to "gladden the world around him", unimportant, but the intended force of this speech of pardon is clearly ironical, and its final lines act like a reductio ad absurdum of that ethic which places art higher than the holiest affections:

> "It is but a lorn heart more or less,
> "And hearts are many and poets few". (104)

Mixed opinions

The handful of mid-century reviewers who express what I regard as genuinely mixed feelings about Goethe should be treated separately, though the line dividing them from the approvers on the one side and the disapprovers on the other may seem an arbitrarily drawn one. I regard as characteristic of the mixed opinion a combination of strongly positive comments with strongly negative ones, and the absence of a final verdict which tips the balance one way or the other. G.H.Lewes, of course, had presented this kind of view in 1843,[105] but Lewes's early indecisiveness later vanished, the reservations that remained becoming unequivocally parts of a positive statement. The rareness

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104. 'Y.K.', "Goethe and Frederika," Macmillan's Magazine, i (1860), pp.353-354.

105. See ch.4, pp.178-179,185-186, above.

of the genuine mixed opinion is partly the result of a universal human pleasure in passing definite judgement, partly of a natural desire among critics of a recently dead poet to see all round his massive and complex genius and thus be able to 'place' him.

A reviewer in Fraser's Magazine in 1847 of Karl Rosenkranz's Goethe und seine Werke, a work strongly favourable to Goethe, finishes his article with judicious statements of a kind familiar from the writings of Sarah Austin, J.S.Blackie, and Lewes before they arrived at more definite opinions - the reviewer thinks we need a balanced view somewhere in between the idolatry of which Rosenkranz's book is a moderate example and the fierce iconoclasm of Menzel and Börne, and is himself suspending judgement until a time when more comprehensive information is available: 'a future age will inevitably be more moderate in its antipathies, less violent in its love, than the generation of to-day'.[106] We do not know whether this writer later developed a firmer point of view, but in his suspended state he shows admirable insight and common sense, and a good knowledge both of Goethe and of the German Goethe-criticism which he is concerned to put in perspective. He considers Goethe's literary greatness unquestionable, though suggesting that he would have achieved greater things still had he been less many-sided - 'His versatility robbed him of strength' (p.491). As a man Goethe may (the reviewer does not commit himself) be a less impressive spectacle, but in any case, if our literary heroes were perfect they would be beyond human sympathy, and nothing is more misguided than attempts by admirers of Goethe such as Rosenkranz to justify every one of Goethe's actions and attitudes (pp.486-487). The most interesting comments are on Goethe's religion.

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106. "Goethe and his critics," Fraser's Magazine, xxxvi (1847), p.493.

It is wrong to present Goethe either as a pious Christian believer or as an atheist, and the reviewer's own deduction from the works is that 'the religion of Goethe hovers in a transitory state between belief and infidelity, security and doubt', so that he is capable of appearing at different times both Christian and non-Christian. The reviewer adopts a historical explanation for the character of Goethe's (and Schiller's) beliefs. Classical art was such an overwhelming inspiration artistically for Goethe and Schiller that they became swamped by Hellenic values, an easy state to fall into at a time when, in Germany, 'The all-powerful myth of Christianity had not... obtained a poetic value'. 'Christian enthusiasm' was harder to attain then than it is now, and artists like Goethe and Schiller were easily led into the error (this writer joins J.S.Mill and others in seeing Goethe's Hellenism as fundamentally anachronistic) of thinking that 'a faithful copy of Hellenic simplicity is also simplicity in Christian times' (p.487). The error is there but Goethe is decidedly not guilty, as the poets of the German Romantic school were guilty, of shrinking away from the realities of the contemporary world. For all his suspending of judgement, the reviewer makes a resounding claim for the grandeur and rightness of Goethe's poetic aims in terms that would have pleased both Carlyle and Lewes, though as compared with those two his emphasis is significantly more on aims and less on achievements. The prime object of the poet's contemplation, and source of his inspiration, ought to be 'the lovely world in which his God has placed him, and the Time which it is his business to understand and elucidate', and in Goethe's case this was definitely so - 'the great literary career of Goethe was one continual effort to accomplish the great end and aim of poesy - to spiritualise the materialism of his age, and to improve that which really existed' (p.489).

The ultimate non-committal article about Goethe is one in a series called "Pedestrian prosings" by Parson Frank of the People's and Howitt's Journal, whom I have quoted before.[107] The prosings are literary discussions in dialogue form, and in this one, from 1850, not only are there two voices, Richmond and Crotchet (respectively, a convinced admirer of Goethe and a more sceptical critic, though one who still grants Goethe many high qualities), but most of the discussion is taken up with summaries of the opinions of other critics such as Menzel , Emerson, and Emile de Girardin. Parson Frank is presenting the nineteenth-century debate about Goethe, or some parts of it, in microcosm rather than expressing an opinion of his own, and he shows quite effectively how one line of argument about Goethe can always be countered with another. Crotchet reports Menzel's complaint that Goethe merely reflected a degenerate age rather than attempting to halt degeneracy, and Richmond answers with a rather vague claim of the same basic sort as that I have just quoted from Fraser's Magazine - Goethe promotes social good indirectly by encouraging a deeper knowledge and understanding of things: "How could Goethe better ameliorate the worse aspect of the age, than by showing, as he did, the meaning and value of Life?"[108] Crotchet quotes an un-named American critic as saying that Goethe had a deep mind but a shallow heart, Richmond cites the prison scene in Faust part one as evidence against this view, and Crotchet in turn refers to Goethe's coldness in his treatment of women in real life (p.88). Richmond reveals the precariousness of one species of admiration for Goethe by his objection to Emerson's

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107. p.270,above.

108. 'Parson Frank', "Pedestrian prosings - no.viii," People's and Howitt's Journal, new series, iii (1850), p.85.

adverse artistic criticism of Wilhelm Meister - if we admit the validity of that kind of criticism, Richmond says, then our vision of Goethe as a monument of culture, of "artistic completeness", "perfect self-consistency", and "vigilant and tranquil knowledge of what he was about", must collapse (p.85). A reviewer of Oxenford's Bohn translation of Eckermann's Gespräche, in the Dublin University Magazine in the following year, is not worried about Goethe's claim to completeness - 'Goethe was, in his way, a true man, and sought to understand, and sought to interpret everything that came before him' - but like many others he seems to doubt whether such a completeness is of the highest kind. Goethe's comprehensive mind lacks a sense of perspective, ranking all things, however sacred,in 'the same category with the fine arts', and rendering more sincere worship to art than to any kind of god.[109] This writer, however, having read the Conversations, is happy about Goethe's'kindness of heart in his intercourse with others' (p.738), and in imagining Eckermann's pleasure in discovering Goethe's poetry (though both Eckermann and this reviewer have experienced 'a strange attraction and recoil of spirit' on first reading Faust part one), he speaks warmly of its hearty naturalness - 'nature and reality, and honest, truth-speaking, German feeling' (p.735).

What these mixed opinions tend particularly to illustrate is the possibility, for the more flexible Victorian minds, of finding Goethe wanting according to Christian criteria, either of character and conduct or of belief, but still being able to praise him very highly in terms other than purely artistic ones. The author of a review of Schiller's Sämtliche Werke in the London Quarterly Review in 1860 may possibly be the same person as the reviewer of Aytoun and Martin's

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109. "Eckermann and Goethe," Dublin University Magazine, xxxvii (1851), p.740.

Poems and ballads in the same Review in 1859[110] - the articles are not dissimilar in tone, and both place much emphasis on the fact that Goethe, though an influential writer, is not a popular one. The later article, however, though it draws the familiar contrast between Goethe and the more Christian hero Schiller, with his earnestness, his deep sympathy for humanity, and his unflawed moral uprightness, has some glowing things to say about Goethe of a kind not found in the earlier one. Goethe may be a less loveable genius who is understandably (at least in England) 'much more talked about than read',[111] but his own positive qualities are important ones. His lyric poetry in particular (perhaps this is the reviewer of Aytoun and Martin making some amends for his mostly negative attitude in that review) has the advantage over Schiller's, and the 'nameless grace of exquisite expressions condensed into the quintessence of beauty and force' in Goethe's poetry is the product of an attitude of mind (which Schiller partly learned to share, and greatly to his advantage - p.116) spoken of here in Lewes - like phraseology and almost with Lewes's quasi-religious enthusiasm - Goethe was 'content to make the best of reality as it was, and to seek his materials within its limitations' (pp.145-146). An article about rationalism, in the Eclectic Review in 1865, brings in Goethe and Schiller as example of 'poetic Rationalists', attempting to explain in general terms in what relation their beliefs stand to Christian belief. Neither, of course, could belong to any Christian church, but that is no reason for consigning them to the 'mere limbo of Pantheism - that happy receptacle for all doubtful creeds; that

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110. See pp.297-298, above.

111. "Friedrich Schiller," London Quarterly Review, xiv (1860), p.109.

convenient way of disposing of all thoughts and experiences we do not quite understand', or for denying the possibility that such unorthodox thinkers might even be regarded in places as 'Christian prophets, or seers'.[112] Goethe, for instance, appears in part of Wilhelm Meister (presumably the "Sanctuary of Sorrow" passage in the Wanderjahre) as 'more than the artist - a soul recognising in the atonement of the Cross the point of contact for the reconciliation of the world and the solution of its sorrows', and in other parts of his works can be found 'some of the finest shadings of the Christian life". What stopped these 'noble men' from being Christians, the author guesses, was not ignorance or blindness but pride - they were incapable of 'making their own nature pliant before the touch of conscience', and Goethe in particular was kept in a certain course by an iron self-control (pp.71-72). Goethe is not a Christian but he may be a Christian prophet - the view is an eccentric one, and not far removed from some of Carlyle's more extravagant claims, but the presence of the un-Carlylean statement about Goethe's lack of Christian humility in this context is one illustration of the fact that mid-Victorian readers did not always need to accept a totally-endorsed model of the kind proffered by Carlyle or Lewes, or to sweep away all the serious objections that were raised against Goethe, in order to find him valuable and important.

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112. "Rationalism," Eclectic Review, new series, viii (1865), p.71.

Chapter Six

THE MID-CENTURY FOR GOETHE

When Matthew Arnold talked about Goethe, he was usually in the middle of talking about something else. The only essay he wrote specifically on the subject of Goethe, "A French critic on Goethe" (1878)[1], is relatively short, and is mostly concerned with what Scherer, the French critic, hasto say, with Arnold's own sonorous judicial tones only sounding very briefly near the end. While working on that essay, Arnold wrote to his sister Fanny aboutthis odd state of affairs, expressing little desire to normalise it: 'Considering how much I have read of Goethe, I have said in my life very little about him; to write an article in general about him would be an alarming task; I am very glad to be limited by having only to speak of my Frenchman's talk of him'. When he says later in the same letter, 'On looking back at Carlyle, one sees how much of engouement there was in his criticism of Goethe, and how little of it will stand',[2] one's sympathies tend to be with Carlyle - Arnold is criticising another for doing badly what he himself does not have the courage to do at all, though as a well-practised essayist with a very extensive knowledge of Goethe he is at least as well-qualified for the task as Carlyle was in the 1820s. Similar dissatisfaction can be felt with Arnold's friend

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1. Complete prose works, viii, 252-276.

2. "To Miss Arnold," December 1877, Letters of Matthew Arnold 1848-88, ed. G.W.E. Russell, 2 vols. (1895), ii.143-144.

Arthur Clough, another very avid student of Goethe, who speaks of Merivale's 1850 article on Goethe, in a letter to Emerson, as 'no great thing',[3] but who himself produced only a review of Aytoun and Martin's Poems and ballads, which, learned and intelligent as it is, is mostly about the problems of translators and contains hardly any direct comment on Goethe.[4] As the scale and the complexity of Goethe's genius became more evident to English readers, so the number of his admirers who dared to attempt general assessments such as those offered in earlier times by Carlyle, Blackie, and Empson, rapidly and understandably dwindled. The mostboldly comprehensive mid-century criticisms of Goethe are the negative, limiting ones (Merivale, Hutton, Mrs.Austin) - once Goethe is cut down to size, he becomes much easier to write about. William Hale White (the novelist 'Mark Rutherford'), when asked by his second wife what he thought of Goethe, replied "You might just as well ask me, 'What do I think of any one of the great forces of nature?' - "What do I think of the sea or the sky?"'[5] Such a sense of Goethe as a vast and incommensurable presence, though by no means universal, becomes increasingly common during the period I am studying, and partly accounts for the critical timidity of such as Arnold and Clough.

The complicated story of Arnold's understanding and misunderstanding of Goethe has been very well told by James Simpson,[6] and my intention here is merely to sketch in his principal statements about Goethe and to indicate how these statements fit with general trends in British Goethe-criticism. A fine collection of titles awarded to Goethe by Arnold over the years shows Arnold repeatedly emphasising his importance for

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3. "To R.W.Emerson," 22 July 1850, The correspondence of Arthur Hugh Clough, ed. F.L.Mulhauser, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ.Press, 1957), i, 285.

4. A.H.Clough, "Poems and ballads of Goethe," Fraser's Magazine, lix (1859), pp.710-717.

5. D.V.White (ed.), The Groombridge diary (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1924), p.318.

6. J.Simpson. Matthew Arnold and Goethe (1979), passim. See Introduction,

modern man: 'Europe's sagest head' and 'Physician of the iron age' (1850),[7] 'the greatest poet of modern times, the greatest critic of all times' (1853),[8] ' that grand dissolvent in an age when there were fewer of them than at present' (1863),[9] 'by far our greatest modern man' and 'a master-critic of modern life' (1878).[10] Goethe also appears in various short and prestigious lists of influential voices for the age. In a famous letter to J.H.Newman in 1872, Arnold lists the four figures from whom he himself has learnt 'habits, methods, ruling ideas' - Goethe, Wordsworth, Sainte-Beuve, and Newman himself-[11], and as we have seen, Goethe is there at the beginning of the Emerson lecture (1883), along with Newman, Carlyle, and Emerson, as one of the voices heard at Oxford in the 1840s.[12] Much earlier, in the two deeply mournful poems "Stanzas in memory of the author of'Obermann'"(1849) and "Memorial verses" (1850), Goethe, a dark figure in two gloomily-imagined intellectual landscapes, is grouped with Senancour and Wordsworth as one of those who have attained to see their way in this our troubled day,[13] and with Wordsworth and Byron as one of the last poetic voices, now silent.[14] The leading idea in what these poems

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7. "Memorial verses," 11.16-17, The poems of Matthew Arnold, ed. K.Allott (1965), p.227.

8. "Preface to first edition of Poems," Complete prose works, i.8.

9. "Heinrich Heine," Complete prose works, iii.110.

10. "A French critic on Goethe," Complete prose works, viii. 275.

11. M.Arnold to J.H.Newman, 28 May 1872, Unpublished letters of Matthew Arnold, ed. A.Whitridge (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1923), pp.65-66.

12. See ch.4, p.168, above.

13. Poems of Matthew Arnold, p.132.

14. Ibid., pp.226-228.

say about Goethe, and in many of Arnold's other remarks about him, is that Goethe is exceptional above all for the clarity with which he sees, and shows to others, what lies around him. Because Arnold at this stage is in such despair about the modern world, he presents Goethe as a grimmer kind of prophet than most readers have imagined him. In "Obermann" Goethe is a strong man pursuing a lonely road of clear and sane vision, keeping his eye on 'Nature's plan' and avoiding making man too much a God or God too much a man - a brave course which few will dare to emulate. In "Memorial verses" he is the physician who sees each wound and weakness in modern man, tells him precisely what is wrong with him, and gives him the following prescription:

> The end is everywhere,
> Art still has truth, take refuge there! (15)

This physician would seem to be much stronger on diagnosis than on treatment. Arnold (whose intellectual relationship with Carlyle is well-known for its complexity and ambivalence[16]) is like Carlyle in that he presents Goethe as pre-eminently a wise man and seer rather than an artist,[17] but differs from both Carlyle and Lewes in apparently having no optimistic vision of what constructive lessons Goethe can teach the moderns. In the Heine essay for instance (1863), with its curious and unhappy linking together of Goethe and Heine

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15. If we accept the view that the 'one' who sits on the 'intellectual throne' in "The scholar-gipsy" (11.182-190) is Goethe, then here (in 1853) is a gloomier picture still of Goethe - a self-pitying autobiographer who has suffered more than others and whose mission is to make his sufferings known. The controversy as to the identity of this 'one' is discussed in Simpson's book, pp.40-42.

16. See K.Tillotson, "Matthew Arnold and Carlyle," Proceedings of the British Academy, xlii (1956), pp.133-153.

17. See in particular the ending of "A French critic on Goethe," Complete prose works, viii.275.

as two outstanding German liberators, the latter in direct descent from the former, Goethe appears as a representative of that 'modern spirit' which sees the lack of correspondence between the spirit of nineteenth-century European society and the mediaeval 'system of institutions, established facts, accredited dogmas, customs, rules' which determines its outmoded form, and works to remove this lack of correspondence, acting as a dissolvent of what needs to be dissolved. Arnold welcomes the modern spirit, and Goethe as a representative of it (all people who have the power should take part in this dissolving work), but the activity of the modern spirit is envisaged almost entirely in negative, destructive terms. Of Goethe he says aptly and beautifully that his 'profound, imperturbable naturalism is absolutely fatal to all routine thinking', but there is none of Carlyle's or Lewes's sense that Goethe will supply new and constructive ways of thinking for a new society, through his practical moral doctrines or through his positivistic attachment to realities. Carlyle saw, at one time, the 'corner-stone of a new social edifice for mankind' in Goethe's works.[18] Arnold sees a naturalism, a putting of the standard of judgement inside every man rather than outside him, than which 'Nothing could be more really subversive of the foundations on which the old European order rested'.[19] Arnold is a reverent admirer of Goethe, but the view he presents of his historical role, if taken to its logical conclusion, seems not far removed from Herman Merivale's or Sarah Austin's disapproving view that Goethe undermined traditional beliefs without offering any adequate substitute, that he

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18. See ch.1, p. 17, above.

19. Complete prose works, iii,108-111.

led the people out into the desert and left them there. The difference is that Arnold, himself one of those people, of whom he speaks in the Heine essay (p.110), who have 'felt Goethe's influence most deeply' and than whom none are more radically detached from the old European order, more 'thoroughly modern', is more deterministic in these matters, less inclined to apply old-fashioned moral criteria and distribute praise and blame.

In 'The function of criticism at the present time" (1864), as James Simpson points out, Arnold refers to Goethe as 'one of the greatest of critics',[20] and the impression given is that his admiration, though still high, has moderated somewhat since the 1853 Preface, where Goethe is the 'greatest critic of all times'. Two years later, however, in the lectures he delivered at Oxford "On the study of Celtic literature", he made the highest of all his high claims as to the importance of Goethe, though typically, the claim is stated in a tantalisingly unelaborated form as a digression in the midst of some general statements about differences in national character. Arnold's words, written in 1866, right at the end of the period I am discussing, sum up well the feeling which had been behind the most serious kinds of British interest in Goethe (on the negative as well as the positive side) since Carlyle, in 1824, introduced the author of Wilhelm Meister as one whom the Germans were ranking alongside Homer and Shakespeare.[21] Arnold says:

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20. Ibid., iii. 259-260.

21. See ch.2, p.57 , above.

> when Goethe came, Europe had lost her basis of spiritual life; she had to find it again; Goethe's task was, - the inevitable task for the modern poet henceforth is, - as it was for the Greek poet in the days of Pericles, not to preach a sublime sermon on a given text like Dante, not to exhibit all the kingdoms of human life and the glory of them like Shakespeare, but to interpret human life afresh, and to supply a new spiritual basis to it. (22)

Goethe's task, then, is more important and difficult than Dante's or Shakespeare's, or, presumably, Homer's. Carlyle had linked him explicitly with Christ,[23] and the Hellenically-minded Arnold links him with the Greeks of the fifth century B.C. Once again, however, Arnold slides out of making any clear statements about whether Goethe has performed this task adequately or not. All he will say is that only Goethe's poetry, since the Greeks, has 'made much way with' the 'grand business of modern poetry, - a moral interpretation, from an independent point of view, of man and the world'.[24] With Arnold we are indeed, like the poet in "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse",

> Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
> The other powerless to be born. (25)

We have established that Goethe was the modern poet par excellence, appointed as a dissolvent of the old European order and supplier of a new basis of spiritual life, but we have not established whether he can claim any real success in the latter part of his role. Carlyle and Lewes indicate different kinds of spiritual edifice that can be built on a Goethean basis, but Arnold merely indicates that some kind

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22. Complete prose works, iii. 381.

23. See ch.1, p.40 , and ch.5, p.272 , above.

24. Complete prose works, iii.380.

25. ll. 85-86, Poems of Matthew Arnold, p.288.

of edifice perhaps could be built.

Arnold makes Carlylean statements about Goethe's renovatory role in the modern world, but the 'line' on Goethe which, it seems to me, he really represents, is a more modest one, which appeared briefly at the end of my last chapter, and will appear frequently in this one. The idea, which I suggested as inherent in statements I quoted from Fraser's Magazine and the People's and Howitt's Journal[26], is that Goethe can benefit humanity, not by directly teaching specific lessons (as Carlyle and, in a less straightforward way, Lewes had suggested), but simply by displaying and thus promoting a deeper, broader knowledge of the world, and particularly of the contemporary world. The two kinds of claim for Goethe can both be seen in the two phrases at the end of the passage I quoted above, placed in apposition so that the difference between the claims is easily missed - it is one thing to say that Goethe's task was 'to interpret human life afresh', another to say it was 'to supply a new spiritual basis to it', and the former, though no mean feat, is far easier to perform than the latter. In 1878, in the final judgement in "A French critic on Goethe", it is the interpreting of human life that is emphasised, and the supplying of a new spiritual basis is not mentioned: 'having a very considerable gift for poetry, he was at the same time, in the width, depth, and richness of his criticism of life, by far our greatest modern man'.[27] Parallels between Carlyle and Arnold should not be over-

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26. See ch.5, pp. 304 ,305 , above.

27. Complete prose works, viii.275.

stressed, but there is an interesting coincidental verbal one here, with Carlyle's letter to his brother of 1833, the letter I used as evidence of Carlyle's declining belief in Goethe's possible efficacy as a redeemer of the world.[28] Arnold says ' our greatest modern man', and Carlyle says 'the greatest of contemporary men', and both are making statements of a valedictory kind which praise generously but stop short of the suggestions of a redemptive potential which the authors had made before. Arnold's enthusiasm for Goethe was never as intense and passionate as Carlyle's, never a matter of life and death,[29] and his public statements about him are more careful, but the enthusiasm does follow, over a longer stretch of time, a pattern similar to that which I outlined at the end of my chapter on Carlyle. There is the initial discovery, at Oxford, of the pleasure and help which Goethe's broad, deep poetic wisdom can afford, then the building of almost millennial hopes (though more tentative than Carlyle's) based on what Goethe's high achievement suggests that a modern poet can do - supply a new spiritual basis to our lives -, but finally a return to a more generalised sense that Goethe is greatly helpful to the modern (shortly before the passage I have quoted from "A French critic on Goethe", Arnold describes him as the 'clearest, the largest, the most helpful thinker of modern times'). At one stage, both with Carlyle and with Arnold, Goethe seems on the verge of messiahship, but with both he ends up as merely a 'man', though the greatest man of modern times.

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28. See ch.1, pp. 18 , 46 , above.

29. See ch.1, p. 17 , above.

The difference, perhaps more important than the similarities, is that Arnold, unlike Carlyle, never lost his belief in the high importance of poetry in the modern world. Carlyle suggests in 1833, in the same letter to his brother John, that 'Art is but a reminiscence now',[30] but Arnold, though he may have stopped talking about spiritual bases, expresses an ever-strengthening belief in the usefulness of poetry in his later years. Two years after "A French critic on Goethe", he begins the famous essay on 'The study of poetry", the General Introduction to T.H.Ward's The English poets, with high claims about the future of poetry: 'More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry'.[31] These claims are, perhaps, inflated ones, and as in the "Celtic literature" lectures, there is an un-signalled leap from one kind of statement ('to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us') to a more grandiose one (poetry will replace religion and philosophy). It is the prevalence of this sort of belief about poetry, however, which made it possible for an age which, except in a few cases, did not swallow whole either Carlyle's thunderings about Goethe the redeeming voice or the positivist and pantheist scheme for which Lewes presents Goethe as the finest advertisement, still to find Goethe an important source of inspiration. I have suggested that a calm, moderate brand of negative criticism of Goethe becomes increasingly common in the

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30. See ch.1, p. 46 , above.

31. Complete prose works, ix, 161-162.

1840s and 1850s,[32] and would suggest that there is a similar trend among the sympathetic critics, prefigured by the 'modern' thinkers Blackie and Sterling in the earlier period, towards a relaxed acceptance of Goethe as valuable because in his works (and conversations, and letters) an exceptional and healthy mind is in action, interpreting man and the world and enhancing our understanding. Goethe's reputation rises steadily, but despite the powerful effect Carlyle had on the young men of the 1840s, hardly any critics would grant Goethe the kind of status Carlyle granted him, and a late-Arnoldian appreciation of the critic of life is a much commoner attitude.

Two eccentric articles about Faust, from the beginning and the end of my present period, provide exceptions which help to prove the rule. The first, from the Oxford and Cambridge Review and University Magazine of 1846, has the appearance of being written by a student, and one of those to whom, as to Matthew Arnold but more overpoweringly, the voice of Goethe was coming through Carlyle. A series of articles offering an explication of both parts of Faust is promised, but this article, which after a portentous introduction only takes us as far as the Easter Hymn which saves Faust from suicide, seems to have been all that materialised. Either the author or the compositor consistently gives the popular English mis-spelling Goëthe, and no especially profound knowledge is in evidence, but Carlyle himself did not make higher claims for Goethe. Goethe is the most remarkable philosophic teacher since Shakespeare, and 'as such, what he has written must not only influence but will more or less have the entire forming of the coming world'. Faust, which contains the

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32. See ch.5, pp. 275, 287 , above.

answers finally arrived at by this 'truly most awful mind' to 'the obscurest and deepest questions of human nature', is 'the poem of this century', and hence, as the world grows up to Goethe's level, the poem will 'exercise more influence over the entire scheme of thought ... than any other book, poem, treatise or philosophy whatsoever'.[33] Along with the Carlylean rhetoric there is a Carlylean emphasis on faith and doubt, on 'adolescence'. Goethe (and Faust as the embodiment of his spiritual history) is remarkable chiefly because he is an exception to the general rule that once a man has doubted he can never truly believe - Goethe has gone through the horrors of unbelief and emerged triumphant, and therefore his recorded experience will be of inestimable value to the thinking men of the present self-conscious, doubting, transitional age, who may have to pass through the same horrors (pp.5 and 6). My second article, from Fraser's Magazine in 1863, gives a much more learned (and complete) reading of part two. This author is another who speaks of millennial hopes in connection with Goethe and Faust, but he is much more temperate and tentative. The idea is that in the second part Goethe, living in a disharmonious time, gives an allegorical presentation of his own progress through life, of 'how he harmonized the discordant sounds of his spiritual and sensual natures', and the author wonders whether the 'world at large' will ever find this harmony - if it ever did, that would indeed be a time to say to the fleeting moment "Stay, thou art so lovely, stay!", but this may be 'a dream as vague as that of the returning golden age or the millennium'.[34] In between these two authors, both in

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33. "Faustus. A dramatic mystery," Oxford and Cambridge Review, ii (1846), pp.2 and 3.

34. "The second part of Göthe's 'Faust'," Fraser's Magazine, lxviii (1863), p.498.

time and in shade of opinion, is the politician Edgar Alfred Bowring, who, in an essay of unquestioningly reverential tone prefacing his volume of Goethe's poems in translation, speaks of Goethe's influence on the present age as 'an influence which is even yet in its infancy, and the ultimate effects of which it is impossible to foresee'.[35] It cannot have been hard to perceive, even in the first excitement of discovery, that Goethe and his works were not going to transform Western civilisation over-night - Carlyle himself had realised that by 1833, There remained one or two (it is not surprising that close study of Faust, with its enticing allegorical mysteries and its air of presenting a problem then progressing towards a solution, should in particular have fostered such thinking) who would link the Goethean message to a possible if distant change in society, but they form a very small minority and a decreasingly confident one.

If Goethe is merely a far-seeing, beneficent critic of life, he does not have to be quite so perfect in deed and word as if he is to be a prophet and redeemer of the time. An Arnoldian tolerance and 'sweet reasonableness' with regard to Goethe's faults becomes increasingly common, though of course not universal, among the mid-century critics. Stumbling-blocks like Goethe's treatment of women and his political indifference come more frequently to be regarded as venial faults. A reviewer of Eckermann's Gespräche, one of the chief repositories of Goethe's faults, in the Westminster Review in 1849, finds Goethe rather too much attracted to rank, wealth, and comfort, and 'somewhat effeminate' in his shrinking away from pain and suffering, but ends firmly:

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35. E.A.Bowring, "Goethe," prefixed to The poems of Goethe (1853), p.1.

'But truly we may say in this instance, that "even his failing leans to virtue's side"'.[36] Another writer on Eckermann, in the New Monthly Magazine in 1851, finds a 'pardonable, nay, almost engaging egotism', which does nothing to spoil his enjoyment of the 'fine feeling, goodness of heart, poetry and artistic taste, learning and deep thought' which the conversations also display.[37] An Athenaeum reviewer of a German book about Goethe's loves, in 1854, is tolerant to the point of permissiveness, amused at the fuss made over 'boyish loves' of the sort that are usually quickly forgotten by everybody, and 'those elegant Platonisms which seem incidental to the position of a Court-poet', and saying that despite the minute attention that has been paid to Goethe's love-life, 'there is not a single case on record of a heartless seduction, or of a reckless disregard of appearances, after the attainment of mature years'.[38] The tolerance exercised (and advertised as a principle) by Lewes in his Life did not please Sarah Austin, but there were some supporters. Another Athenaeum reviewer (or possibly the same one), in 1855, considers Lewes's apologetic efforts on behalf of Goethe the man oonvincing, and protests against the attitude of those 'censorious moralists' who will enlarge the list of vices so that this 'intellectual hero' may be found vicious, making, particularly in the case of Goethe's relations with women, the moral code 'assume it severest aspect for the purpose of a special condemnation'.[39] J.A.Froude, the un-reconstructed

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36. "Conversations with Goethe," Westminster Review, 1 (1849), pp.566, 568.
37. "Conversations of Goethe," New Monthly Magazine, xci (1851), p.256.
38. "Goethe's love and love-poems," The Athenaeum, xxvii (1854), p.1132.
39. "The life and works of Goethe," The Athenaeum, xxviii (1855), pp.1302-1304.

Carlylean who, as he tells us in his review of Lewes for the Westminster, had previously been worried by the gap between the beauty and nobleness of mind and heart exhibited in Goethe's works and his apparently very dubious history as a man, and above all by the fact that Goethe, unlike more passionate sinners such as Byron, seems to have sinned coolly and in full possession of his senses and to beg no indulgence, is deeply grateful to Lewes for revealing a genuine living person who shows 'real affection, real weakness, real generosity', and, most pleasing and surprising, 'real sorrow when he did wrong', and whom we can now therefore love and forgive.[40]

More deeply subversive of opposition to Goethe (though of course no convinced hostile critic is going to be won over by this kind of argument) is the idea that those who think they are judging Goethe may be being judged, that Goethe's deep and comprehensive wisdom is such that those who fail to appreciate it could simply be showing their own limitations. Two reviews in the 1850 volume of the Athenaeum, possibly by the same writer, both take this standpoint. Goethe's letters to Reinhard are described as illustrating 'some principal features of that science of life to which his great influence on minds of a superior order is due',[41] with the implication that only superior minds will see the value of the science of life which writers like Merivale and Hutton had found so utterly wrong-headed. Eckermann's Gespräche and Hermann und Dorothea are both spoken of as books which judge the reader: the former, in which 'so much of the wise and beautiful is mingled with personal traits',

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40. J.A.Froude, "The life and works of Goethe," Westminster Review, new series, ix (1856), pp.274-275.

41. "Correspondence between Goethe and Reinhard, from 1807 to 1832," The Athenaeum, xxiii (1850), p.1271.

would be 'no bad test of the scale of the receiver's cultivation', and the latter, as a fruit of mature genius, cannot be rightly tasted 'unless the reader bring to it a mind in some degree prepared, and a sense unspoiled by prejudice, dissipation, or caprice'.[42] George Eliot's essay on "The morality of Wilhelm Meister" (1855) is built around the claim that the book 'appears immoral to some minds because its morality has a grander orbit than any which can be measured by the calculations of the pulpit and of ordinary literature'.[43] A writer in the National Review in 1864, though not talking about judgements, speaks of Goethe as a 'mysterious intellect' not to be understood by ordinary people, one who will not 'come home, as it were, to the mass of mankind' - 'You cannot pour into a flask more than it will hold; and the quantity of communication which a mind like Goethe's can hold with others is limited by a similar law'.[44] This rather dangerous line of argument (how can we tell a lunatic from a sane man if we accept that to call someone a lunatic is just to reveal the limitations of our own intellect?) takes us further than Blackie's or Empson's, or Lewes's, advice that we should accept Goethe as he is and enjoy the massive and harmonious vision that he presents rather than looking for missing components. Now it is suggested that we should assume that what may seem discordant is in fact harmonious, and re-tune our own minds accordingly. This kind of view, however, obsequious though it may seem, is in fact less conducive to a belief in Goethe's messianic possibilities than other kinds of admiration. We are admitting the width, depth, and

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42. "Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret," The Athenaeum, xxiii (1850), p.1339.

43. G.Eliot, "The morality of Wilhelm Meister," The Leader, vi (1855), p.703; also in Essays of George Eliot, ed. T.Pinney (1963), p.144. For a discussion of the authorship of this article, see Ashton, The German idea, p.225, note 93.

44. "Goethe's correspondence with the Duke of Saxe Weimar," National Review, xviii (1864), pp.1-2,11.

richness of Goethe's criticism of life, allowing his profound, imperturbable naturalism to upset our routine thinking, and accepting that however great he appears he may soon appear greater as we perceive more of him, but it is those who, like Carlyle and Lewes, extract specific messages from his life and works, who hope that he will change things (and those who, like Herman Merivale and Sarah Austin, extract specific messages which they dislike, who fear that he has changed things already).

Goethe the reconciler: 1846-1849

Goethe's critics often talk about the bringing together of qualities, or abstract principles, which are normally found apart - self-control and warmth of emotion, free use of the reason and faith, the ideal and actual -, some thinking that such reconciliations are accomplished in or by him, some that they conspicuously are not.[45] Such talk continues into the mid-century (Lewes, of course, does plenty of it), but generally does not have the Apocalyptic overtones with which Carlyle invested it when he spoke of Goethe showing how 'the Actual and the Ideal may again meet together, and clear Knowledge be again wedded to Religion'.[46] The enthusiastic Oxford and Cambridge reviewer of Faust, of course, with his idea that Goethe has shown the way for modern man by passing through doubt to new faith, is an exception. This author also makes the Lewes-like (but also Carlylean -both Lewes and Carlyle want to find the ideal in the real) point that by having the 'vast machinery' of Faust part one lead into a 'mere

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45. See ch.1, pp.37-38,ch.2, p.79, ch.4, pp. 229 , 230 , ch.5, pp.284 , above.

46. See ch.1, p. 37 , above.

village tale of seduction', Goethe teaches 'the extraordinariness of the ordinary everyday life, ... the infinitely pregnant meaning that underlies the meanest action of the meanest man' - to teach this, he says, is 'the whole object of all he ever wrote or said'.[47] The Scottish jurist and political philosopher James Lorimer, in a rather confused article in the North British Review about "Female characters of Goethe and Shakespeare", takes the more common line that Goethe shows a rare combination of attributes, without claiming also that he can show the way to mystical resolutions of dualisms. Lorimer sees in Goethe an exceptional 'double nature'. In him we have 'the singular, and, we believe, unparalleled phenomenon, of the enthusiastic temperament of a poet united with the faculties of a cool and dispassionate observer'. He is the 'deepest and most abstruse' and at the same time the 'most popular' of all modern poets (a more dubious claim). There is a lesson for mankind in this Goethean uniting of contraries, but it only concerns the continued existence of themes for poetry in modern times - Goethe is 'the poet of the nineteenth century' because he 'read the newspapers all his days, and ... was a poet notwithstanding', thus showing that 'while men and women feel, love, and suffer, the poet's occupation will remain'.[48] Goethe's modernity is part of his character as a 'poetic realist' (p.269), and Lorimer contrasts him, at least as respects his female characters, with the more idealistic Shakespeare (an unusual distinction - Shakespeare is more normally considered a realist also, if of a different kind), though unlike Lewes he expresses no clear preference for the realistic over the idealistic. Goethe's females are 'truer to nature,

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47. "Faustus. A dramatic mystery " (note 33, above), p.10.

48. J.Lorimer, "Female characters of Goethe and Shak speare," North British Review, viii (1848), pp.266-268, 293.

not in the higher sense of what nature might and would produce in given circumstances, but in the lower sense of what she usually does produce, and what we see around us in the ordinary intercourse of the world. They are one degree farther removed from the antique, in that they are less the embodiments of abstract passion, and approach nearer to the complexity of ordinary nature'(p.291). Goethe's truth to nature is of a 'lower' sort, but it is a sort appropriate to the task of giving 'aesthetic expression' to Goethe's own time (p.293), the task for which, by virtue of his peculiar double nature, Goethe is exceptionally well-fitted.

John Abraham Heraud, reviewing an American translation of Dichtung und Wahrheit in the Athenaeum in 1847, also draws attention to qualities unusually combined, though he finds the mixture not a completely stable one: 'we cannot fail of recognizing, in blended union, the gravest wisdom with the most fervent enthusiasm - the latter revelling in the strangest theories, the extravagances of which even the former could not always succeed in correcting'.[49] Heraud's speciality, as we have seen from his Faust article of 1833,[50] is protesting that understanding Goethe is much easier than everybody thinks, then proceeding to confuse the picture with his own convoluted thinking and prose style. Here he makes much of the fact that people used to think, before it became known that Goethe was a philosophical realist with a pre-eminently easy and familiar style, that the meaning of the title Dichtung und Wahrheit was a dark mystery. Now we know

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49. J.A.Heraud, 'The autobiography of Goethe,' The Athenaeum, xx (1847), p.1096. The article is attributed to Heraud in L.A.Marchand, The Athenaeum: a mirror of Victorian culture (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1941), p.215.

50. See ch.2, pp. 80-81, above.

better, and Heraud offers as the simple truth his own metaphysical and highly idiosyncratic interpretation - '"Truth and Poetry, out of my Life," meant what the words imply, and no more - i.e., that in stating the facts of his early life the autobiographer had selected those which were most illustrative of his poetic temperament, and most respected that deeper truth which the poetic element essentially involves' (p.1094). The general idea seems to be that Goethe (a great man and poet, though not so great as Shakespeare or Milton - p.1096), even though 'His strength to the last was in a mystical region of idea' (p.1096), was essentially a clear and straightforward poet. Heraud is then forced, like Lewes, to separate off the 'system of allegory and mysticism' used in Faust part two and Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, and to describe these works as unfortunate afterthoughts (p.1094). Another Athenaeum review, which could well be by Heraud on grounds of both style and content, similarly emphasises clarity as a characteristic of Goethe's mind - 'the largest, clearest, most universal mind of his time' -,[51] and includes him with Dante and Shakespeare in a select group of poets who can also be considered (in Carlylean phrase) vates or prophets, 'not as foretelling particular events that were to happen, but as men endowed with a superior faculty of insight generally'. As in the review of Dichtung und Wahrheit, there is a confident assertion here that the mysterious and difficult Goethe is a thing of the past, that 'there is little doubt that before long the image of the great genius and truly noble man will be visible from its proper elevation to all friendly eyes in the region above the floating mists of passion and prejudice' (pp.102-103). Not all writers shared this slightly condescending belief that we will soon

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51. "Goethe and his works," The Athenaeum, xxi (1848), p.101.

know exactly what to make of Goethe. Two notices in the Westminster Review speak of Goethe, and Faust, as inexhaustibly fascinating and puzzling, so that the continued flow of critical writing and translation is quite understandable[52].

The most unreservedly admiring remarks about Goethe in this period come from an article about "The German novel" in the Eclectic Review. With its unstinted praise for German authors, its extremely wide range of coverage, and its rather stilted and Germanic use of language, this article has the air of being either a translation or the work of an émigré German. The terms used to prise Die Wahlverwandtschaften - 'unequalled for its profound and clear ideas' - and Wilhelm Meister - ' a mass of the deepest thoughts, of the clearest and soundest judgements, and of the most entrancing eloquence'[53] - suggest again that combination of (to use two conveniently vague categories) 'romantic' and 'classical' features - profundity and clearness or soundness, enthusiasm and wisdom - which, if perceived, was always likely to make Goethe increasingly admired at a time when, if progress were to be made at all, Romanticism had to be assimilated and travelled beyond.

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52. "Briefe von und an Göthe," Westminster Review, xlvi (1846), pp.266-269; "Faust, a tragedy," Westminster Review, xlvii (1847), pp. 242-243.

53. "The German novel," Eclectic Review, 4th series, xx (1846), p.470.

Hermann und Dorothea and William Whewell

Goethe's idyllic bourgeois epic in hexameters, Hermann und Dorothea, is very warmly spoken of by mid-century critics, and altogether enjoyed a popularity in the nineteenth century which it has generally speaking not had in this. An English translation, in blank verse, by Thomas Holcroft had appeared as early as 1801, and after something of a gap there appeared in my present period, first a volume of hexameter translations by distinguished hands including William Whewell's translation of Hermann und Dorothea (which had already been privately printed in 1839),[54] then in 1849 an anonymous hexameter translation, then in 1850 another translation by M.Winter, and at least three more before 1865.[55] Carlyle never showed any interest in the poem, and describes it parenthetically in Frederick the Great (a work where his anti-fictional bias is at its strongest) as an 'unreal Shadow' of the real events on which it is based, a 'pleasant work' written when the great Goethe was 'not inclined for more'.[56] Matthew Arnold, in 1853, compared it unfavourably with the great Classical poems anddramas - the modern 'domestic epic' leaves the reader cold in comparison because its action is less great, its personages less noble, and its situations less intense.[57] Lewes, however, praises it unreservedly, and devotes a lot of space in his Life to summarising and describing it[58], and his enthusiasm is far from being

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54. English hexameter translations from Schiller, Göthe, Homer, Callinus, and Meleager, by J.C.Hare, J.F.W.Herschel, W.Whewell, J.G.Lockhart, and E.C.Hawtrey, ed. W.Whewell (1847).

55. For details of these translations, see Bibliography, Section II(c), below.

56. Carlyle, History of Frederick the Great (Centenary ed.), iii.50 (book 9, ch.3, 'The Salzburgers').

57. "Preface to first edition of Poems," Complete prose works, i.4-5.

58. See ch.4, pp. 220 ,238 , above.

an isolated phenomenon. With its robust but utterly un-sordid realism of presentation, and its warm-hearted and touching endorsement of various kinds of 'domestic affection', Hermann und Dorothea was well calculated to please mid-Victorians, though an earlier, more 'romantic' taste for the sublime and the profound might find it insipid. It is a comforting poem, as well as being a poem of high technical quality, and comfortable terms tend to be used to praise it. An Athenaeum reviewer, in 1850, speaks of its 'kindly gravity, its fluent breadth, and graceful homeliness'[59], and in the same volume, in an article I have already quoted from, it is found 'harmonious' in its composition and possessed of a 'tranquil power'.[60] In the same year, the Irish translator M.Winter talks in his Introductory Notes about Goethe showing us a new, Christian way of looking at war, focusing not on battles, heroes, and the admirable qualities of those who destroy, but on 'those who console, assist, and defend their fellow-creatures'. Winter, in fact, finds the poem Christian through and through, a 'true and beautiful representation of our own rational and happy religion', imbued with the feeling often expressed by the characters that there is 'a good Providence over-ruling all for the best'. Along with this Christian soundness there is an affectionate realism about human character - 'In this Poem, as indeed, in all his writings, Goethe shows himself to be, like Shakespeare, a lover of human nature, and not, like too many great geniuses, a despiser of it'.[61] A later translator, J.Cartwright, makes the same kind of remark in his Preface, in 1862 -

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59. "Herman and Dorothea," The Athenaeum, xxiii (1850), p.40.

60. "Conversations..." (note 42, above), p.1339.

61. A translation of the Hermann and Dorothea of Goethe: in the Old English measure of Chapman's Homer, by M.Winter (Dublin, 1850), introductory notes, pp.iv,v,vii.

Goethe is 'a man who thought nothing human beneath his attention' - and discreetly indicates that the poem is unexceptionable family reading, 'a simple tale and fit for all'.[62] A reviewer of the Rev. Henry Dale's translation (published in Dresden) in 1860 similarly presents Hermann und Dorothea as the only one of Goethe's great works, with the exception of Iphigenie auf Tauris, ' to whose whole spirit, tone, and expression, neither justice nor prejudice can possibly take exception'. Like Winter, this writer finds truth and beauty combined - 'this most beautiful and most truthful of modern idyls' - claiming that 'the Real in poetry' could not possibly go further than this, but that the poem is nevertheless 'truly poetic'. This is the 'art which conceals art', using the most sophisticated means to create an effect that is simple and natural.[63]

William Whewell, the scientist and philosopher, and a much-respected Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, from 1841 to his death in 1866, devoted much attention to Hermann und Dorothea as part of a long-lasting pre-occupation with the possibilities of hexameters as a metre for modern poetry. Whewell was born in 1794, a near contemporary of Carlyle, and like him learnt German around 1820. Though he studied Kant and, according to Leslie Stephen in the Dictionary of national biography, became something of a disciple at one stage (though never swerving from his un-dogmatic Christian beliefs), Whewell's involvement with German literature was clearly of a relaxed and casual kind compared with Carlyle's, and the playing around with hexameters, including the translating of Hermann und Dorothea, has the air of being an aesthetic and mathematical game. Whewell is in favour

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62. Goethe's Hermann and Dorothea: translated into English verse, by J.Cartwright (1862), Preface, pp.9,6.

63. "Hermann and Dorothea," London Quarterly Review, xiv (1860), pp.546-547.

of the use of hexameters in modern poetry of certain kinds, arguing that the metre can easily be adapted for use in languages whose poetical metres work interms of accent rather than quantity, that we should not be put off the attempt by the absurdities that were produced when the Elizabethan poets tried to write English hexameters according to quantity, and that modern hexameters can achieve effects which other metres cannot. These arguments are put forward chiefly in two "Dialogues on English hexameters" in Fraser's Magazine in 1847 and 1849,[64] in which the enthusiast Ernest argues with the sceptical Marcus, and in a review of various translations and original poems (Clough's Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich and Longfellow's Evangeline) in English hexameters, in the North British Review in 1853.[65] The essence of Whewell's argument on its positive side is the claim, made in the second of the "Dialogues", that hexameters can achieve what more common English metres cannot - here he is talking of an "earnest familiarity, and a truth to the feeling of the day", which he finds in the direct speech in Clough's Bothie, Voss's Luise, and Goethe's Hermann und Dorothea - because the latter metres have become too closely associated with poetic conventions and habits (p.344). Hermann und Dorothea is the supreme example of the liberation which hexameters bring, and that liberation is seen as a recovery of an antique freshness and simplicity. In the first "Dialogue", Ernest claims that the poem, which far from being a mere exercise or a museum piece is "of deep and universal interest", "could not have its Odyssee [sic]-like simplicity in any verse except that of the Odyssee"(p.669). In a review of an anonymous translation, in 1850, Whewell makes the same comparison, saying that although Hermann und Dorothea is true to the feelings of its time, it reminds us constantly

64. W. Whewell, "Dialogues on English hexameters," Fraser's Magazine, xxxvi (1847), pp.665-670, and xxxix (1849), pp.342-347.
65. W.Whewell, "English hexameters," North British Review, xix (1853), pp.129-150.

of the Odyssey 'by the natural and simple breadth of the situations and sentiments, and the picturesqueness and vividness of the details'.[66] In the North British Review he goes even further, finding not only a Homeric 'homeliness of detail' and 'reality' of household conversation and family affection, but also a Shakespearian 'truth of dramatic character' and a Biblical 'breadth and simplicity of human interest' in the story (pp.140-141). Voss's Luise, Whewell says in this same review, is pleasant enough, but it is merely homely, whereas the homeliness of Hermann und Dorothea is 'elevated by contact with weighty interests and deep struggles of sentiment' (pp.138-139).

The propagandist for modern hexameters virtually has to like Hermann und Dorothea, but Whewell clearly has a great admiration and affection for the poem in its own right, and always praises it much more highly than any of the other hexameter poems he talks about. Again it is a question of Goethe combining qualities not usually found together - the poem has modernity, and a sort of pre-lapsarian Homeric simplicity and directness, and universality in the ideas and feelings it deals with, and also an "epic dignity" (second "Dialogue", p.343). An anonymous translator of Hermann und Dorothea in 1849, who describes himself as 'a disciple of Goethe for nearly twenty years' (p.54), makes comments in his Introductory Essay, both about Goethe and about the advantages and difficulties of writing in hexameters, which Whewell, who reviewed the translation[67], must have found much to his taste.[68] Refuting a suggestion that Goethe wrote

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66. W.Whewell, "Göthe's Herman and Dorothea," Fraser's Magazine, xli (1850), p.33.

67. See note 66, above.

68. Herman and Dorothea; translated into English hexameters (1849), introductory essay, pp.3-54.

Hermann und Dorothea out of envy over the success of Voss's Luise, this translator speaks of Goethe's nobility of character, testified to by some of Germany's greatest minds (pp.18-19). Like George Eliot, he praises Goethe for following reality, rather than a priori notions, in his presentation of human character and relationships - the 'sensibilities of the novel-reader' may be offended by the thought of Dorothea having been previously engaged, before she meets Hermann, but 'our poet deals with nature, and not with sentimentality' (p.32). He extracts a moral from the poem, more convincing than the one Lewes found,[69] though still perhaps rather unnecessary. The poem tells us we should build for the future in our individual lives, listening to 'the dictates of nature, good sense, and pure religion', at times when the world is collapsing around us and society rapidly changing - the individual who works to improve his own condition is indirectly promoting the 'common good' (pp.38-39). It is a healthy moral, and this translator, clearly not one of those who would blame Goethe for his political indifference and pre-occupation with his own development, follows the same line as Whewell in presenting Goethe, or at least the author of Hermann und Dorothea, as an eminently healthy poet, one who shows us that to be thoroughly modern one does not have to have lost the vigour and directness associated with ancient authors - some pre-lapsarian pleasures are still available after the Fall.

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69. See ch.4, pp.237-238 above.

Goethe, objectivity, and Shakespeare: 1850-1854

Positivism never became more than a minority cult in England, but the general attitude of mind which gives rise to the cult - a belief in the importance of keeping close to reality, nature, fact, of keeping an 'objective' mind - is a common thing in mid-nineteenth-century England. In the years immediately preceding the publication of Lewes's positivist Life of Goethe, this leaning towards realities - something cooler and more solid, to use Charlotte Brontë's words,[70] than Carlyle's transcendentalist love of 'facts' - appears frequently in commendatory criticisms of Goethe. Praise for the fresh-air qualities of Goethe's style comes out of this liking for the real and natural. Theodore Martin, of Martin and Aytoun's Poems and ballads of Goethe, earlier made a translation of Goethe's fragment "Prometheus", and in his prefatory remarks talks about the difficulty of conveying in translation 'the simplicity and concise energy of the original, which has all the effect of exquisitely chiselled sculpture standing against a crisp, clear sky'.[71] A reviewer of Anna Swanwick 's Bohn translation of Goethe's dramas makes similar comments when talking of the translator's difficulties - Miss Swanwick has failed to reproduce the 'freshness', 'vigour', and 'conciseness' which are characteristic of Goethe's style in both poetry and prose.[72] More often, however, it is Goethe's wisdom, his 'criticism of life', what one writer calls his 'deep insight into the conditions of Art and Nature',[73] that is

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70. C.Brontë, Shirley (Oxford; Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), p.7(ch.1, "Levitical").

71. T.Martin, "Prometheus - a dramatic fragment, By Goethe," Dublin University Magazine, xxxvi (1850), p.520.

72. "Goethe's Faust, Iphigenia in Tauris, Torquato Tasso, and Egmont," Literary Gazette, xxxiii (1851), p.141.

73. "Göthe's opinions on the world, mankind, literature, science and art," The Athenaeum, xxvi (1853), p.824.

being praised. It is a wisdom characterised as not only profound and far-seeing but practical, based on a knowledge of things as they really are. In an article about Ludwig Tieck, Goethe is described, in contrast to the writers of the German Romantic movement, as 'the fully developed man beside the restless boy', by reason of his 'practical wisdom, which arrests us at almost every line in silent wonder'.[74] Jane Sinnett, the hard-working Westminster reviewer who, as we have seen, did not admire Goethe unreservedly,[75] finds in a collection of his epigrammatic sayings 'the perfection of common sense', made possible by the 'perfect equilibrium of his great powers'.[76] The writer whom I quoted as saying that Goethe's 'science of life' influences superior minds describes that science mostly in terms of attachment to realities - 'a regard for the actual, and a dislike of mere abstractions; the reverent worship of nature, and the aversion to whatever clouds or distorts her'.[77] Passing into more abstruse regions, a writer called James McCosh, who has an all-embracing theory of the universe according to which the structures and modes of development in atoms, plants, and animals, and the history of God's dealings with men, all conform to the same pattern and illustrate the two principles of General Plan and Special Adaptation, anticipates Lewes in praising Goethe's pioneer work on plant morphology, work whose value was ensured by his 'fine eye for the objective world'.[78] A review of Eckermann's Gespräche (in Oxenford's translation) in the Literary Gazette, in one of the most resounding encomiums

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74. "Ludwig Tieck," British Quarterly Review, xviii (1853), p.380.

75. See ch.5, p.274, above.

76. J.Sinnett, "Goethe in Briefen und Gesprächen," Westminster Review, new series, ii (1852), p.611.

77. "Correspondence...," (note 41, above), p.1271.

78. J.McCosh, "Typical forms: Goethe, Professor Owen, Mr.Fairbairn," North British Review, xv (1851), pp.389,412,395.

on Goethe from this period, describes the tendency in more generalised terms. Having established that Goethe's is 'the freshest, broadest, and most highly cultivated intellect in Europe', that he was nobly generous, that to accuse him of coldness or political indifference is simply a mistake arising from prejudice, that his utterances are made in a 'clear, beautiful style', the reviewer makes this summarizing statement: 'Truth is always paramount with him; truth in sentiment, truth in thought, truth in opinion, truth in observation, truth in expression'.[79]

Another highly enthusiastic reviewer of Oxenford's translation of Eckermann, in the Gentleman's Magazine, who gives Goethe the unusual compliment of calling him a 'politician in the highest - the Greek-sense of the word', not interested in the immediate political situation but having the 'social development of mankind' always at heart, also centres on 'what the Germans call objectivity'.[80] Objectivity for this writer refers simply to a certain kind of artistic capability, 'the faculty of reflecting objects... without investing them with any peculiarity borrowed from the individual mind', and he goes on to call this quality 'the same freedom from consciousness and mannerism which, above all its excellences, characterizes the poetry of Shakspere' (p.60). The comparison with Shakespeare, so frequently invoked by mid-century critics, is most carefully worked out by David Masson in a long article in the British Quarterly Review which is also nominally a review of Oxenford's Eckermann along with two critical books about Shakespeare, and which quotes extensively from the conversations.[81] Masson, whom

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79. "Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret," Literary Gazette, xxxiii (1851), pp.60-62.

80. "Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret," Gentleman's Magazine, new series, xxxvi (1851), pp.58-61.

81. D.Masson, "Shakespeare and Goethe," British Quarterly Review, xvi (1852), pp.512-543.

we have already seen testifying to the strength of Carlyle's influence in the 1840s,[82] was a very distinguished man of letters, author of a monumentally authoritative life of Milton, editor of Macmillan's Magazine from its formation in 1859 to 1867, and Professor of English Literature first at University College London and later at Edinburgh University. The most prominent critics and translators of Goethe in the nineteenth century sometimes appear to be a close-knit club who are all acquainted with each other, and there are plenty of familiar names in George Gregory Smith's article on Masson in the Dictionary of national biography. He was a close friend of the Carlyles, considered by many to be a Carlyle disciple, though Smith thinks this notion an injustice to his independence of mind, and certainly his judgements on Goethe do not follow a Carlylean pattern. In the English chairs at London and Edinburgh he was the successor, respectively, to A.H.Clough and to W.E.Aytoun, the translator of Goethe's poetry. In this article we see Masson unequivocally ranking Goethe very high indeed. He begins with a discussion of whose portraits, and busts, ought to decorate the rooms of a person of the highest literary culture, and he decides on Shakespeare and Goethe - Dante perhaps might be considered as well, but his 'severe and scornful melancholy' would not harmonise with the 'genial mildness of the two Teutonic faces' (pp.512-513). There is little comparative evaluation of Shakespeare and Goethe, though the feeling is that Shakespeare must be on top, and Goethe's 'mode of activity', as far as it is distinct from Shakespeare's (defined as 'the genius of translation from the subjective into the objective;... of giving felicitous intellectual form to states of mind'), is described as 'narrower' than Shakespeare's, which was 'the genius of universal expression; ..., of pouring over the

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82. See ch.4, p.168, above.

image of any given situation, whether suggested from within or from without, an effusion of the richest intellectual matter' (pp.542-543).

The modes of activity are distinct, but there are important features in common. Like the writer in the Gentleman's Magazine, Masson links Goethe and Shakespeare together as 'objective' poets, but in a different sense - both poets are said to abstain systematically from 'the abstract, the dialectical and the controversial', and to devote themselves to 'the concrete, the real and the unquestioned' (p.541). Masson is more original and ingenious in his account of the different forms which this devotion to the real takes with the two. Taking Prospero's 'Our revels now are ended' speech as his starting point, Masson imagines Shakespeare as intensely aware both of the real world in all its detail and of the boundless and mysterious supersensible world that surrounds reality. Goethe is aware of the supersensible as well, but sees it not as separate from but as flowing through the real - 'the world was to him not a mere spectacle and dominion for the supernatural, but an actual manifestation of the substance of the supernatural itself, on its way through time to new issues'. This is the feeling behind Goethe's 'notion of progress or evolution', his 'peculiar notion of immortality' (as declared to Eckermann), his idea of the relativeness of good and bad, right and wrong, and his doctrine that men should direct all their efforts outwards, into the real world in whose substance the supernatural express itself (pp.541-542). A sense, rather beautifully expressed, of the difference between Shakespeare's and Goethe's faces, in the pictures we have of them, leads Masson to the different types of character they represent. Both faces show a great susceptibility to impressions, but Shakespeare's is a more passive face, one which suggests that

'the tremors among the nervous tissues' reach to 'depths of sheer nervous dissolution', whereas Goethe has a more prominent face suggestive of 'a firmer basis of permanent character', so that those tremors 'sooner make impact against the solid bone'. Shakespeare's face has the calm of 'habitual softness and ease', Goethe's the calm of 'dignified, though tolerant, self-composure' (p.514). Goethe's life, accordingly, by contrast with Shakespeare's, shows throughout, for all his impetuosity in youth, a propensity for self-control and discipline: Goethe gives up, because he is convinced it is the best thing to do, a young and beautiful girl (Lili Schönemann) at the age of twenty-five, whereas at thirty-five Shakespeare is the 'abject slave of a dark-complexioned woman' whom he 'cursed in his heart' (p.536); Goethe consciously dedicates himself to art and to self-culture, whereas Shakespeare's mind is one of those 'whose strength is a revelation to themselves during the moment of its exercise' (p.537). Masson is careful, however, to dissociate himself from the view that the self-controlling Goethe was cold and heartless. He made himself what he was by 'uniting will and wisdom to his wealth of sensibilities': 'A heartless man does not diffuse geniality and kindliness around him, as Goethe did; and a statue is not seized, as Goethe once was, with haemorrhage in the night, the result of suppressed grief' (p.538). Masson, then, sees Goethe much as Lewes sees him - an 'objective' intellect and a good man with an exceptional capacity for self-discipline. His observations are, however, much less evaluative than those of Lewes, the propagandist of philosophical and aesthetic realism. Masson, in fact, in an article about theories of poetry written in 1853, the year after "Shakespeare and Goethe", uses a dictum from Goethe to support an argument

against exclusive realism or imitativeness in art and in favour of the imaginative element. At the moment, with Pre-Raphaelite painting and Thackeray's novels (admirable though both are), we are getting rather too much mirroring of the real world, and after all art can never be an entirely true reflection of life - 'to close this discussion with a phrase which seems to us to fall like a block of stone crush through all our puny contemporary reasonings about art imitating nature, being true to nature, and the like - "Art is called art," said Goethe, "simply because it is not nature."'[83]

E.A.Bowring, who in the sketch of Goethe's life in his volume of translated poems says virtually all the nice things that can be said about Goethe, also links him with Shakespeare - both were 'Nature's high-priests', who studied her closely, appreciated her wonders, and had an exceptional 'power of giving utterance to the wisdom that she teaches'.[84] Bowring's idea of Goethe, however, more like Carlyle's than Lewes's, is essentially religious - Goethe's closeness to nature is nature-worship, a pantheism out of Spinoza, and the fact that he finds God in, not beyond nature does not limit the 'depth of his religious feelings and convictions' (p.34). A presumably German writer called Falck Lebahn, introducing a German text of Faust part one with notes for the English reader, similarly makes claims for Goethe which are based on a broad and liberal view of what is meant by religious, or in this case Christian. Goethe was 'a Christian, in the sense which this word has in Germany, that is to say, he loved God and men', and rejected any doctrine whose tendency was against such love.[85] Carlyle and Lewes found religious

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83. D.Masson, "Theories of poetry and a new poet," North British Review, xix (1853), pp.304-307.

84. "Goethe" (note 35, above), pp.34-35.

85. Faust: a tragedy, ed. F.Lebahn (1853), introductory remarks, p.vii.

wisdom in Goethe, and so did many others. What is distinctive about Carlyle and Lewes (and not Arnold) is that the religion they found in or extrapolated from Goethe was to them the true religion, the fundamental religion, the one which modern man must turn to as traditional Christianity became obsolescent. Others simply doff their hats to Goethe's beliefs, like the two writers I have just quoted, or just select fragments from the Goethean creed which they find particularly edifying. Anna Swanwick, a pious though anti-sectarian Anglican and one of the most skilled and successful of Bohn's translators, manages to find in Faust part one a sort of Christian message, and one which fits with her own view (as it is reported by Mr.Mackenzie Bell[86]) as to the supreme importance of conscience. The 'fundamental idea' of Faust, she says, is contained in these lines, spoken by the Lord in the "Prolog im Himmel" -

> Ein guter Mensch, in seinem dunklen Drange,
> Ist sich des rechten Weges wohl bewusst -

and translated by Anna Swanwick into something rather more moral in emphasis:

> A good man in the direful grasp of ill,
> His consciouness of right retaineth still. [87]

These lines show 'a recognition of conscience as belonging to the deepest roots of man's inner life', and the poem as a whole (part one, that is) shows that man's natural tendency is heavenward, and

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86. "To her, conscience and duty were supreme, the former she almost deified." The words are part of an appreciation contributed by Mr.Mackenzie Bell to Anna Swanwick: a memoir and recollections 1813-1899, ed. M.L.Bruce (1903), p.253.

87. Faust part one, 11.328-329 ("Prolog im Himmel"); Dramatic works of Goethe, translated by A. Swanwick and W.Scott (1850), translator's preface to Faust, p.vi.

that if he heads in other directions the 'agonies of remorse' will soon pull him up.

A better poet than Anna Swanwick, Alfred Tennyson, also found in Goethe endorsement of a truth, of a religious kind, which was of great importance to himself, and which formed one of the fundamental ideas of his own poem In Memoriam. Tennyson admired Goethe very highly, considering him "among the wisest of mankind as well as a great artist", and, with Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and Dante, one of "the great sage poets of all, who are both great thinkers and great artists". In poetry, Tennyson was particularly impressed by the number of different styles in which Goethe excelled, and in the famous first stanza of the first lyric of In Memoriam he both pays tribute to this talent and commends a piece of Goethean wisdom which, he explained much later, he derived from the words "Von Änderungen zu höheren Änderungen", among Goethe's last (in the immediate context, of course, self-indulgent grief is making this wisdom impossible to follow, but the poem as a whole is clearly meant to endorse the idea):

> I held it truth, with him who sings
> To one clear harp in divers tones,
> That men may rise on stepping-stones
> Of their dead selves to higher things. (88)

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88. The poems of Tennyson, ed. C.Ricks (1969), p.864. Tennyson's statements about Goethe, and identification of 'him' in In Memoriam, are reported in H.Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson: a memoir, 2 vols. (1897), ii.287-288 and 391-392 and note.

Clough, Froude, George Eliot

A.H.Clough and J.A.Froude (born in 1819 and 1818 respectively), two doubting mid-Victorian intellectuals who were well acquainted with Goethe and whose literary works show his influence, made little contribution to the critical debate. The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich takes its hexameters and its character as modern idyllic epic from Hermann und Dorothea, and Dipsychus (where hexameters are also used at some points) is a dialogue between a Faust-like aspirer (Dipsychus) and a Mephistophelean reductive realist (the Spirit), Froude's The Nemesis of faith, the most celebrated example of a numerous Victorian genre, the faith-and-doubt novel (Conybeare's Perversion, of course, though it starts from utterly different premises, belongs in the same genre), leans heavily for the part of its plot where moral collapse follows loss of faith on Die Wahlverwandtschaften. Froude's agonised hero Markham Sutherland makes remarks about Carlyle very similar to that which Clough made to Emerson:[89] "Carlyle! Carlyle only raises questions he cannot answer, and seems best contented if he can make the rest of us as discontented as himself".[90] The Goethean solution, propagated so conspicuously by Carlyle, of leaving speculation alone and turning to action, is preached to Markham by his uncle the Dean, who encourages him to be ordained (p.39), but the solution does not work for Markham, and his doubts remain. Markham's illicit love for Helen Leonard ends with the death from fever (after a damp boating trip) of the unlucky symbolic child Annie, and the different conclusions drawn from this catastrophe, with the ambiguous ending where we are left in real doubt as to whether sin and the marriage

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89. See ch.5, p. 269 , above.

90. J.A.Froude, The Nemesis of faith (1849), p.35.

laws are to be considered absolute or relative, are very reminiscent of what follows the similar death of Eduard's and Charlotte's child, though of course Goethe's novel has none of the pre-occupation with religious belief which is the substance of Froude's. The similarities with Goethe, however, as also in the case of the Bothie and Dipsychus, are really only superficial, and none of these works could be described as Goethean in spirit.

I have discussed the only article about Goethe known to be by Froude as an example of a tolerance which is prepared to accept Goethe as fundamentally good and brush aside his faults.[91] Froude has always found Goethe the poet 'pure and noble', and rather inaccurately says that these qualities in the writer have 'long been evident to every one' - not all mid-Victorian critics, for instance, would have accepted that Die Wahlverwandtschaften, with which Froude was so closely acquainted (he not only used it in his own novel, but actually translated it for Bohn[92]) was entirely pure and noble. Even to the liberal-minded Froude, Goethe the man had previously seemed 'impure and sensual', but now Lewes has revealed him as a 'boy among boys, a youth among youths, a man among men', and the whole picture is harmonious and pleasing.[93] Clough, in his review of Aytoun and Martin,

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91. See p.323 , above.

92. Bohn's own short Preface to the volume Novels and tales, by Goethe (1854), mostly translated by R.D.Boylan, describes the translator of Die Wahlverwandtschaften as 'a gentleman well known in the literary world, who does not wish his name to appear' (p.v). A letter of George Eliot's makes it clear that the gentleman is Froude; she is discussing forthcoming contributions to the Westminster Review, and reports that 'Froude is too busy translating the "Wahlverwandschaften [sic] for Bohn to do anything for us worth having' - "G E to Sara Sophia Hennell," 21 January 1852, George Eliot letters, ii. 5.

93. "The life and works of Goethe" (note 40, above), pp.274-275.

keeps himself to aesthetic matters and mostly to questions of translating policy. It is interesting, in view of his own earlier experiments with the metre, that Clough now thinks modern hexameters do not really work satisfactorily, even in the German originals.[94] He suggests a selection of the weightier, more intellectual of Goethe's lyrics - "Prometheus", 'Mahometsgesang", "Grenzen der Menschheit", "Gesang der Geister über den Wassern", "Ganymed" - as most truly characteristic and bringing us into the closest contact with Goethe's mind. Like many critics of Goethe's lyric poems from the first critics onwards, he singles out "Wanderers Nachtlied II", or "Über allen Gipfeln", and he makes these vague remarks about it:

'It is in this serene ether of a divine intelligence that we seem most truly to meet the undying part (the unsterbliches) of Goethe. Here he is himself: elsewhere he is but striving to become himself' (p.712). Intelligence, of a super-human, ethereal kind, seems to be what Clough reverences in Goethe. On an emotional level he finds him less satisfying, and he makes it clear again that he regards the intelligence as the essential in Goethe: 'in the love-poems in general, we are haunted by a sense of the restricted character of the passion... The imagination was enchanted, the soul was agitated, the heart also suffered; but the Mind, which was the man, revolved upon its centre' (p.714).

George Eliot, born in 1819 like Clough, is another of these mid-Victorians who read and thought about (and admired) Goethe a great deal but wrote little. In a sense, though neither Arnold, Clough, Froude, nor even George Eliot would have agreed with everything he said, Lewes had spoken for Goethe's English admirers in this generation.

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94. "Poems and ballads..." (note 4, above) p.715.

Carlyle's more eccentric and extreme writings could never have achieved this kind of consensus status, and as long as Carlyle was the chief authority on Goethe in print there was room for completely different kinds of positive reaction such as that put forward in J.S.Blackie's articles. Lewes, however, though more Carlylean than he seems, gave a comprehensive expression to the more balanced, post-Carlylean admiration for Goethe, and made much possible favourable criticism from British writers unnecessary. Certainly for George Eliot, closely involved in the final stages of the Life of Goethe, in fact a 'silent collaborator' in it as translator of long passages from the German,[95] there was little incentive to set up as a Goethe-critic in her own right. Though a very well-informed Germanist before she met Lewes, and though the more powerful thinker of the two, she was necessarily behind him in knowledge of Goethe, and in any case would have no desire to compete with her husband.

There is, however, a cluster of articles on German subjects by George Eliot published in 1855, using the reading and observing she had done during her stay in Germany with Lewes, and clearly also, as Rosemary Ashton suggests,[96] helping to prepare the ground for the Life of Goethe. Running through these articles are strongly-held realist principles, both aesthetic and philosophical, which closely resemble Lewes's but are also part of a separate development which culminates in the great realistic novels, as yet barely dreamt of. Two pieces of travel memoir published in Fraser's Magazine, "Three Months in Weimar" and "Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar", talk casually of

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95. See G.S.Haight, George Eliot: a biography (Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ.Press, 1968), pp.172-173.

96. The German idea, p.167.

works of art in terms of these principles. Houdon's bust of Gluck is 'a striking specimen of the real in art', showing small-pox scars and a pug nose but also ' the presence of the genius qui divinise la laideur' (Lewes's notion of the ideal rising out of the real is here before Lewes himself has properly formulated it[97]), and a miniature portrait of Goethe on a china cup shows an 'unbent though withered' neck supporting a head 'which might serve as a type of sublime old age', though the dream that from this head 'the discipline of seventy years had purged away all meaner elements than those of the sage and the poet' is only a dream - 'alas! it never is so in reality'.[98] Wagner's music is thought too intellectual in its use of symbolism, starting with the abstract thought and then choosing the symbol, whereas with the greatest artists, surely, 'the symbol rushes in on their imagination before their slower reflection has seized any abstract idea embodied in it'. This article closes with another rhapsody on "Über allen Gipfeln", seen by George Eliot as a consummate piece of mood poetry: 'perhaps the finest expression yet given to the sense of resignation inspired by the sublime calm of Nature'.[99] There is more comment on Goethe's lyric poetry in the essay on Heine of the following year. Goethe, by contrast with Heine, is the complete lyric poet whose poems have 'masterly, finished simplicity and rhythmic grace' as Heine's also do, but an added depth of thought as well (though in fact George Eliot is saying that by reason of their entirely non-intellectual character Heine's poems touch our hearts more strongly): '[Goethe's] lyrical genius is a vessel that draws more water than Heine's, and, though it

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97. See ch.4, p.244 , above.

98. G.Eliot, 'Three months in Weimar,' Fraser's Magazine, li (1855), pp. 702,703; also in Pinney's volume of essays (note 43, above), pp.88,90.

99. "Liszt, Wagner, and Weimar," Fraser's Magazine, lii (1855), pp.51, 62; Pinney, pp.104,122.

seems to glide along with equal ease, we have a sense of greater weight and force accompanying the grace of its movement'.[100] Returning to realism and the Summer of 1855, the philosophical side of George Eliot's beliefs appears in a review of a German book, by Friedrich Gruppe, about the future of German philosophy. In a sentence which obviously points outwards from the subject immediately under discussion towards the rightness of realism in art and towards the consolations of the unbeliever, she expresses surprise that a German professor of philosophy (Gruppe) 'renounces the attempt to climb to heaven by the rainbow bridge of "the high priori road," and is content humbly to use his muscles in treading the uphill à posteriori path which will lead, not indeed to heaven, but to an eminence whence we may see very bright and blessed things on earth'.[101]

In her review of Lewes's Life for the Leader, George Eliot, not in a position to offer judgements, restricts herself to describing what the book contains and quoting from it at length, and makes little direct comment either on Lewes or on Goethe, though she does point out how well equipped Lewes is to write about Goethe's scientific work, mentions Goethe's literary works in enthusiastic tones, and talks of how people have been taught to regard him as 'the intellectual father, or grandfather of this age'.[102] Her most important criticism of Goethe is "The morality of Wilhelm Meister", also in the Leader, a short but very serious article defending the novel's moral character on general principles, which is discussed in detail by Rosemary Ashton in The German idea.[103] It is an article of evangelising

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100. "German wit: Heinrich Heine," Westminster Review, new series, ix (1856), pp.28-29; Pinney, p.248.
101. "The future of German philosophy," The Leader, vi (1855), p.724; Pinney,
102. "Life of Goethe," The Leader, vi (1855), pp.1058-1061; See Ashton, p.153. The German idea, pp.133, 134-135.
103. "The morality of Wilhelm Meister," The Leader, vi (1855), p.703; Pinney, pp.143-147 (the page numbers I give in my text will be Pinney's). See Ashton, The German idea, pp.167-173.

tone, not merely vindicating a book but propounding a set of ideas about morality and about art, on the basis of which Wilhelm Meister can be approved. George Eliot goes beyond tolerance, and beyond Lewes's rather crude and unconvincing attempt at a moral interpretation, his 'deep and healthy moral meaning' and 'from self-culture to sympathy'.[104] There are two central assertions. The first, attacking the prudish, is that 'the novelist may place before us every aspect of human life where there is some trait of love, or endurance, or helplessness, to call forth our best sympathies', and that Goethe always keeps by this rule, showing us erring humanity which is 'saved from utter corruption by the salt of some noble impulse, some disinterested effort, some beam of good nature' (p.146). The second, attacking the naively moralistic, is that what makes Wilhelm Meister a truly moral book is the 'large tolerance' with which Goethe treats his characters, quietly following 'the stream of fact and of life' and waiting patiently 'for the moral processes of nature as we all do for her material processes' rather than attempting to 'alarm readers into virtue' by showing each action having melodramatic consequences depending on its moral or immoral character, according to the 'immoral fiction' that there is a clear line between the virtuous and the vicious (pp.146-147). This most morally pre-occupied of writers is not denying the importance of morality in life or art but proposing a new, broader and deeper morality, and she shows a better understanding of Goethe's tolerance, non-judicial but certainly not amoral in the sense of ignoring morality, than does Lewes or any other of Goethe's British critics from this

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104. See ch.4, pp. 238-239, above.

period. One might argue, however, that the criticisms, particularly the impressively put 'waits patiently for the moral processes of nature as we all do for her material processes', fit George Eliot's own coming novels rather more perfectly than they do Wilhelm Meister - George Eliot learned from Goethe, but Goethe is ultimately a very different kind of genius, much more detached, ironical, and enigmatic in his dealings with both characters and readers. A climactic chapter of Middlemarch (1872) has as its motto Faust's words from the beginning of part two about the earth on which he has been sleeping filling him with resolution 'Zum höchsten Dasein immer fortzustreben'.[105] The contrast between the renunciatory visit to Rosamond Lydgate which follows Dorothea's re-awakening, and the less directly moral progress towards the highest form of existence which follows Faust's, is symptomatic of profound difference between the authors.

Sarah Austin accused Lewes of arguing against crude and ignorant forms of hostility to Goethe without admitting that there might be views worthy of more respect in between these and his own. At first sight, it appears that the same kind of complaint could be made of George Eliot with some justification. Her targets in "The morality of Wilhelm Meister" seem rather easy ones - she attacks the 'moralising novelist' who exhibits a direct 'moral bias', and the 'so-called moral dénouement' in which rewards and punishments are distributed according to actions performed (pp.144-145). In a whole series of articles about the novel from these years, in fact, articles in which the ideas behind George Eliot's own fiction are clearly being thought out, she consistently chooses weak opponents - W.J.Conybeare with his

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105. G.Eliot, Middlemarch (ch.5, note 18, above), iii, 395 (book 8 ch. 81). The lines from Faust are part two, ll.4681-4685 ("Anmutige Gegend").

cynical and malicious attitude to humanity,[106] silly 'oracular' lady novelists who insist that novels must solve great questions,[107] or the homilectic tone and the false idea of renunciation in Kingsley's Westward Ho! and Geraldine Jewsbury's Constance Herbert, criticised in an article of July 1855 which Rosemary Ashton links with "The morality of Wilhelm Meister".[108] The ideas she propounds are really, however, more powerful weapons than this frail opposition merits, and as a critic of Goethe she is, even in this small space, more profoundly subversive not only of ignorant and trivial hostility to Goethe but also of the more serious complaints of a Sarah Austin or R.H.Hutton than is Lewes with his less subtle brand of aesthetic moral realism. If we admit (even the more maturely moralistic Victorian critics, of course, are unlikely to) that the business of the truly moral novelist is quietly to follow the stream of fact and life, showing humanity in all its weakness and fallibility without expressing moral bias while also showing the touches of goodness and beauty which co-exist with weakness, then we will not complain, as Sarah Austin does, of Goethe's 'moral indifference', of his 'confounding right with wrong'[109] or, as R.H.Hutton does, of the lack of moral contrast and perspective in Goethe's fiction.[110] Hutton does not want the moralisings of 'Edgeworthian art', and neither does Sarah Austin, but both want pictures of moral greatness to set off against the weaker characters, so that we

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106. See ch.5, p. 293, above.

107. "Silly novels by lady novelists," Westminster Review, new series, x (1856), pp.449-450; Pinney, pp.310-311.

108. "Westward Ho! and Constance Herbert," Westminster Review, new series, viii (1855), pp.288-296; Pinney, pp.123-136. Ashton, The German idea, pp.171-172.

109. S.Austin, "Goethe's character..." (ch.5, note 73 , above), pp.223,226.

110. See ch.5, p. 290, above.

can have a clear sense of what things in life are morally acceptable and what are not. George Eliot, of course, has Dinah Morris, Dorothea Brooke, and other figures of high moral stature (but then again, Goethe does have his Iphigenie[111]), but would argue that we must, as Goethe pre-eminently does, first accept a universal human weakness which we display impartially, and then watch moral greatness grow out of it. When our own experience has taught us (and Sarah Austin, R.H.Hutton, Herman Merivale, and Goethe's other moralistic opponents clearly have not learnt any such lesson) that the line between the virtuous and the vicious is 'itself an immoral fiction', we shall 'be able to love the good in a Philina, and to reverence the far-seeing efforts of a Lothario' (p.147).

Goethe the healthy poet , and Goethe after death: 1855-1859

Volumes of translations like Bowring's (1853) and Aytoun and Martin's (1859), together with Lewes's insistence on treating Goethe as an artist and his particularly rhapsodic comments on the lyric poetry, to which he devotes a chapter, helped bring Goethe's poems into new prominence in Britain in the later 1850s, thus further redressing the imbalance created by Carlyle's concentration on Wilhelm Meister and Goethe's wisdom. As Lewes's chapter and Clough's article show, however, there is little in the way of general comment to be said about the lyric poems; and these are not the days of detailed practical criticism either. A simple, healthy naturalness, such as was found in Hermann und Dorothea,

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111. See ch.5, p. 290 , above.

is found in the shorter poems as well. A reviewer of an American book of translations by William Grasett Thomas, speaking as many do about the impossibility of adequately translating these poems, says they are 'like wild flowers, lovely and charming on their native heath',[112] and the same writer (presumably) follows this notice with one of Heine's poems as translated by Bowring, in which Goethe's poems, which 'seem to flow from him naturally and to be carelessly thrown forth without reflection, as a bird sings by impulse only', are brought in as a comparison. Heine's poems by contrast seem careful and studied, and the 'vestiges of art', for all Heine's skill in removing them, still make themselves felt and 'leave an after-taste like an impure wine'.[113] The contrast is, interestingly, the opposite way round to the one George Eliot drew between Goethe and Heine, though George Eliot was talking not about art but about intellectual content. Goethe's versatility is such that, if a distinction is being drawn between different kinds of artistic capability, he is quite likely to appear as exemplar of either kind. The Westminster reviewer of Aytoun and Martin speaks of the variety of Goethe's poetic achievements as something that should make him pleasing to all tastes, and gives a list of antithetical qualities: 'Strong and graceful, deep and playful, wise and tender, he has excelled in every kind of composition, and may claim the homage and admiration of every reader'.[114] We have seen how different critics regard Goethe as both an utterly 'objective' poet and an utterly 'subjective' one. Another Westminster reviewer, speaking of Oeser's

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112. "The minor poetry of Goethe," Westminster Review, new series, xvi (1859), p.634.

113. "The poems of Heine," same vol. as above, pp.634-635.

114. "Poems and ballads of Goethe," Westminster Review, new series, xv (1859), p.624.

"Aesthetische Briefe", draws a contrast between Goethe and Schiller which Herman Merivale and Sarah Austin would put the other way round (Merivale actually does so[115]): Goethe is the poet who creates, actually inventing characters 'in harmony with the invariable laws of our nature', whereas Schiller merely expresses thoughts and feelings, not abl fully to embody them.[116]

The radicals of the Westminster Review find Goethe's poetry refreshingly close to nature, and place him above other poets for that reason. The Rev.Frederick Metcalfe, a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford who produced a History of German literature 'based on' (meaning loosely translated from) a German work by Vilmar, relays to English readers another version of this type of praise. Goethe has faults (he lacks sympathy with the mass movements of mankind,his Wahlverwandtschaften shows a deterministic idea of human behaviour which is immoral in tendency), but altogether he 'gives one the idea of perfect health' in both mind and body, and has a 'natural soundness of understanding'. His genius is 'natural', and it leads him towards nature: he is what Herder wanted to be but himself was not, a 'genius who, by the force of his own natural powers, went to life and the realities of the world around for the matter of his inspiration, moulding these into poetical shape' .[117] Lewes's idea of Goethe, the poet who indirectly prophesies simply by being an 'objective' poet and animating fact with divine life, catches on in a way that Carlyle's idea of a directly prophesying Goethe never really did. Andrew Wilson, a young Scottish journalist (born in 1831)

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115. H.Merivale,"Göthe's festival" (ch.5, note 41 , above), p.204.

116. "Aesthetische Briefe," Westminster Review, new series, xiii (1858), p.632.

117. F.Metcalfe, History of German literature, 'based on the German work of Vilmar' (1858), pp.451,431.

and yet another example of the special openness of Scotland to German culture (he was educated at both Edinburgh and Tübingen), contributed to Blackwood's in 1856 a collection of "Wayside songs, original and translated", which include a few translations from Goethe, and also some incidental remarks about poetry which Lewes and Goethe would both have approved of. Commenting on some lines he has translated from Faust, he explains that what we need in order to understand the 'mystic meaning' of things is 'that sympathy with pure nature which enables a man, in the first place, to see objects as they really are, and then, to enjoy the life of these objects as if it were actually his own'.[118] This statement, in fact, manages to suggest features of the Goethe-criticsm of Carlyle, Lewes, and Matthew Arnold. It was Carlyle who talked about facts revealing mystic meanings, Arnold who praised Goethe's 'profound, imperturbable naturalism' and, in phraseology strikingly similar to Wilson's here, spoke of the importance of seeing the object 'as in itself it really is'.[119] Lewes, however, who sees Goethe finding and revealing the ideal through close and detailed knowledge of the actual, of the structures and processes of nature, is nearest to Wilson's thinking.

Goethe is still, then, offering a sort of revelation of the divine to some readers, and he can still, even in these relatively realistic times, be regarded as Inspired in a capitalised if rather vague sense. One of the Westminster reviewers I quoted speaks with special enthusiasm of "Die Braut von Korinth", and we are reminded of Carlyle's idea that

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118. A.Wilson, "Wayside songs, original and translated," Blackwood's Magazine, lxxx (1856), p.406.

119. See ch.4, p.207 , above.

Goethe was in contact with the 'old, divine spirit' of poetry[120] - the poem reads 'as if in the night-watches the spirit of the past had descended upon Goethe, like a tongue of flame; and he writes as if inspired by the genius of ancient Poetry'.[121] A frankly confused R.D.Boylan, in the Preface to his translation for Bohn of Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, is happy to lean on a dim notion of artistic inspiration: 'Alternately attracted and repelled, we at last take refuge in the conviction that our Author is one of the Inspired, a true and original Genius, notwithstanding our inability to penetrate his views, or to comprehend why he is at times so obscure and unintelligible, and at others so profound'.[122] It has become commonplace by this stage both to connect Goethe with 'ancient Poetry' and to grant him a special kind of vision, as two not altogether complimentary epithets from this period show - the British Quarterly Review calls him 'The German Homer',[123] and the Scottish Review (apparently quoting someone else) 'The "sublime Pagan"'.[124]

As we have already seen, it is even still possible to present Goethe as a revealer of Christian truth,[125] though this seems to be easier for writers of foreign extraction than for the British. The Hungarian G.G.Zerffi, whom we have met in his capacity of Professor of the German language and literature at Westbourne College, Bayswater and other

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120. See ch.1, p.36 , above.

121. "Poems and ballads of Goethe " (note 114, above), p.625.

122. Wilhelm Meister's apprenticeship, translated by R.D.Boylan (1855), Preface, p.v.

123. "Goethe and Werther," British Quarterly Review, xxi (1855), p.591.

124. "Poems and ballads of Goethe," Scottish Review, vii (1859), p.199.

125. See pp.331, 342, above.

institutions,[126] accompanies his students' edition of Faust with a personal interpretation more extravagantly Christianising than any of those I discussed from the earlier period.[127] He admits that Faust can be seen in many different lights, but to him it is a 'thoroughly Christian book' which, however puzzled we may be by it, is all the time 'wafting us safely to the haven of the purest Christianity'.[128] In Faust is dramatised the perpetual struggle within our divided nature between good and evil. Faust is torn between his reason and his sensual nature, but Goethe teaches us the 'great truth' that 'reason and body must alike submit to the guidance of the bright star of RELIGION' (pp.xix-xx). In the second part Faust progresses beyond his love for Gretchen to the 'purer love' which is for God, and which eanbles him at last to 'seek and obtain forgiveness and eternal life' (note 940, p.327). His spiritual nature finally 'regains its mastery over his rebellious passions', and he enters, not into new spheres of activity, but into 'eternal peace' (p.xxxii). A witty reviewer of Zerffi's edition in the Saturday Review is more typical of British interpreters of Faust, still importing more Christian moral and theological criteria than most modern critics would, but avoiding the naive extremes of Zerffi. Zerffi's notes, he says, show a mixture of 'the voluminous industry of a German commentator' and 'the zeal of an English evangelical clergyman', and his notion of the theme of Faust is wrong because Goethe was not a Christian, never mind one who would 'wander about the world to tilt as a knight-errant for the

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126. See ch.5, pp.258-259, above.

127. See ch.2, pp.76-96, above.

128. Goethe's Faust (ch.5, note 14 above), Preface, pp.ix-x.

Augsburg Confession', and did not write works with a religious object 'as the word "religion" is understood by Christians'.[129] There is, however, 'something of a grand strain of prophecy' in the way the story works out. It is 'the great poem of the eighteenth century', 'the epic of a revolutionary age', and reflects the eighteenth century's 'war of ideas', with the hero, reacting against the tedium of common life and against system, falling Rousseauistically back on nature, unable to find God and unaware of 'nature's highest purpose'. Faust is saved, however (and the age was to be saved), for two reasons - and here a little of the Christian thinking which had been drained off pours back in again. Firstly, Faust's love for Gretchen had been 'a saving fragment of his life', and once the impure aspects of it have been 'expiated by misery' he can be borne up to heaven by, among others, Gretchen herself. So the age, confused and blinded in its struggles, was to have 'much forgiven it because it had loved much', and the ideal and the real thus come together, finding 'their point of union in the heart'. Secondly, more predictably, Faust's altruistic last actions, the reclaiming of the land, have 'given the angels part in him'. This reviewer chooses the same two lines as Anna Swanwick chooses for the 'true moral' of the whole poem,[130] though not speaking as she does of conscience but simply of the truth that 'The idealist may stray, but he never sinks' (pp.456 and 457).

Why Faust goes to heaven is a subject much discussed in the nineteenth century. The question of <u>whether</u> Goethe himself has gone there is also raised, though much less frequently. Kenealy's <u>Goethe: a new pantomime</u> explicitly connects Goethe's death with Faust's,[131]

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129. "Faust," <u>Saturday Review</u>, viii (1859), pp.456-457.

130. See p. 343 , above.

131. See ch.5, p. 278 , above.

and so, implicitly, does "Goethe's death", a poem by T.Irwin printed in the Dublin University Magazine in 1857.[132] This poem, though utterly different in conception and a mere 250 octo-syllabic lines long, can be seen as an ante-type to Kenealy's pantomime. Like Kenealy, Irwin starts his poem shortly before Goethe's death, imagining the poet's state of mind as he waits, and then speculates on what will happen to him after death, though there is no following of Goethe into Tartarean or Elysian realms. The attitude to Goethe is one of awed reverence, but the poem is enveloped in a Keatsian haze and contains little analysable critical comment. Most of the space is taken up by nostalgic poetic visions which are supposed to pass through the dying Goethe's mind, but which have little obvious connection with anything in Goethe's life or works. There is an attempt to summarise Goethe's wisdom, spoken of here as deeply beneficial to the rest of mankind:

> The beauty, wisdom, and the truth
> That he had gleaned since days of youth
> From out the spheres of things and men,
> For future culture of his kind (p.336).

Irwin picks out the keeping close to nature, the hoarding of 'The wealth from observation won', the cultivation of the will in action but also of self-sufficient tranquility, the recognition of the preciousness of the soul, and of the value of suffering (pp.336-337). What is most striking in this poem, though, and rare among Victorian critics, is something like a sympathetic understanding of late Goethean

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132. T.Irwin, "Goethe's death," Dublin University Magazine, 1 (1857), pp.333-337.

attitudes to death and after-life. Irwin has clearly studied the end of Faust part two, with the Mater Gloriosa's command to the transfigured Gretchen,

> Komm, hebe dich zu höhern Sphären!
> Wenn er dich ahnet, folgt er nach, (133)

and he shows Goethe imagining an ascent to higher spheres and an ever-continued activity beyond death - Goethe sees nearby

> The realm of Second Life disclose
> Its radiant regions of repose,
> And amplified activity,

and 'views the future of his soul',

> Through mighty heavens ranging on,
> Through varied lives, from God to God (p.337).

Irwin can contemplate without distaste Goethe's remoteness in old age - too 'subtile-brained' and 'Bright souled' for 'human hued companionship' - and is in no doubt about the harmonious beauty and greatness of the whole life: a heavenly choir (again we are close to the end of Faust) is imagined singing to him "Thy task is done, thy crown is won" (p.333).

Bulwer Lytton and Goethe's superior knowledge: 1860-1865

I have suggested that the ethical debate about Goethe, revived by the appearance of Lewes's Life in 1855, has largely died out by 1860.[134]

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133. Faust part two, 11.12,094-12,095 ("Bergschluchten").

134. See ch.5, pp.298-299, above.

The work which, in that year, caused a brief flicker of interest in the old questions, Henry Noel Humphreys's semi-fictional dramatic nouvelette Goethe in Strasbourg, shows an unmixed admiration of Goethe surviving all the aspersions that had been cast on him (Humphreys was born in 1810 and must have been aware of moral objections that had been raised - indeed his manner of treating the Strasbourg story shows that he definitely was), an attitude which, though not typical, was by no means unique at this time. Irwin's poem, for instance, and Bowring's sketch of Goethe's life[135], show a similar unclouded belief in the hero. Bowring in particular shares with Humphreys a desire to find Goethe in the right at all times, amusingly illustrated when, ignorant of the history of Goethe's relationship with Christiane Vulpius, he assumes that because Goethe had a grown-up son at the time of his marriage, there must have been a previous marriage.[136] The Goethe Humphreys presents (his work is half a play and half a novella, with dialogue set out as for a drama but with stage directions and descriptive passages in the past tense) is Lewes's 'magnificent youth',[137] an Apollo in appearance, wild in behaviour, with the fire of genius in his eyes, but also with a genuinely deep seriousness about his emotions which Lewes does not claim for Goethe at twenty. There is a naive dragging in of as much Goetheana as possible - Goethe gives an overwhelming reading of Götz at a Strasbourg party, and in a love scene with Frederika spends most of the time expounding his theory of the Urpflanze. The crucial scene and the one where Humphreys's Goethe-idolatry is at its most distorting,

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135. See p. 342 , above.

136. E.A.Bowring, "Goethe" (note 35, above), p.25.

137. Lewes, Life of Goethe, p.65.

is an argument between Goethe and Frederika as to whether for the sake of the free development of his genius they ought both to renounce their love for each other. The argument against the 'unfettered self-culture' idea is ingeniously put into Goethe's own mouth - "I feel now that to be linked to such a heart as yours would not impede my course, but give it warmth and purpose" - whereas Frederika unselfishly takes the other side: "Ah, Goethe! happiness in obscurity for one like you is impossible; no, no, the caged eagle would pine, and droop the lids of the glorious eyes destined to gaze where others dare not glance."[138] The problem is solved, leaving neither of the principals with any responsibility, when Clampe (a fictional extension of the dancing-master's daughter, Lucinde, whose story is told in Dichtung und Wahrheit) maliciously throws down a well the locket which is supposed to be a sign sent to Goethe that his proffered love for Frederika has been accepted. Humphreys knows he is fictionalising, but clearly has a high enough opinion of Goethe to want to make all his actions appear in the best possible light.

More commonly found is a qualified acceptance of Goethe in moral terms, of a kind exemplified in the writings of J.S.Blackie, and in an intelligent review of Goethe's corresondence with Duke Karl August, in the National Review in 1864, from which I have already quoted statements about Goethe not being fully comprehensible to ordinary mortals.[139] It is the kind of view produced when initial reservations are substantially overcome by the discovery of a warm and good-hearted

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138. H.N.Humphreys, Goethe in Strasbourg: a dramatic nouvelette (1860), pp.157-159.

139. See p. 324 , above.

personality as revealed most plainly in Goethe's letters - we know that John Sterling went through this process, and other readers of the sets of correspondence must have had similar experiences.[140] This writer speaks of the 'calm genial kindliness, which runs like a vein of ore through all Goethe's letters', and though he finds the '"I am Goethe"' tone characteristic of the letters, a constant concentration on his own 'internal development', he does not think them selfish letters - 'on the contrary, they are tender-hearted to an extraordinary degree'.[141] Goethe's attitude to life is described, without either praise or blame but with the implication that it is an admirable self-discipline though not quite a recommendable one, as resembling 'the creed professed rather than acted upon by the ascetic school of believers, only that the object of the faith is different'. As certain kinds of religious people profess to have to make social considerations subservient to the elevation of their souls, so Goethe, acting more than he professes, puts the elevation of his mind first. The delicately-balanced character of this assessment, which suggests approval and admiration on the whole, but has the possible reservations all the time in mind, is nicely contained in the following sentence (Goethe's life has been described as a dedicated struggle and search for, in his own dying words, "more light"). 'To secure that end, he would sacrifice the affections of others as readily as he would his own; more readily he could not' (p.11).

Lewes's view that if we look at Goethe straight and without prejudice we will not find him perfect but will find more to admire than to regret

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140. See ch.3, pp. 161 , 128 , above.

141. "Goethe's correspondence..." (note 44, above), pp.10,11.

seems to have won a great deal of assent - many critics, in any case, were of that persuasion before Lewes's Life was published. An area where Lewes was clearly less successful (though many readers might have been quite glad to be warned off the more difficult Goethe) was in the interpretation and judgement of Goethe's more abstruse works, most obviously Faust part two. John Anster, following his very popular translation of part one, published in 1835, produced nearly thirty years later a translation of part two (not the first by a long way but, like the earlier translation, more popular than most and often reprinted[142]), accompanied by exhaustive notes and a long Preface. Anster was an Irish lawyer and literary man, born in 1793, Regius Professor of Civil Law at the University of Dublin from 1850, and a student of German and of Goethe from the 1810s. He amassed an extensive knowledge of Goethe and of Goethe-scholarship, but made little individual critical contribution. His lectures on German literature, given in Dublin in 1864, contain some remarks about Goethe, but mostly of a hazy and rambling kind - there is a tentative biographical interpretation of Iphigenie auf Tauris, in terms of Goethe finding in 'Grecian art' a long-lost sister who puts an end to the struggles and errors of his youth, and a detailed description of the "Mahomet" fragment and of the notes Goethe made for its continuation, but no general or evaluative comment at all.[143] The Preface and notes to his translation of Faust part two similarly express little individual thought - Anster wishes 'to be understood rather as communicating to my readers materials

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142. See Morgan, Critical bibliography, p.162.

143. J.Anster, "German literature at the close of the last century and the commencement of the present," in Afternoon lectures on literature and art, delivered in Dublin, April and May 1864, 2nd series (London, 1864), pp.189-90, 190-195.

for forming opinions for themselves than definitely expressing any of my own'.[144] The very undertaking of the exercise, however, and the nature of the 'materials' provided - mostly summaries of German interpretations of the allegory, with some suggested parallels-indicates an attitude to part two very different from Lewes's. He speaks of it as a 'wonderful work', and in particular, implying that it should not be dismissed by those who dislike allegory, protests against those critics who try to pin down the meaning of the whole poem and everything in it - we should really think of the characters 'not as though read of in an essay, but as seen acting on the stage' (p.xli).

The English interpreter of Faust part two, whom I have already quoted, who saw in it a representation of Goethe's personal harmonising of his disharmonious age, and wished that the world could follow Goethe's way,[145] is a direct assailant of the unimpressed Lewes. He speaks with scorn of Lewes's comments on part two in the Life, and at one point, exposing one of these comments as a mere mistake, says in a foot-note 'I think it is not saying too much, that Mr.Lewes really never read Faust through'.[146] Contrary to Lewes, this writer says that part two gains from being the work of an old man, because only age and experience could conceive the massive theme of the 'reconciliation of man's ideal with his sensual nature'. He also denies that the poem is really obscure - it certainly presents difficulties, but the poet is not in the wrong, and the difficulties can only be temporary - 'a calmer and more advanced age shall look with clearer eyes on the greatest poem of the clearest of all poets' (p.497). The interpretation

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144. Faustus: the second part, translated by J.Anster (1864), Preface, p.lxxxi.

145. See p. 320 , above.

146. "The second part..." (note 34, above), p.502, note.

offered is the most learned and impressive since that in the Foreign Quarterly Review in 1840,[147] and in some ways an advance on that, though rather less ambitious in that it does not really attempt to be a total, unified reading. The author is good at seeing parallels and pairings, particularly between parts one and two. The "Kaiserliche Pfalz" corresponds to "Auerbachs Keller" (Faust seeks enjoyment in the latter, action in the former, and finds only tawdriness in both). The conjuring of the Mothers is a superlative version of the conjuring in the "Hexenküche". In the "Klassische Walpurgisnacht", Faust passes from lower manifestations of Classical art (sphinxes, gryphons) upwards towards the highest (Helena), while Mephistopheles proceeds downwards to the hideous Phorcyads (pp.504, 508). The least convincing part of the interpretation is a repeated insistence that from the end of part one onwards Faust is on a consistently upward course. Though he does not introduce Christian notions of sin and redemption, this writer is like the few others who attempted to understand part two in this period in being lured by the attractions of a possible hopeful message for mankind into giving an over-simplified version of the processes that are going on. He sees the Faust of part two 'acting deliberately, and pursuing his high aim, becoming purer at every step', and later he says 'step by step he has sought and gained purer knowledge and lived according to higher laws' (pp.499,512). I would suggest that there is no such linear progress, and, as the reviewer of 1840 indicated, that it is important to remember the deliberately fragmented nature of the poem, and to take each fragment on its own terms. When it comes to saying what the 'message' is (he gives the impression that there is one),

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147. See ch.2, pp. 92-96 , above.

this writer of 1863 becomes vague and oracular. He tells us that the "Alles Vergängliche" lines sum up the whole meaning of the poem, but does not explain in what way they are a summing up. Finally, asking whether Faust has received divine mercy without faith, he hints that the poem has a message of hope for doubting modern man, quoting the stanza from In Memoriam where Tennyson claims 'There lives more faith in honest doubt,/Believe me, than in half the creeds". (p.512).

The Carlylean belief that in Goethe's works and life can be found the key to all knowledge, and even the clue to survival, for modern man, lives longest among a small minority group of interpreters of Faust. The more normal trend, as I said at the beginning of this chapter, is towards finding Goethe valuable in a more generalised sense, as one who can greatly extend our understanding of the world by virtue of the exceptional breadth and depth of his own knowledge. Appreciation of the artistic qualities of Goethe's works, particularly of the lyric poems, becomes more widespread, but it is still as a sage of one kind or another that Goethe is most admired. Elizabeth J. Hasell, for instance, in an article in Blackwood's which compares Goethe's Iphigenie auf Tauris favourably with the source play by Euripides, commends Goethe's artistic achievement, particularly in character-portrayal, but commends it as the expression of a modern, essentially Christian moral wisdom. Euripides's play may surpass Goethe's in 'interest of story', but in 'interest of character (infinitely the higher source of dramatic interest)' Goethe's is far superior. Goethe's Iphigenie, above all, who, with her 'purity and goodness', 'though supernatural, is not unnatural', serves, by comparison with Euripides's heroine, to demonstrate the superiority of Christian thinking, which 'sets morality and religion at one', to Pagan, which tends to drive them

apart.[148] Matthew Arnold is more dismissive of the literary qualities of Goethe's individual works than most of his Victorian admirers would be, but the majority would probably agree that it is for the criticism of life above all that we go to Goethe.[149] In any case, as Lewes's criticism shows, artistic appreciation can be just another way of enjoying the fruits of Goethe's wisdom. Two reviewers of the second edition of Lewes's Life join Lewes in celebrating an intellect exceptional in all its areas of activity, and, more important still, an intellect rightly directed. The Westminster Review (the author is probably W.M.W.Call) speaks of 'the greatest European poet since Shakespeare' and 'this high-priest of truth and beauty',[150] and the Athenaeum, scoffing at those 'worthy souls inhabiting mortal bodies, who to this day believe that Goethe was a mystic', points especially at Goethe's sound scientific method, rightly seen by Lewes as a carefully handled a priori which does not lead us to the 'brain-spun universes' of German metaphysics.[151]

Returning to Bulwer Lytton and Caxtoniana[152], we find an author who both exemplifies and discusses the usefulness for others of Goethe's superior knowledge. Throughout the two volumes of these essays on life, literature, and manners he quotes from and refers to Goethe to back up points he is making, a practice that is becoming increasingly common among English essayists, and in the essay "On some authors in whose writings knowledge of the world is eminently displayed", where

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148. E.J.Hasell, "Iphigenia in Tauris," Blackwood's Magazine, xcii (1862), pp.469-470, 477-479.

149. See Arnold, "A French critic on Goethe," Complete prose works, viii. 275.

150. W.M.W.Call (probably), 'The life of Goethe," Westminster Review, new series, xxv (1864), p.603.

151. "The life of Goethe," The Athenaeum, xxxix (1864), pp.191-192.

152. See ch.3, pp. 144-154, above.

he devotes seven pages to Goethe, he explains why this habit is so strong with him: 'there is scarcely a subject connected with the great interests of the world - whether in art, literature, politics, or in the more trivial realm of worldly manners - on which some shrewd, wise, or playful observation of Goethe's does not spontaneously occur to me as pertinent, and throwing a gleam of new light on topics the most trite or familiar'.[153] Knowledge of the world means not merely an understanding of people but a wider understanding of the ways of society as a whole, and the essay discusses a large number of English and continental writers who possess this knowledge in varying degrees. At the top of the list are Shakespeare and Goethe, who combine knowledge of the world with other kinds of knowledge and are of the tolerant cast of mind which enables the knowledge to operate most effectively: 'It seems to me that, among modern poets, Goethe ranks next to Shakespeare, at however wide an interval, in the combination of abstract, metaphysical speculation, and genial, easy, clement knowledge of the actual world' (p.254). The cast of mind is very important - Juvenal, Rochefoucauld and Horace Walpole all have knowledge of the world, but it does not make them any the better, nobler, or wiser. Shakespeare and Goethe, unlike the satirists and cynics, are characterised by indulgent leniency, a 'genial sympathy for the infirmities of others', and a freedom from 'acrid and arrogant self-love' and 'pharisaical pretensions to an austerity of excellence' (p.260). Goethe, perhaps, takes this leniency a little too far. There might be some foundation (Bulwer, as we have seen, is not as passionate

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153. E.G.E.L.Bulwer Lytton, "On some authors in whose writings knowledge of the world is eminently displayed" (essay 25), in Caxtoniana: a series of essays on life, literature, and manners, 2 vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1863), ii.254.

or fundamental a realist as George Eliot) in the often-heard complaint that in Goethe's works there is an excess of 'This want of indignation for the bad, this want of scorn for the low, this want of enthusiasm for the good, and this want of worship for the heroic' (p.256). A much milder version of R.H.Hutton's feeling that there is a lack of moral perspective in Goethe's works leaves Bulwer ranking him distinctly lower than he ranks Shakespeare (though no-one else is placed above Goethe) - Goethe's 'astonishing knowledge of the infirmities of man's nature' is not, as Shakespeare's is, carried into 'the realm of poetic beauty' in such a way as to show infirmity in the true perspective, with the result that Goethe makes a hero of Clavigo, who would be a subordinate character in Shakespeare, and makes Mephistopheles the prince of hell, whereas Shakespeare would make the same character 'a mocking philospher of "earth, most earthy"' (p.259). In religious matters, Bulwer finds 'frequent and grave defects in orthodoxy' in Goethe, but vaguely praises his understanding of the 'religious truth' that art and religion are inseparable (p.257). At the centre of this balanced but very high approval, as so often, is that discovery, from the letters and conversations, of unexpected personal qualities, which can turn hesitation into enthusiastic acceptance and persuade both the orthodox and the unorthodox that Goethe's wisdom is real and deep wisdom rather than shallow, dangerous cleverness: 'When, through his private correspondence and conversation, we approach to his innermost thoughts, we are somewhat startled to discover the extent of his enthusiasm for all that is genuinely lofty, and all, therefore, that is upright, honest, and sincere' (p.256).

CONCLUSION

Walter Pater, born in 1839 and beginning to write at the end of the period covered in this thesis, is the first English critic with a fully sympathetic and attentive understanding of the ambivalence of Goethe's genius. Two statements towards the end of the essay on Winckelmann (1867) which forms part of Pater's Renaissance present a Goethe in whom a predominant Hellenism is mixed with other, more distinctively modern elements. The first is this: 'Goethe illustrates a union of the Romantic spirit, in its adventure, its variety, its profound subjectivity of soul, with Hellenism, in its transparency, its rationality, its desire of beauty'. The second leads into an innocent repetition of Carlyle's worst habitual misquotation of Goethe[1] which reminds us how strong and multifarious Carlyle's influence was, but both Pater's own values and his understanding of Goethe are as un-Carlylean as they could be: 'Goethe's Hellenism was of another order, the Allgemeinheit and Heiterkeit, the completeness and serenity, of a watchful, exigent intellectualism. Im Ganzen, Guten, Wahren, resolut zu leben:- is Goethe's description of his own higher life'.[2] It is a simplification but perhaps a helpful one to say that Carlyle wanted and found the profound subjectivity of soul and the exigent intellectualism,

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1. See ch.1, p. 23 , above.

2. W.Pater, 'Winckelmann,' in The Renaissance: studies in art and poetry, Library edition (1910), pp.226-227,228.

Lewes the serenity and rationality, and both missed the uniqueness of the mixture. Others either relaxed and enjoyed with a partially worked-out understanding (Crabb Robinson, Sterling, Blackie, David Masson, Bulwer Lytton), or made up their minds that the incompleteness was Goethe's (George Moir, Sarah Austin, Merivale, R.H.Hutton).

The critical debate over Goethe from the 1830s to the 1850s was necessarily an inconclusive one, partly because of Goethe's elusiveness and partly because of terminological discrepancies. It is no wonder Goethe is successively praised or blamed for being wholly objective, wholly subjective, or a mixture of the two, when scarcely two critics can agree as to what these new-fangled Germanic terms mean when applied to art. To find Goethe healthily 'natural' because of his love of botany, the freshness of his language, or his lenient attitude to human frailty, is not to silence that Romantic commitment to 'natural' forces which feels Goethe's dedication to art as a voluntary self-confinement in the hot-house or the refrigerator. Historical accident, however, and Goethe's complex and only selectively attractive greatness, combined to make it a lively and revealing debate which was always touching on fundamental questions. Carlyle, in a sense by mistake, suddenly brought a German style of Goethe-worship before the English eye, and thus presented Goethe for scrutiny in the light of Romantic ideas of the saving potential of art and the messianic powers and reponsibilities of the artist. The need for comprehensive and reliable information about Goethe was satisfied by a positivist biographer whose whole-hearted endorsement of Goethe was also a manifesto for a controversial aesthetic and quasi-philosophical realism. A knowledge of the critical discussion of Goethe under these two heads

and their numerous sub-headings helps fill out our understanding of such other Victorian phenomena as, on the one hand, the enormous popularity of the national poet Tennyson in his lifetime and the pious glorification of Shakespeare, or, on the other, the aggressive apologies for realist practice in the early novels and tales of George Eliot, the preface to Thackeray's Pendennis, and the first chapter of Charlotte Brontë's Shirley.

The seriousness, on both the positive and the negative sides, of that generation of Goethe-critics born around the beginning of the nineteenth century, gradually gives way, as we have seen, to broader and less intense views in the course of the 1850s. Lewes in 1855 is in his way as convinced of Goethe's messianic properties as Carlyle was in 1828, but his claims are disarmingly quiet and generalised in comparison. Such seriousness, however, does leave a deposit behind. Sarah Austin and Herman Merivale speak of a pernicious influence, the younger R.H.Hutton of a sadly incomplete poetic character. The latter point of view, and the assumptions it has in common with the former about the necessary ingredients of the full poetic nature, survives at least long enough to re-emerge in the aftermath of the second world war - Erich Heller's influential essay "Goethe and the avoidance of tragedy" (1952) presents Goethe as an incomplete genius of whom it can be said, as of his alter ego Faust, 'His "tragedy" is that he is incapable of tragedy'.[3] On the other side of the argument, Carlyle speaks of the religious wisdom which could be the corner-stone of a new social edifice, David Masson more calmly of an 'effusion of

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3. E.Heller, "Goethe and the avoidance of tragedy," in his The disinherited mind: essays in modern German literature and thought (Cambridge, 1952), p.46.

the richest intellectual matter' (p. 340 , above). When Goethe's wisdom has been seen as crucial to society, it is the more likely to be found, by the less obsessed, helpful and important for the individual, and again we can look forward, to T.S.Eliot after he recovered from his initial prejudice (see his 1955 lecture on "Goethe as the sage", in On poetry and poets) or to the American poet and Goethe-translator Randall Jarrell. Very few would follow Lewes either in his dogmatic realism or in his total acceptance of Goethe, but most of the reviewers of his biography approved of it on the whole, and Lewes's winningly rational assessment of Goethe is part of that movement towards greater latitude as to what kinds of material can legitimately be regarded as high art which has had to proceed with ever-increasing rapidity between his age and ours. Goethe himself was large enough to survive both muddle-headed discipleship and anxious hostility, if too large and various (and too untranslatable) to achieve any real artistic or intellectual sovereignty in England either then or now.

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