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# Goethe's *Faust* as the Historical Background of Jung's Life and Works

Shoji Muramoto

## Introduction

Jung and his psychology have often and typically been criticized as ahistorical. His opponents wonder what Jungian therapists' discourse on myths, religions, fairy-tales, and alchemy, though interesting and possibly useful for the clinical exploration of patients' inner world, have to do with historical facts?

But Jung himself says something contrary to this criticism in his autobiography: "without history there can be no psychology, and certainly no psychology of the unconscious." (MDR, pp.205-6) Here Jung means by history alchemy and Gnosticism as the historical counterpart of his psychology.

Obviously there seems to be different meanings in the word "history" between professional historians and Jung. History in Jung is not so much an accumulation and ordering of facts in the past but something experienced from the depth of the mind to provide us with the sense of belongingness and identity and the perspective from which to understand what is happening now. His concept of history is therefore not so much scientific than Romantic.

This presentation is not content with the formulation of alchemy as historical counterpart of Jung's psychology but concerned with an intimate link of his psychology, alchemy and Goethe, especially Faust as the hero of his drama.

Dr. Faust was an historical figure in the age of Reformation who had already fascinated and driven people to create fictions for three centuries before Goethe gave him an almost eternal figure in his

drama with two parts. *Faust* was for Goethe his lifework or main work (*Hauptwerk*). So was Jung's interpretation of *Faust*. Along with Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Goethe's *Faust* is the work that Jung most frequently quoted in his writings. But, unlike *Zarathustra*, *Faust* never became the theme of his seminars nor appeared in the title of any of his works. Instead, Jung's references to *Faust* are found almost ubiquitously in them, ranging from the earliest to the latest ones.

The main intention of the present study is to show how Jung got involved in and reacted to Goethe's *Faust*. I will talk more about *Faust* only as seen by Jung than as written by the author Goethe. The critical evaluation of Jung's *Faust* interpretations will be postponed to another opportunity.

### **The Legend of Jung's Grandfather as Goethe's Natural Child**

In dealing with this problem, there is a factor that cannot be overlooked. In the Jung family, there is an interesting legend that Jung's grandfather of the same name, Carl Gustav Jung (1794-1864), a famous professor of psychiatry at Basel University, was an illegal child of Goethe. The author of the appendix "the story of Jung's family" in Jung's autobiography in German version, Aniela Jaffé, leaves it open on the question about the authenticity of the rumor. Anyway this legend may well have made some contributions to Jung's life and works as well as the development of his psychology beyond the historical Jung.

Jaffé notes Jung's ambivalent reactions to this rumor. On the one hand, he did not speak of it without some pleasure because it led him to the encounter with the mysterious world of *Faust* and a special feeling of closeness to it that only those who have kinship with the author would claim to have. On the other hand, he saw in the rumor a bad taste of telling a story of a fatherless child (ETG, S. 399-400).

## The Encounter with and Initiation into the Goethean Spirituality

How did Jung really come to know Goethe's works? Born as a son of a country pastor, suffering from estrangement and isolation among the Jung family, especially on the maternal side, where Christian theology was dominant, and also from the splitting of his personality into No.1 and No.2, Jung once followed his mother's advice to read *Faust*.

Jung reports the effect of *Faust* upon his mind in the following words: "Here at last is someone who takes the devil seriously and even concludes a blood pact with him — with the adversary who has the power to frustrate God's plan to make a perfect world." (MDR, p.60).

For Jung, taking evil seriously or not seems to be the most important criterion for evaluating the work, positively or negatively, so he says: "I regretted Faust's behavior, for to my mind he should not have been so one-sided and so easily tricked." He even says: "It would not have grieved me if Faust's soul had gone to hell. He deserved it." Faust, and also Goethe as the author, seemed to be too optimistic about the power of darkness. Intriguingly, Jung's stance here is very ethical and even Protestant.

Nevertheless, the adolescent Jung saw in Goethe someone "who saw evil and its universal power, and... the mysterious role it played in delivering man from darkness and suffering" and noteworthy is the following confession: "To that extent, Goethe became, in my eyes, a prophet." (MDR, p.60) This means that Jung was, as it were, initiated into the Goethean spirituality as an alternative to Christianity.

This view is confirmed by his reports on the connection of No.2 and Faust during his student years:

"Here (in No.2) were meaning and historical continuity, in strong contrast to the incoherent fortuitousness of No.1's life, which had no real points of contact within the environment.

No.2, on the other hand, felt himself in secret accord with the Middle Ages, as personified by Faust, with the legacy of a past which

had obviously stirred Goethe to the depths. For Goethe too, therefore, — and this was my great consolation — No.2 was a reality.” Acknowledging the primacy of Faust over St. John and other Gospel writers in the appeal to his feeling, and identifying Faust with No.2, he admitted comfort as well as “an increased feeling of inner security and a sense of belonging to the human community”, concluding: “My godfather and authority was the great Goethe himself.” (MDR, p.87)

The quotation above, especially the use of the religious term “godfather”, suggests Jung’s possible initiation into the Goethean spirituality as imagined by him as well as the establishment of this young man’s spiritual identity through the encounter with Goethe. And it is very likely that the rumor of his grandfather as the poet’s natural child, or at least, his fantasy about it, contributed to it. Or by relating his No.2 to Faust, the splitting of his personality as a psychological problem was healed to some degree by finding its historical counterpart, a pattern which repeats itself throughout his life and characterizes the Jungian approach to the problem of mind and history.

But as already pointed out, Jung did not wholeheartedly accepted Goethe. The quotation above is followed by the expression of his anger to the work, an important paragraph deleted or omitted in *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* for some unknown reason. So I would like to translate it from the original German text, *Erinnerungen, Träume, Gedanken*: “But here my provisional admiration stops. Despite my admiration I criticized Faust’s final solution. I was personally hurt by the playful underestimation of Mephistopheles as well as Faust’s reckless arrogance and, above all, the murder of Philemon and Baucis.” (ETG, S. 92) Goethe as the author of *Faust* was therefore for Jung, unlike for other intellectuals of the day, never an historical figure with whom he simply wanted to identify with for idealization as a much-needed father figure or a spiritual or ideological hero.

## Freud

Be it real or merely imaginal, Jung's alleged kinship with Goethe may also shed an intriguing light upon his relationship to Freud. Freud also quotes Goethe most frequently, though not beside Nietzsche but Shakespeare, and was to be later in 1930 awarded with the Goethe Prize by the city of Frankfurt, the birthplace of the poet. In the speech vicariously read by his daughter, Anna, he compared Goethe with Leonardo da Vinci, pointing out the difference between them in the conflict or no conflict of science and art, and concluded that Goethe, free from narrow-mindedness and sharing many insights with him, would not have refused psychoanalysis. It is very likely that, in saying so, Freud certainly wanted to suggest Goethe as his spiritual ancestor.

Now back to the time about twenty years earlier, Freud was enjoying the exchange of letters with Jung. Goethe was the common intellectual resource for metaphors and insights for both men. For example, on March 9, 1909, Freud quotes Mephistopheles from the scene of "Witch's Kitchen" where Faust hesitates to drink the potion for rejuvenation arranged by the witch: "As thick as you are with the devil, / Can you be frightened by a flame? (2585-6)

Freud's quotation was a response to Jung's confession two days earlier of his insight into his polygamous nature through an affair with his woman patient, and Freud means by "the devil" and "a flame" respectively her and her passionate love. Here Freud and Jung respectively played the roles of the mentor and the student, or even the priest and the believer. And, being aware of Jung's father-transference, Freud did not fail to warn Jung not to confuse him [Freud] as a psychoanalyst with a pastor.

But Jung was far from being simply dependent upon Freud. Indeed, at first Freud was delighted to hear that Jung was going to descend into the sea of mythology, looking forward to hearing his discoveries. Intriguingly, he quotes Mephistopheles again from the same scene of "Witch's Kitchen": "Of course the devil taught her

(witch) how to do it (concoct portion), / But he can't do the work himself." (2376-77)

Freud obviously needed Jung's collaboration in the exploration for unconscious fantasies, liked the work to concocting the portion for rejuvenation, imagining that he and Jung were respectively playing the roles of Mephistopheles and the witch.

The exploration for unconscious fantasies is also the enactment of the scene in *Faust Part II* in which Faust, with a key in hand delivered from Mephistopheles, descends into the Land of Mothers to bring the ghosts of Helen and Paris from Ancient Greece to the Knights Hall of the contemporary German Palace.

However, Jung's immersion into unconscious fantasies made him a lazy writer in the exchange of letters, which frustrated Freud and made him suspicious of his collaborator's real intention. Jung went on to propose Freud: "2000 years of Christianity can only be replaced by something equivalent," (11 February, 1910), an idea Freud hardly could accept because it would make psychoanalysis cease to be a science and degenerate into a religion, be it substitute or new. Then, on Jan. 18, 1911, he even said what may sound as a claim to his own orthodoxy in the psychoanalytic movement, using the authority of his rumored great-grandfather. Moved by the performance of *Faust* at Pfauen Theater, Jung wrote to Freud:

"As the whole thing sprang into life before my eyes, all kinds of thoughts came to me, and I felt sure that my respected great-grandfather would have given my work his placet, the more willingly as he would have noted with a smile that the great-grandchild has committed and even extended the ancestral line of thought."

Is this not an indirect declaration of Jung's spiritual independence from Freud as well as a challenging claim that he, not Freud, was the legitimate successor of the psychoanalytic tradition supposed to begin with Goethe? Beyond the merely personal rivalry of both men, this may also involve the question as to the nature and the method of what they were committed to in the name of psychoanalysis. As

expected, Jung extensively draws on Goethe's *Faust* when criticizing Freud.

On 3 January 1913, the time when inner conflicts within the psychoanalytic movement had already come to the surface, Jung wrote in a way that makes readers clearly see that he was criticizing Freud: "It is my hope that the psychoanalytic movement will continue to advance, its vitality unimpaired and indeed heightened by internal conflicts and crosscurrents. Without them there is no life. When everything goes smoothly, petrification sets in." Then he quotes from *Faust*: "I do not seek salvation in mere apathy" (6271). Though unquoted, it is followed by these lines: "Awe is the greatest boon we humans are allotted, / And though our world would have us stifle feeling, / If we are stirred profoundly, we sense the Infinite." (6272-4) This is what Faust says after shuddering to hear the word of "Mothers" from Mephistopheles.

### **Philemon**

During the phase of the so-called confrontation with the unconscious after parting with Freud, Jung had a vision of a figure called Philemon and had dialogues with him to be taught about the autonomy of things found in the soul.

Who is this mysterious figure? He did not first emerge from Jung's unconscious mind but from the text of *Faust Part 2*. He and his wife were an old couple long living in a hut, watching the Church Bell, in a piece of land. But Faust was now allowed to rule it by the emperor as a reward to his contributions to the victory of the war with the aid of Mephistopheles. Faust saw them as obstacles to fulfill his plan of extending his land against the sea. And without any explicit demand from him, his subjects fulfilled his wish by burning their house and killing them. There is no line that suggests Faust's feeling of guilt, perhaps a point which Jung took most seriously.

Philemon and Baucis did not first appear in Goethe's *Faust* but in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. This couple there is depicted as the symbol for



the hospitality of the human heart toward gods, Zeus and Hermes, in the guise of travelers in the spiritually scanty world. Though Jung does not mention either Goethe or Ovid in speaking of Philemon, he was obviously conscious of this tradition of giving hospitality to gods. Philemon was for Jung not only one of unconscious fantasies but a historical and spiritual resource to be shared in this world. What is characteristic of the Jungian version of Philemon is that he is no more together with his wife, Baucis, but alone and that he is no more a human being belonging to the earth but an angelic figure with wings belonging to the sky, perhaps because the crime was committed.

As noted earlier, Jung was personally hurt when he read the passage of the murder of Philemon and Baucis. For Jung, what Faust did to this old pious couple, though not directly but through his subjects, was a both personal and collective experience. It overlapped with what was happening in Europe, and Faust and Hitler were continuous in Jung's mind. Remembering after the World War II the days when Jung first read Faust, he says: "I could not remotely guess the extent to which Goethe's strange heroic myth was a collective experience and that it prophetically anticipated the fate of Germany. Therefore I felt personally implicated, and when Faust, in his hubris and self-inflation, caused the murder of Philemon and Baucis, I felt guilty, quite as if I myself in the past had helped commit the murder of the two old people." (MDR, p.234).

This sense of responsibility and guilt was clearly expressed in a letter to his friend, Dr. Paul Schmidt on January 5, 1942, so during the time of the war. "All of a sudden and with terror it became clear to me with horror that I have taken over *Faust as my heritage*, inheritance, and moreover as the advocate and avenger of Philemon and Baucis, who, unlike Faust the superman, are the hosts of the gods in a ruthless and godforsaken age. It has become—if I may say so—a personal matter between me and proavus Goethe. To the extent that I harbour a personal myth of this kind, you are right in nosing up "Goethean" world in me. Indeed it is there, for it seems to me

unavoidable to give an *answer* to Faust: we must continue to bear the terrible German problem that is devastating Europe, and must pull down into our world some of the Faustian happenings in the Beyond, for instance the benign activity of Pater Profondus. I would give the earth to know whether Goethe himself knew why he called the two old people "Philemon" and "Baucis". Faust sinned from the beginning against these first parents (Philema and Baubo). One must have one foot in the grave, though one understands this secret properly."

The intention of building a tower in Bollingen is explained by Jung himself: "I had to achieve a kind of representation in stone of my innermost thoughts and of the knowledge I had acquired" (MDR, p.233), and one of the inscriptions there is: *Philemon sacrum / Fausti poenitentia*. This was inscribed earlier than 1928 because Jung referred to it in a letter to Hermann Graf Keyserling on January 2 of the same year.

### Jung's Interpretations of *Faust*

Jung's interpretations of *Faust* seems to be based upon five closely interrelated factors: his disappointment at Christianity and quest for the true image of Christ; his imagined kinship with Goethe; his typology; his interest in alchemy; and his indifference to Goethe's natural science. Most appealing to Jung's heart when he read *Faust* for the first time was what the hero told Wagner: "You only know one driving force, / And may you never seek to know the other! / Two souls, alas! reside in my breast, / And each is eager for a separation. (1110-3, quoted in CW 6, par. 368) We can say that, resonating with the splitting of Jung's personality into No.1 and No.2, these words of Faust's provided him with the starting point of what he was later to formulate as his typology.

In Jung's typology, Goethe was extraverted, but keenly aware of the necessity to fulfill his nature by integrating the opposite tendency. This is especially evidenced in his friendship with Schiller who belonged to the introverted type (CW 6, par.118). For Jung, Faust and

Mephistopheles are both sides of the same person of Goethe, or personifications of his superior and inferior functions, respectively feeling and thinking.

### **The Primacy of the Archetypal over the Personal: The Low Appraisal of Gretchen**

One of characteristics in Jung's interpretation of *Faust* is the primacy of the second part over the first part as evidenced in the number of references as well as the substantially attributed weight. In "Psychology and Literature" (1930) Jung clearly contrasts the first and the second parts of *Faust* in a psychological principle, namely psychological and visionary, and says: "The love-tragedy of Gretchen is self-explanatory... But the second part cries for interpretation." (CW 15, par.138). While the first part originates from common experiences that can be explained by Freud's theory of the personal unconscious, the second part from primordial experiences that call for Jung's own theory of the collective unconscious. This obvious difference in the degree of Jung's commitment between Part 1 and Part 2 means the primacy of the collective or the archetypal over the merely personal in him.

Consequently noteworthy is Jung's low appraisal of Gretchen, the heroin of Part 1 who is seduced and abandoned by him, and sentenced to death for the murder of their child. This is confirmed when he sees in *Faust* the repetition of a late ancient Gnostic theory of erotic ascension that Eros, beginning from Eve, passes through Helen and Mary, and finally reaches Sofia (CW 16, par.361). In Jung's view, Gretchen was only a personification of the lowest stage of biological impulsiveness represented by Eve, a figure so different from the way how she is depicted by Goethe. Jung never addresses *Faust's* unethical behavior toward Gretchen in contrast to that toward Philemon and Baucis.

### Alchemy as the Basis of *Faust*

Jung repeatedly emphasizes the alchemical basis of Goethe's *Faust*. For example, in "Psychology and Alchemy": "Goethe's Faust, which is steeped in alchemical forms of thought from beginning to end" (CW 12, par. 558); in the autobiography: "I regard my work on alchemy as a sign of my inner relationship to Goethe. Goethe's secret was that he was in the grip of that process of archetypal transformation which has gone on through the centuries. He regarded his Faust as an *opus magnum or divinum*." (MDR, p.206)

Indeed, Goethe, as a student of Leibzig University, studied and even practiced alchemy with Miss Klettenberg. And *Faust* is really abundant in alchemical symbols. But it must not be overlooked that Goethe himself was very ambivalent toward alchemy as seen in *Faust* and other writings like *Chromatics*. Faust is suffering from not using instruments inherited from his father, an ardent practitioner of alchemy. He remembers with an irony that his father led many people, his admirers, to death through his prescriptions. Mephistopheles ridicules people by saying: "The philosopher's stone could be in their possession, but there'd be no philosopher to use it." (5064-5). Goethe often spoke of alchemy in the context of the danger of zeal without any basic knowledge. So we should also be more cautious about Jung's attempt to connect Faust with alchemy.

Jung pays attention to what Nereides and Tritons say in the scene of "Classical Walpurgisnight": "We've brought along three of them [Cabiri], but the fourth wouldn't come" (8186-7), and connects the fourth with Goethe's inferior function of thinking. Be it correct or not, this is only one of examples that reveal how Jung's interpretations of *Faust* are strongly determined by his typological theory and his antagonism to Christian theology.

Goethe's *Faust* is for Jung not only the greatest alchemical drama but also a historical turning-point of alchemy. While Jung mostly emphasizes that Faust is a man of medieval mentality, the same hero is regarded as a modern man, especially in the scene between Paris and

Helen. Unlike the medieval alchemists who would be content with carefully watching the mysterious conjunction of Sol and Luna, Faust intervenes the scene to snatch Helen away from Paris. The result is the disappearance of both ghosts and Faust's faint. This means a failure in alchemy the goal of which is the production of the incorruptible substance. Further, Jung evaluates the disappearance of the Boy Charioter, the becoming of the Homunculus, and the death of Euphorion as similar failures in alchemy, which makes Faust's redemption happen not in life time but in his afterlife. Without knowing that Jung's primary concern was Faust's redemption, we could not understand why he interpreted Faust in this way.

Faust's action in the scene of Helen and Paris, in Jung's view reveals the dilemma in which people living in the modern world find themselves: keeping on projection of unconscious fantasies upon the outer, material world like pre-modern people or identifying with consciousness that may result in ego-inflation.

Jung says in the second last paragraph of *Psychology and Alchemy*.

"If the old alchemists ascribed their secret to matter, and if neither *Faust* nor *Zarathustra* is a very encouraging example of what happens when we embody this secret in ourselves, then the only course left to us is to repudiate the arrogant claim of the conscious mind to be the whole of the psyche, and to admit that the psyche is a reality." (CW 12, para. 564). Therefore, he seems to find *Faust*, in the final analysis, not so promising in dealing with the crisis of modernity, and in the last paragraph, to find hope in the "primordial images."

But at this point we had not better immediately follow him to the psychic reality. We must remember that in this presentation we deal with Faust only in so far as it is seen and interpreted by Jung without examining his possible working biases. Aren't Jung's interpretations of Faust as well the projection of his personal or collective unconscious? So the question remains: Though Faust and Mephistopheles may be both sides of Goethe as Jung says, why don't we try to

interpret *Faust* otherwise and more meaningfully? Even if the psyche is a reality, how is it related to Nature or human being as the ultimate concern for Goethe?

Thus, through Jung's involvement in Goethe's *Faust* we are led to Pre-Jungian question, namely on the origin of modern psychology as well as the clue to its development.

以上は、2005年7月に Texas A & M University で開催された the Joint Academic Conference of the International Association for Jungian Studies and the International Association for Analytical Psychology において筆者が発表した原稿に加筆修正したものである。MDR は *Memo-ries, Dreams, Reflections*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1973, CW は *The Complete Works of Carl Gustav Jung* の略である。ゲーテ『ファウスト』の英訳テキストは, *Faust I & II* edited and translated by Stuart Atkins, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984を用いた。