

## The Media History of Faust in the 19th Century

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### I. Introduction

The media history of Faust does not begin in the 19th century. Rather, since it first appeared in the 16th century, this theme has been characterised from the outset by an extraordinary diversity of media. At first Faust appears in the medium of rumour, in oral communication. People tell each other stories about the historical figure who was a travelling impostor and charlatan. These stories then appear in printed texts and as books. And soon there will also be pictures of him, songs and dramatizations. From the 16th to the 18th century the Faust theme already had a relatively large presence in various media. Literature, theatre, music, visual arts, science: in many fields and in many media we come across the story of the black artist and devil conjurer Faust.<sup>1</sup>

In the 19th century, two things happened that massively influenced the history of the theme (Rohde 2016). First, through the adaptations by Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1808/33) and Charles Gounod (1859), Faust's story attains an unprecedented popularity, and that all over the world. Secondly, this spreading popularity goes hand in hand with the emergence and proliferation of a modern, urban and commercial mass culture. In other words, the cultural system in which the Faust theme unfolds changed fundamentally in the 19th century. At the beginning, it was still dominated by courtly-feudal structures; at the end of the 19th century, the cultural system will be dominated by the mechanisms of a democratic mass media society.

### II. Book Market

When the first part of Goethe's *Faust* appeared as a book in 1808, it was still a pure high culture phenomenon. Although the tragedy is one of Goethe's most successful works, the publisher Cotta sold only about 5,500 copies of the first edition. The detailed depiction of the tragedy in Madame de Staëls *De l'Allemagne* (1810/13) caused a furore throughout Europe a few years later, but here too the reception remains primarily within the social and cultural elites. Only in the later course of the 19th century did Goethe's tragedy become a real mass article on the German book market. When the ban on reprinting classics was lifted in 1867, Reclam Verlag opened its "Universal-Bibliothek" series with Goethe's *Faust* part I and II, selling almost 1,6 million copies by 1912. In addition, a large number of other editions of Goethe's *Faust* appeared on the book market – in a wide variety of price

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<sup>1</sup> The Faust theme in the Early Modern period has been the object of various scientific studies that partly touch media questions, see for instance Brown, Georgia E. "The Other Black Arts. Doctor Faustus and the Inky Worlds of Printing and Writing". Deats, Sarah Munson, ed. *Doctor Faustus. A Critical Guide*. London, New York: Continuum, 2010, pp. 140-158; Schwartz, Peter J. "'I'll burn my books!' Faust(s), Magic, Media". Richter, Simon / Block, Richard, eds. *Goethe's Ghosts. Reading and the Persistence of Literature*. Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2013, pp. 186-214.

categories and outfits, with or without illustrations, as mass-produced items of poor quality or as elaborate luxury and splendid editions. And it is not only Goethe's *Faust* that is becoming a mass article and that reflects the differentiation of the modern book market. The folk book *Historia von D. Johann Fausten* also profits from the new popularity of the Faust theme. Between 1587, the publication date of the *Historia*, and 1800, a total of five editions of the Faust folk book will be published in Germany in an estimated total circulation of around 100,000 copies. In the 19th century, an unmanageable number of different editions and adaptations of the folk book appeared. These editions are only incompletely recorded bibliographically, but for the sake of estimation it can be said that within a century up to one hundred different Faust folk book editions were produced for mass demand. These are partly cheap booklets, partly lavishly equipped books – together the total circulation is likely to amount to several hundred thousand, if not millions of copies.

The actually new mass medium in the field of the printed word in the 19th century, however, is the magazine. In his Faust bibliography, Karl Engel gave a remarkable overview of Faust in journals and newspapers until the mid-1880s (Engel 1885, pp. 458-603). On about 150 pages he collects journalistic and scientific contributions on various aspects of the Faust theme. Often, Goethe's or Gounod's well-known Faust adaptations were the occasion for reporting. But also the legend of Faust and the folk book were the subject of articles. The spectrum of print media in which Faust appears includes a wide variety of genres, including family journals, illustrated newspapers, cultural magazines, daily newspapers and much more.

### III. Theatre

The structural changes in the field of the medium book can also be observed in a similar way in the field of theatre. Here too, as in the book market, the principles of differentiation and economization are taking hold. Throughout Europe, especially in the big cities, a new and unique theatre culture established itself in the 19th century. The theatre became the most important urban cultural institution, and the modern cultural industry was already prototypically developed in its functional mechanisms.<sup>2</sup> Numbers underline this theatre boom: between 1850 and 1885, one hundred and fifty new theatre buildings were built in the German Reich (while, at the same time, 73 buildings fell victim to a fire). Between 1869 and 1885, the total number of theatre companies doubled (Bucher/Hahl/Jäger 1976, p. 147). In 1870 there were forty different theatres in Paris, 27 in London and a good dozen in Berlin (Charle 2012, p. 27-28). Faust is present at the theatre in a wide variety of forms and genres. Of course, Goethe's tragedy is played, especially the first part. In the German court and city theatres, Goethe's *Faust* became a classic of the stage repertoire. But the play is also performed internationally in translations.

This applies even more to Gounod's opera. After its premiere in Paris in 1859, this musical drama developed into the most frequently performed opera of all by the end of the 19th century. And that worldwide. You could see and hear Gounod's opera on stages all over Europe, but also in cities like

<sup>2</sup> See Adorno, Theodor W. „Bürgerliche Oper“. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. by Rolf Tiedemann. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1970-1986, Vol. 16, pp. 24-39. Adorno sees the opera business of the 19th century as similar to the modern cultural industry, but this applies basically to the entire theatrical system.

New York, Mexico City, Cairo, Melbourne or Buenos Aires (Loewenberg 1978, pp. 939-41). Charles Gounod's opera *Faust* is a good example of the differentiation of the media in the 19th century. This Faust adaptation can be experienced as a multimedia spectacle not only in the theatre. Since the end of the century it has been possible to buy shellac records of the most famous arias and play them on a gramophone. Enrico Caruso, the first record millionaire in classical music history, made a fortune recording arias and duets from Gounod's opera (Scott 1988, pp. 265-95). And the media exploitation chain goes even further: at the end of the 19th century, the first still very short film shots on Faust were made, some of them scenes from the popular opera (Keppler-Tasaki 2017). And a short time later, in the 1920s and 30s, the medium Radio discovered Faust. In New York, for example, there have been live broadcasts of Gounod's musical drama from the Metropolitan Opera in the public radio (Fitzgerald/Seward Uppman 1989, p. 268).

Not only in high culture Faust receives great attention on stage. It is above all entertainment theatre that benefits from the general boom in theatre in the 19th century (Becker 2014). In London and Paris, theatrical performances based on Goethe's play were already to be seen in the 1820s, but transformed into sensational and melodramatic performances. On 27 October 1827, Marie Emmanuel Théaulon's three-act lyrical drama *Faust* premiered at the Théâtre des Nouveautés in Paris. It is based on Goethe's *Faust*, but Théaulon – who was a “Vaudevilliste” that wrote a total of 250 pieces – was more interested in effect and emotion and changed the original considerably. In London, the first Faust adaptations were already shown in 1824/25. The production which took place in 1825 at the Theatre in Drury Lane and which inspired Eugène Delacroix to create his famous illustrations was a free adaptation by George Soane with the title *The Devil and Dr. Faustus*. It also focused on spectacle and entertainment. Both adaptations, in London as well as in Paris, contain music and dance interludes customary in the time, which underlines the multimedia character of these theatrical performances. The spectrum of Faust plays in the field of entertainment theatre is extremely diverse, encompassing a wide variety of dramatic and musical-dramatic genres. There are comedies, farces, fairies, operettas, burlesques, vaudevilles and much more (Meier 1990). This genre diversity is itself part of a historical development. When the first part of Goethe's *Faust* was premiered in 1829 – first in Brunswick, later also in Weimar under the direction of Goethe himself – this was still largely done under the auspices of the traditional courtly-feudal art system. The entire structures and circumstances of these court theatre productions in art-loving provincial and residential cities in Germany differed categorically from those in Berlin, Paris and other large cities at the end of the 19th century.

#### IV. Entertainment Theatre

This becomes particularly clear when one compares the performance of a Faust adaptation, which premiered on 18 January 1873 in Berlin's Victoria Theater. The piece *Faust und die schöne Helena* ('Faust and the Beautiful Helen') is associated in many respects with typical phenomena of modern metropolitan culture. On the one hand, the style of this piece fits into the expansion of a commercial, urban entertainment industry that relies entirely on spectacle and pleasure. What counts is the equipment, effects and decorations, music and singing. The fable of Faust, which here is amalgamated with the myth of Helen, remains recognizable, but is not of interest in the sense of an inner

dramatic conflict. What is particularly remarkable, however, is that various typical institutions and facilities of modern metropolitan culture lay around the play like a wreath. *Faust and the Beautiful Helen* becomes the subject of the mass press, newspapers report on the great success of the revue. On 27 August 1874 the “200th performance” is given in Berlin, as can be read in the *Vossische Zeitung* the day before. In the weekly *Die Gegenwart*, the writer Paul Lindau condemns the play as being conventional and trivial, while at the same time he analyses it clairvoyantly as a typical product of the big city. The playbill as well as a large-format theatre poster by *Faust and the Beautiful Helen* come from the printing company Litfaß, which, with the Litfaß column since 1855, first in Berlin and later also in other cities of the Reich, turned the poster into a mass-effective advertising medium for the metropolitan public. Indirectly, the Faust-Helen-Revue of 1873 is therefore also connected with the emergence of a metropolitan commercial advertising economy. Advertising posters for cultural events and entertainment establishments became an important iconographic component of the modern cityscape. The playbills and posters are, as it were, media spin-offs of the play and reflect the media differentiation of the urban cultural system. The same applies to another media branch of *Faust and the Beautiful Helen*. A music print from the Berlin company Bote & Bock is estimated to have been printed around 1875. It is preserved in the Weimar Faust Collection: “Hell gallop from the air: ‘Faust and the Beautiful Helen’ for pianoforte”, price: 7½ silver pennies. The Berlin music publisher Bote & Bock is again exemplary for an entire industry: analogous to the cultural sector as a whole, a historically innovative commercial music business for the bourgeois masses is unfolding for the first time in music history. In the 19th century, publishing houses such as Bote & Bock in Berlin or Ricordi in Milan rose to become internationally operating companies trading on a large scale with music, sheet music, textbooks and performance materials (Baker 2013, pp. 139-40).

## V. Music

Most theatrical performances contained musical elements. By bringing together word, image and sound, they basically represented multi- or intermedial events. In addition to opera and operetta music, so-called drama music was a popular genre in the 19th century before it slowly disappeared from the theatres in the 20th century. The mainly instrumental musical works of composers forgotten today (Carl Eberwein, Eduard Lassen) accompanied the drama, mostly Goethe’s *Faust*, during and between the acts and scenes with atmospheric music. But Faust was also very present in 19th century music beyond these intermedial constellations (Fitzsimmons/McKnight 2019). And this applies both to performance practice (music as a social event) and to the aesthetic dimension. Faust not only conquered the theatres, he was also frequently played in concert halls. There were numerous Faust compositions both in the field of instrumental (Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner, among others) and vocal music (Hector Berlioz, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann et al.). Through piano reductions of popular Faust compositions (e.g. *Faust and the Beautiful Helen*), this theme and its figures were also represented in a musical form of performance which enjoyed great popularity especially in the 19th century. Hundreds of thousands of piano students and music lovers, who practised piano playing for their individual pleasure and educational purposes, were presumably familiar with one or more Faust compositions for this instrument. Also aesthetically, Faust music served different registers. Operas,

oratorios and symphonies emphasized the totality of the drama around the main character; as a rule, they offered appropriate musical or music-dramatic means that pointed in the direction of a Wagnerian aesthetic of overpowering. The numerous settings of Gretchen's songs in Goethe's *Faust*, on the other hand, exposed the intimate and sometimes sentimental facets of the story. Alone the scene with Gretchen on the spinning wheel ("Meine Ruh' ist hin") experienced countless settings, among them by Franz Schubert, Richard Wagner, Giuseppe Verdi and others, and contributed not insignificantly to the sentimental iconisation of the Gretchen figure.

## VI. Images

The medium of the image is a form of medialization of the Faust theme, which particularly clearly illustrates the profound upheavals in the media history of the 19th century.<sup>3</sup> Faust was also present in this medium from the very beginning. Especially portraits of the black artist were widespread. But it was not until the surge in visualization in the 19th century, the 'explosion of images' (Aprile 2010, p. 578; Tillier 2016, p. 222) in this period, that images of the fable and the figures of the Faust theme appeared in unprecedented numbers and variety. Here, too, the changes can best be illustrated by first looking at Goethe's adaptation. Images of Goethe's tragedy often appear in traditional contexts, as etching or illustration e.g. in the very first book edition in 1790. For the first time at an exhibition, a picture of Goethe's drama is shown in 1804 as part of an exposition of the Weimar Art Friends. It is a drawing by Asmus Jacob Carstens. But especially the exhibition – this "medium of the century" (Estermann/Schmidt 2016, p. 25), as it was called – developed into an event for the masses in the 19th century. Thousands of works of art were exhibited in the Paris salons and hundreds of thousands of visitors flocked to them. Following the example of these salons and later the Universal Expositions, a real exhibition business was created. And part of this operation are again and again representations of Faust, because this popular subject is often used, whether in works of art or in arts and crafts and in book printing. When, for example, the First International Art Exhibition took place in 1869 in the Munich Glass Palace – modelled on the Crystal Palace of the 1851 World Exposition in London – the approximately 100,000 visitors encountered a series of Faust pictures. According to the titles in the catalogue, there were six paintings, two drawings and three sculptures with Faust motifs on display.<sup>4</sup> These were mostly Gretchen or Faust and Gretchen representations. Four years later, at the 1873 World Exposition in Vienna, numerous paintings and sculptures with Faust motifs are again on display. At exhibitions such as the World Exposition, Faust is also an obvious part of an international commodity culture. He stands side by side with things that underline the triumph of progress and bourgeois society. Whether sewing machines, steam locomotives or paintings by Gretchen: what counts here is primarily the "shop window quality of things" ("Schaufenster-Qualität der Dinge"; Simmel 2004, p. 36), as sociologist Georg Simmel called it in view of the visual structural principle of these exhibitions.

<sup>3</sup> See in detail: Rohde, Carsten: *Faust-Ikonologie. Stoff und Figur in der Bildkultur des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> *Katalog zur I. internationalen Kunstausstellung im Königlichen Glaspalaste zu München*. München: Verlag des Ausstellungs-Comités, 1869, pp. 6, 17f., 47, 59, 65, 74, 87, 90.

At these exhibitions, the latest artfully illustrated book editions, including Goethe's masterpiece, are shown in the Arts and Crafts Department. The number of illustrated editions of Goethe's *Faust* or other adaptations is legion. And, as already mentioned, they vary from very elaborate luxury editions to cheap prints. But the first real mass medium in the realm of illustration was the journal, especially the so-called illustrated periodicals and the later family journals. They reached new dimensions in terms of circulation, in some cases selling hundreds of thousands of copies. In these media, pictorial representation, especially in the form of wood engraving, plays a prominent role. And there are pictures of Faust and Gretchen in numerous popular periodicals – because once again it is above all Gretchen and the love story between Faust and Gretchen that is the subject of these often large-format illustrations (Mainardi 2017).

This also applies to another medium that became mass produced in the 19th century, the mural or wall print (Pieske 1988). It is part of the tradition of popular print and popular imagery that has existed since the invention of letterpress printing in the 15th century. One bought such prints on the fair or from pedlars for little money and fastened them at home at the wall. These were often pictures with religious motifs, depictions of Christ, for example, or the Virgin Mary. But landscapes and literary motifs were also popular. In the 19th century this area of culture, like many others, was subject to professionalization and industrialization in production and distribution. Traces of Faust, Gretchen and Mephisto are numerous in this medium. Faust was even partly shown in colour, for example, in the technique of oil printing, which became particularly popular at the end of the 19th century and was quite inexpensive. From here it is not far to further manifestations of the popular Faust imagery, which also largely turned out to be coloured, for example on advertising posters, in advertisements or also on the popular collectible pictures that were added to various consumer products. Coloured Faust representations for the masses were made possible by the invention of chromolithography in the middle of the 19th century (Twyman 2013).

Technical progress also ensured that Faust appeared and spread in another central medium of the 19th century. In photography, too, the simple equation applies: Faust was extremely popular – so he quickly found widespread use in the new popular medium of photography. In particular, photographs of well-known Faust actors in drama and opera met with a lively response. Photographs of the scenes of the Faust saga were also of interest, often in the form of photo postcards. And there were also some photographs of the Faust play on stage. However, these were re-created pictures, as the photographic technique was not yet ready to capture the living play. In the medium of photography, Faust finally became a mass product. Right from the start, photography was geared to reproduction; it marked the entry into the age of technical reproducibility. On all three levels of production, distribution and reception, this pictorial form is determined by socio-economic structures of mass culture. This development tends to lead to an emptying of the complexity and subtlety of Faust's story. Nevertheless, especially in the field of popular culture, we are insufficiently informed about the effects of Faust adaptations. Unlike well-known writers, artists and critics who thought and wrote about Faust, the recipients of mass culture usually left no documented testimonies.

## VIII. Conclusion

Even if the shown spectrum of the Faust media is already very broad – it is by no means complete. For example, there have also been many recitations of Faust. Actors performed Goethe's Faust drama for audiences that enjoyed this play as an acoustic event (Rohde 2018, pp. 329-31). And also the puppet play of Faust was still very popular and reached thousands of people.<sup>5</sup> It becomes clear, however, that the manifold upheavals in the media history of the 19th century are reflected in the history of the Faust theme. The history of this theme is not only the story of an increasing ideologization of the figure, as it has been in the foreground of research on the subject so far.<sup>6</sup> If one looks at the multitude of media in which Faust appeared both as a figure and as a theme, it becomes clear that these contents and forms could be effective in very different ways. Faust was not so much the increasingly chauvinistic German hero from the perspective of his contemporaries. Rather, he was a popular figure who served central affects of mass entertainment, including those that today seem somewhat trivial and sentimental to us: he could move when he fell in love with Gretchen; one could laugh at him when, once again, his idealism broke with profane reality; and this story was sensational, one could be horrified when the devilish consequences, including the hell ride, were painted. In short, for most people in the 19th century Faust was obviously a fascinating, partly entertaining, partly instructive figure of identification and projection. His omnipresence in the media has been both a mirror and a catalyst of these multiple identifications and projections.

But Faust is not only a media myth, he is also a mediality myth of modernity, i.e. his medializations reflect in a fundamental way on the conditions and mediation structure of medial signs in a modern media society. In the early days of film around 1900, the Faust theme was also so popular because directors and makers found themselves identifying with it. They were also producers of appearances; in an uncanny way they made things disappear and appear, just as Goethe resp. Faust, at the beginning of *Faust II*, with the help of a *Laterna magica*, let appear heroes from antiquity before the audience of the imperial court. Here and there, the Faust fable describes a myth of mediality: the theme is the conditions of the possibility of medial mediation, the foundations and the referentiality of those signs that make up our world. From today's point of view, Faust's modernity and topicality are less rooted in the 'striving' that Goethe's title hero represented and that was particularly prevalent in the reception of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Rather, it is the 'restlessness' of which Goethe's drama mentions right away in the first stage direction: "FAUST *restless, seated at his desk*" ("FAUST *unruhig auf seinem Sessel am Pulte*" Goethe 1999, p. 33). This is also why Ernst Bloch spoke of Faust and other heroes as "figures of restlessness" ("Figuren der Unruhe"; Bloch 1990, p. 1188) who are out to transcend all boundaries in a concrete and figurative sense. Part of this restlessness and non-fixibility is that Faust appears as a medial border crosser, even more so: through the alliance with diabolical appearances, the medial, understood as the sphere of transition, transgression and dynamic transformation, becomes his very own element.

<sup>5</sup> See the articles by Yoko Yamaguchi and Kateřina Lešková Dolenská in this volume.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Schwerte, Hans. *Faust und das Faustische. Ein Kapitel deutscher Ideologie*. Stuttgart: Klett, 1962.

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