

## Illustrations to Goethe's *Faust* by Peter Cornelius

Naoki SATO

### 1. Prologue: The History of Illustrations to Goethe's *Faust*

The 'Night' scene in Goethe's *Faust* begins with the following description: "NIGHT: In a high-vaulted, narrow Gothic chamber. Faust, in a chair at his desk, restless".<sup>1</sup> Following a long monologue, Faust opens a book and looks at a diagram of the cosmos. He then turns the page and sees the symbol of the Earth Spirit and when he chants his incantation, the terrifying figure of the Earth Spirit appears.<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that Goethe's model when writing this scene was Rembrandt's 'The Alchemist/Faust' (fig. 1). Goethe himself received this work from Grand Duke Karl August around 1780<sup>3</sup>; this piece is preserved in the Weimar Prints and Drawings Collection.<sup>4</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> century this work by Rembrandt was known only as 'Een praktiserende alchemist' or 'The Alchemist at Work' but that fact that, for example, it was sold at the Gersaint Gallery in Paris in 1751 under the name 'Dr Faustus'<sup>5</sup> makes it clear that in Goethe's day it was widely identified as Faust. When we look at the room depicted in Rembrandt's piece, we see a dark Gothic interior with light shining in through a large window. Before Faust's eyes a brilliant disk illustrating the firmament emerges, with just the hand of a guardian angel pointing meaningfully at the circle of light. Rembrandt's print certainly portrays a scene very close to that presented in Goethe's text.

We cannot know whether Rembrandt actually described the figure in this work as Dr Faustus or not, but a Dutch translation of British dramatist Christopher Marlowe's (1564-1593) play *Dr Faustus*, based on the German Faust legend, was published in 1604<sup>6</sup>, and the play performed in



fig. 1 Rembrandt, *Faust*, ca. 1652

<sup>1</sup> Goethe, *Faust*, Part 1, lines 496-499, translation by A. S. Kline, *poetryintranslation.com.*, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Goethe, *Faust*, Part 1, lines 476-481, translation by A. S. Kline, *poetryintranslation.com.*, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> *Rembrandts Radierungen. Bestandskatalog. Ehemalige Großherzogliche und Staatliche Sammlungen sowie Goethes Sammlung*, hrsg. von Wolfgang Holler und Hermann Mildenerger, Klassik Stiftung Weimar, 2011, S. 128.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, S. 128 ; Christian Schuchardt, *Goethes Kunstsammlungen*, Teil 1, Jena, 1848, S. 177, Nr. 322.

<sup>5</sup> In the 1679 inventory of items owned by the late Clement de Jonghe this was entitled 'Een Praktiserende Alchemist' but the Paris Gersaint Gallery catalogue of 1751 describes the piece as the portrait of a philosopher or doctor, known in Holland as Dr Faustus, *Rembrandt. Radierungen*, Ausst.-Kat., Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, 2006, S. 86.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, S. 86.

Amsterdam in 1650.<sup>7</sup> It is very likely that Rembrandt was portraying a scene from this play, which contains a scene where Faust asks the Guardian Angel about the nature of the light in front of him, and the Angel replies telling Faust to wake up, as the Devil is already deceiving him.<sup>8</sup> However, the original meaning of Rembrandt's piece remains shrouded in mystery. Many different opinions have been proffered, especially regarding the meaning of the lettering on the shining diagram which remains unresolved. Of course Goethe would have no way of deciphering the enigmatic iconography in Rembrandt's work, so it is reasonable to assume that he interpreted this as 'Dr Faustus', in line with popular belief at the time. Evidence that Goethe interpreted Rembrandt's figure as Dr Faustus came when he asked Johann Heinrich Lips (1758-1817) to produce a print based on this work in 1788.<sup>9</sup> Lips was a printmaker, highly regarded by Goethe, and his 'Faust' (fig. 2) was used as the frontispiece to Volume 7 of *Goethe's Complete Works (Goethe's Schriften)* published in 1790. This volume included *Faust, a Fragment*.

Later, Goethe himself made drawings for Faust. Of several surviving sketches the most famous is probably 'The Appearance of the Earth Spirit' (fig. 3), again depicting this 'Night' scene. Here, unlike Rembrandt in his piece, Goethe clearly depicts a classical-style figure of God. His face emanates a powerful light; Faust does not look at him but turns away. We realise that Goethe is illustrating the following section of his text:

SPIRIT: Who calls me?

FAUST: (*looking away*)

Terrible to gaze at!

SPIRIT: Mightily you have drawn me to you,

Long, from my sphere, snatched your food,

And now –

FAUST: Ah! Endure you, I cannot! <sup>10</sup>

....

SPIRIT: Are you he, who, breathing my breath,

Trembles in all your life's depths,

A fearful, writhing worm?

FAUST: Shall I fear you: you form of fire?

I am, I am Faust: I am your peer! <sup>11</sup>

Exactly as stated in this passage, Faust's face expresses a strong intent, even as he rebels against the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., S. 128.

<sup>8</sup> *Catalog Rembrandt. Hundert Radierungen*, bearbeitet Eckard Schaar, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, 1987, Kat.-Nr. 71.

<sup>9</sup> Willy F. Storck, *Goethes Faust und die Bildende Kunst*, Berlin und Leipzig, 1914, S. 32.

<sup>10</sup> Goethe, *Faust*, Part 1, lines 482-486, translation by A. S. Kline, *poetryintranslation.com.*, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Goethe, *Faust*, Part 1, lines 496-499, translation by A. S. Kline, *poetryintranslation.com.*, 2003.



fig. 2 Johann Heinrich Lips, *Frontispiece of Faust. A Fragment*, Goethe's *Schriften*, Bd. 7, 1790



fig. 3 Goethe, *The Appearance of the Earth Spirit*, 1810/12-1819, Klassik Stiftung Weimar

flaming Earth Spirit. If we assume that Goethe completed this drawing around 1810, he would have had Rembrandt's print with its image of Faust in his study in the 'Night' scene, firmly planted in his mind as a model. However as we shall see, Goethe did not impose his own vision onto Peter Cornelius when he tackled the drawings, but instead extolled the young artist's powerful imagination.

## 2. Peter Cornelius' Rediscovery of Northern Renaissance Painting

Goethe discusses Cornelius' series of Faust drawings in a letter to the artist of 8<sup>th</sup> May 1811: *The drawings delivered by Mr Boisserée are very pleasing; they show, my dear Cornelius, how much progress you have made since I last saw your work. You have selected the scenes well, conceived the drawings for them most fittingly, and I can only admire your witty treatment of them, both as a whole and individually.*<sup>12</sup>

Goethe penned this letter full of praise when he had received the first 5 drawings that Cornelius produced in Frankfurt. After Cornelius moved to Rome he eventually completed the whole set of 12 drawings, but that was to take several more years. As Goethe says in his letter, these drawings showed novel 'Germanic' and 'Medieval' qualities from the outset. These innovative ideas drew the attention of art lovers and young artists, who at times responded with wild enthusiasm. Because this series of drawings led to widespread public recognition for Cornelius, it played an important role in launching the young artist's career. He then proceeded to Rome where he joined the Nazarenes on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1812, and his activities and fame continued to increase.<sup>13</sup> The 12 drawings in the series, all

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Goethe to Peter Cornelius, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1811. Zitiert nach Ernst Förster, *Peter Cornelius*, Bd.1, Berlin 1874, S. 80; Martin Sonnabend, *Peter Cornelius. Zeichnungen zu Goethes Faust aus der Graphischen Sammlung im Städel*, Ausst.-Kat., Mainz, 1991, S. 7; [https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb11181497\\_00104.html](https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb11181497_00104.html)

<sup>13</sup> Sonnabend, op.cit., S. 7.

large scale pieces in grey ink on white paper, were produced in three separate phases. ‘Auerbach’s Cellar in Leipzig’ (fig. 4) is thought to have been the very first of the drawings that Cornelius made. Before we examine this work more closely, let us first take a look at Cornelius’ career and the distinctive characteristics of his art.

Peter Cornelius was born in Dusseldorf, and began his art training under his father and elder brother who were both lecturers at Düsseldorf Art Academy. From 1798 to 1805 he was a student at the academy, and from 1803 to 1805 repeatedly submitted work to the Weimar Friends of Art competition known as Weimarer Preisaufgabe, established by Goethe and Johann Heinrich Meyer for the promotion of the visual arts. Despite submitting work for 3 successive years, he was not successful in the competition.<sup>14</sup> Goethe’s reference in his letter to the ‘last time he saw Cornelius’ work’, clearly indicates that he remembers the young artist submitting work to the competition, even though he did not win a prize.

In 1809, 26 year-old Cornelius moved to Frankfurt from Dusseldorf, where he spent the next two years before leaving for Rome. In ‘The Holy Family’ (fig. 5) produced during this period in Frankfurt, we can see that Cornelius was already moving away from French Classicist picture composition towards medieval art prior to the Faust drawings. As Frank Büttner points out, this is the first work in which Cornelius consciously looks back to the style of Northern Renaissance art, namely that of Dürer. His sources of inspiration were Dürer’s woodblock print ‘The Holy Family with Two Angels in a Vaulted Hall’ (fig. 6) and ‘The Glorification of the Virgin’ (c. 1501-1502), the last in the woodblock-print series, ‘Life of the Virgin’. However, the motifs of the Christ child standing on the virgin’s lap and the angel playing the harp are not Dürer-esque. These were probably influenced by Raphael, but it difficult to pinpoint a specific work. Most astonishing is the fact that although Cornelius had not yet joined the Nazarenes at this time, he produced a work that could easily be mistaken for that of the Nazarenes, successfully fusing Dürer-like elements with Raphael-like elements.

So how did Cornelius achieve this departure from academic classicism, and acquisition of Northern, and Italian renaissance styles? One of the turning points was certainly the visit, in summer 1803, of medieval art collectors Johann Sulpiz Boisserée (1783-1854) and Johann Baptist Bertram (1776-1841) to Cornelius’ studio (I shall introduce Boisserée and Bertram’s collection later). In addition to this, Büttner points out the importance of Cornelius’ exposure to Friedrich Schlegel’s theory of art. In 1803 Schlegel launched *Europa* magazine as a space to develop his new art theory. One hardly need restate that the series of essays appearing here had a powerful influence on the art

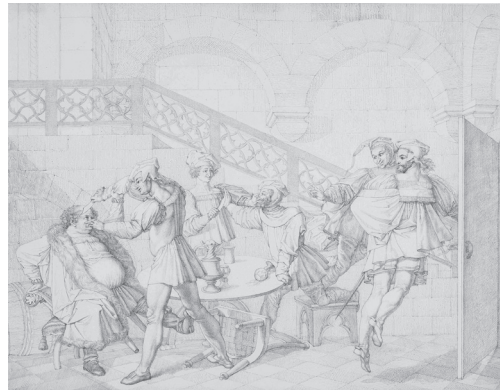


fig. 4 Peter Cornelius, *Auerbach’s Cellar in Leipzig*, 1810, Städel Museum

<sup>14</sup> Frank Büttner, *Peter Cornelius. Fresken und Freskenprojekte*, Bd. 1, Wiesbaden, 1980, S. 1-5.





fig. 5 Peter Cornelius, *The Holy Family*,  
1810-11, Städel Museum



fig. 6 Albrecht Dürer, *The Holy Family with  
Two Angels in a Vaulted Hall*, 1503-04

world; they rejected classicist art theory, as advocated by Goethe, Johann Heinrich Meyer and others in *Die Propyläen*, which saw the imitation of antiquity as supreme.<sup>15</sup> In *Europa* Schlegel openly criticised the view expressed in Meyer's article, 'Über die Gegenstände der bildenden Kunst' (On subjects in visual art) published in 1798 in the Weimar Friends of Art journal, *Die Propyläen*. Schlegel maintained that Christian subjects, not prioritised by Meyer, were far from exhausted, and urged artists to take their work forward by looking at painters like Pietro Perugino, Leonardo and Raphael.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Schlegel sets out his own personal theory of painting in the first addendum to *Gemäldebeschreibungen* ('Painting Descriptions') where he asserts that the future of art will be saved by "reverting to the great style of that old school"<sup>17</sup> and that, as Büttner put it, "Painting should be nothing but painting; it should be freed from the plastic models of antiquity."<sup>18</sup> In other words, it appears that Cornelius was enormously influenced by Schlegel's call for 'Romanticism' in opposition to academic classicism, and his view that art of the new era should return to the richly imaginative medieval world.

As Satoshi Arai points out, Schlegel's vision of art further develops the new territory carved out by Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder in his 1797 book, *Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar*. In other words, Schlegel sought to revive the very same early Italian and German painting that Wackenroder praised his writing. Considering the development of painting from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century onwards as a

<sup>15</sup> Satoshi Arai, 'Furi-dorihī shure-geru no Kaiga-ron (Japanese Text) in: *Doitsu Bungaku*, Vol. 80, Nichidoku Bungaku-kai, 1988, pp. 71-73. (Friedrich Schlegels Ansichten und Ideen von der Malerei, in: *Die Deutsche Literatur*, Vol. 80, Japanische Gesellschaft für Germanistik, 1988, pp. 71-73).

<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, Bd. IV, Paderborn, 1959, S. 57-60; Büttner, op.cit., S. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Schlegel, op.cit., S. 70.

<sup>18</sup> Schlegel, op. cit., S. 70-78; Büttner, op. cit., S. 5.

history of errors, he attempted to search for ‘authentic painting’ in this older artwork. Schlegel maintained that a “new dawn of Christian painting” was created in the modern era by pioneers like Giotto in Italy and Jan van Eyck and others in the Netherlands and Germany<sup>19</sup>, and this culminated in the art of Raphael and Dürer. In other words, Schlegel saw subsequent art history as a deterioration, and therefore consigned all 18<sup>th</sup> century painting to the category of ruination. He asserted that art began to decline with Michelangelo and the Mannerists that succeeded him, and even within the work of Raphael he held up Raphael’s early work – not his later oeuvre – as a model to be followed. In Schlegel’s era, the Classicists also praised Raphael because he expressed the ‘Ideal Beauty’ of antiquity.<sup>20</sup> Schlegel, however, believed that only a limited selection of Raphael’s work should be used for reference, and that the essence of Raphael’s work was actually not ‘Ideal Classical Beauty’. This is because he argued that it was precisely early Raphael that was “most closely linked with the right source, the Old School of painters”<sup>21</sup> and it was these so-called ‘Primitive Painters’, from Giotto to Mantegna, Bellini, and Raphael’s teacher Perugino, whose true worth should now be re-evaluated.<sup>22</sup> Schlegel himself also further pursued his interest in Gothic and Northern Renaissance painting through exchanges with the Boisserée brothers. Frank Büttner has pointed to the strong possibility that it was the Boisserée brothers who first introduced Cornelius to Schlegel’s theory of art.

It goes without saying that this art theory of Schlegel’s had an enormous impact on the Brotherhood of St. Luke, formed in Vienna, but its powerful influence on Cornelius during his time in Dusseldorf is also highly significant. That is to say, the fact that these painters – Cornelius, and the Brotherhood of St. Luke artists – began emulating early painting contemporaneously in Dusseldorf and Vienna, resulted in a very fortuitous turn of fate when Cornelius was drawn to the city of Rome, just when the Brotherhood of St. Luke happened to have moved their base to the city. The experience of Vienna and Dusseldorf as centres of Northern Renaissance painting is a significant factor in this phenomena occurring in parallel in both of these cities. This is because, while Franz Pforr, who had just begun studying at the academy in Vienna, was suddenly awoken to Northern Renaissance Art when he went with Friedrich Overbeck to visit the imperial gallery at the Belvedere (reopened in 1806), Cornelius had a very similar experience in Dusseldorf in front of works in the Boisserée brothers’ art collection and Stefan Lochner’s altarpiece in Cologne Cathedral.

It was the Medieval Painting-Collection of Sulpiz and Melchior Boisserée and Johann B. Bertram in Dusseldorf that awakened Cornelius to Northern Renaissance Art. Between 1820 and ’23 Johann Nepomuk Strixner made lithographic prints of works in the Boisserée Collection, expanding public knowledge and the reputation of the collection.<sup>23</sup> The collection contained an astonishing number of masterpieces including paintings by Cologne School artists and the Master of Saint Veronica, now in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, a large number of Early Netherlandish Paintings

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<sup>19</sup> Schlegel op. cit., S. 115.

<sup>20</sup> Schlegel, op. cit., S. 54.

<sup>21</sup> Schlegel, op. cit., S. 55.

<sup>22</sup> Satoshi Arai op. cit., pp. 71-73.

<sup>23</sup> *Gemälde der Sammlung. Sulpiz und Melchior Boissrée und Johann B. Bertram lithographiert von Johann Nepomuk Strixner*, Auss.-Kat., Clemens-Sels-Museum Neuss, 1980, S. 7.

such as Rogier van der Weyden's Adoration of the Magi (The Bladelin Altarpiece) as well as portraits of the saints by Dürer and work by Lucas Cranach.<sup>24</sup> Cornelius was able, in Dusseldorf, to see more, higher-quality work than Pforr and his contemporaries could in Vienna.

Cornelius left Frankfurt with his friend, the painter Christian Xeller (1784-1872) at the end of August 1811, reached Rome on October 14<sup>th</sup>, and joined the Brotherhood of St. Luke on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1812. When Pforr died in 1812, Overbeck was despondent at the loss of such an important pillar of the Brotherhood but Cornelius, 6 years his elder and a positive personality, provided support. It was also Cornelius who created the opportunity for Nazarene painters to produce the Frescoes of Casa Bartholdy, a seminal series of paintings which brought fame to the Nazarenes.

After Pforr's death, Cornelius and Overbeck became the new driving force of the Brotherhood of St. Luke, as we can see from their 'Double Portrait' (fig. 7) where each artist drew a portrait of the other, side by side on a single sheet. Cornelius' subsequent activity as a member of the Nazarene Movement was spectacular and his reputation also grew in Germany, leading, in 1819, to a request for him to become director of the art academy in Dusseldorf. Then Ludwig I, with whom Cornelius had become friendly in Rome, invited him to Munich where he was put in charge of the art academy in 1825, raised to the peerage, and welcomed into the nobility.

### 3. Cornelius and Dürer

Cornelius' series of Faust drawings were published as engravings in 1816, while the artist was in Rome. The plates were faithfully engraved by Ferdinand Ruscheweyh (1785-1846) who was a close friend of the Brotherhood of St Luke in Rome. However the current paper does not focus on that series of prints but seeks to examine the characteristics of Cornelius' work as revealed in the original drawings which, other than the cover illustration, corresponded exactly with them. Numbering 12 in total, the drawings were all executed in grey ink on large white sheets of paper, and we know that they were produced in three separate batches in the following order.

The first 5 drawings created from late 1810 to early 1811 in Frankfurt, and shown by Boisserée to Goethe in May 1811:

- No. 4 Auerbach's Cellar in Leipzig
- No. 5 Scene upon Leaving Church



fig. 7 Friedrich Overbeck/Peter Cornelius,  
*Double Portrait*, 1812, Private Collection

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. S17-33. 215 panel paintings were purchased by Ludwig I of Bavaria in 1827, and have been housed part of the Alte Pinakothek collection since 1836.

No. 6 Walk in the Garden

No. 10 Walpurgis Night. The Way to the Brocken,

and No. 11 The Apparition at the Rabenstein

These were followed by 2 works drawn, or planned, in Frankfurt in summer 1811:

No. 7 Gretchen before the Image of Mater Dolorosa

and No. 9 Scene in the Dome

When Cornelius arrived in Rome on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1811 he did not resume work on the Faust series immediately, but instead started a new series of drawings for the epic poem, *The Nibelungenlied* (*The Song of the Nibelungs*). Only when the *Nibelungenlied* drawings had been prepared for engraving and publication did he resume work on the Faust series. The following 5 drawings were produced from late 1814 through 1816:

No. 1 Title Page in Arabesque

No. 2 Prologue for the Theatre

No. 8 Night: Street in front of Gretchen's Door

No. 12 Dungeon Scene

No. 3 Easter Walk. Before the City Gate

However, the current paper does not examine all twelve drawings in the series, but focuses on how Cornelius incorporated aspects of Dürer's style into his work, and what new elements this in turn brought to 19<sup>th</sup> century art. First of all, as Martin Sonnabend points out, the rotund figure drinking at the far left of 'Auerbach's Cellar in Leipzig' (fig. 8), the very first of the drawings to be produced, clearly caricatures Dürer's portrait of his close friend, Willibald Pirckheimer (fig. 9).<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Sonnabend proposes Dürer's copperplate engraving 'Young Couple' (The Promenade, fig. 11) as the source for 'Walk in the Garden' (fig. 10). These comparisons illustrate the constant close attention that Cornelius paid to Dürer, extending not only to very detailed observation of the clothing, but the important role played by the relationship between body and dress in Dürer's work. We can see a similarity in, for example, the figure of the woman dragging her cloak behind her, the man's hat topped with fluttering feathered ornament, and the way that the man gazes at the woman (fig. 12). There is no doubt that Cornelius was fascinated by this kind of representation of costume or the man's expression, as opposed to the timeless Classical representation of the ideal nude which had predominated for so long.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Sonnabend mentions that Cornelius may have seen not just Dürer's prints, but also some of his drawings. He points out that Martha's clothing in Cornelius' 'Walk in the Garden' (fig. 12) shares several characteristics with Dürer's Lady from Nuremberg, the figure on the left-hand side in 'A Lady from Nuremberg and a Lady from Venice' (fig. 13), both in the dress-style itself and the way the garments are worn, notably the way the trailing sleeve is hooked over the lady's forearm. Because we have not found any other model closer to the Cornelius drawing than this, Sonnabend came to the conclusion that Cornelius very likely saw this work by Dürer.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Sonnabend, op. cit., 12.

<sup>26</sup> Sonnabend, S. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., S. 11. This drawing by Dürer is in the Städel Museum, so there is a strong probability that it was in





fig. 8 Peter Cornelius, *Auerbach's Cellar in Leipzig, detail*, 1810, Städel Museum



fig. 9 Albrecht Dürer, *Portrait of Pirckheimer*, 1524



fig. 10 Peter Cornelius, *Walk in the Garden*, 1810-11, Städel Museum



fig. 11 Albrecht Dürer, *Young Couple (The Promenade)*, c.1498



fig. 12 Peter Cornelius, *Walk in the Garden, detail*, 1810-11, Städel Museum



fig. 13 Albrecht Dürer, *A Lady from Nuremberg and a Lady from Venice*, 1495, Städel Museum



What is more Cornelius did not only use Dürer as a model for his work. In ‘The Apparition at the Rabenstein’ (fig. 14), he quotes from Raphael’s ‘Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple’ (fig. 15). It is astonishing that Cornelius already quoted from Raphael’s Vatican Murals before coming to Rome. He must have been following Schlegel’s advice to learn from ‘early Raphael’. However, Raphael’s ‘Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple’, as one can infer from the figures’ dramatic gestures, is not in fact an early work, but dates from nearer the middle phase of Raphael’s career. Or indeed, it may even be assigned to the beginning of Raphael’s ‘late period’. So the Nazarene painters gradually misapplied what Schlegel defined as the ‘early period’ of Raphael’s painting, but I would like to leave this discussion for another occasion.

Of the 12 drawings in the series, the most dramatic scene is must be ‘Walpurgis Night’ (fig. 16). Faithful to Goethe’s text, the landscape and figures are closely interconnected. In this single drawing, Cornelius adeptly combines Faust and Mephistopheles, as well as the Will O’ the Wisp, and witches, all of whom appear in this scene.

FAUST: How the wind roars through the air!  
And whips around my head!

MEPHISTOPHELES: Grasp the ancient stony bed,  
Lest you’re thrown in the abyss, there.<sup>28</sup>

Then in the scene after the witches’ chorus:

MEPHISTOPHELES: They glimmer and sparkle, stink and flare!  
The genuine witch-element’s there!  
We’ll soon be parted, so stay near!<sup>29</sup>

This scene is one of the first five sent to Goethe, and it is clear that Goethe was full of admiration for the way that Cornelius had interpreted the text. However, we should take note of a surprising element in this drawing which is unrelated to Goethe’s text. This is the inclusion of ‘rock faces’ on the surface of the stone, which have received no attention at all until now (fig. 17). Human faces like these on the rock surface are not described anywhere at all in Goethe’s text. Is the rock about to turn into a devil, or a human being? How did Cornelius come up with these ‘human’ rock-faces - fantastical images which are completely extraneous to the text?

To find the source for this kind of trompe d’oeil type of image, we should probably look at Dürer’s landscape painting, ‘View of Arco’ (fig. 18). Ever since Heinz Ladendorf’s work in 1971<sup>30</sup> opinion

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Frankfurt in Cornelius’ day.

<sup>28</sup> Goethe, *Faust*, Part 1 lines 3936-3939; translated by A.S. Kline, *poetryintranslation.com.*, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Goethe, *Faust*, Part 1 lines 4018-4020; translated by A.S. Kline, *poetryintranslation.com.*, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Heinz Ladendorf, Ein Felsgesicht bei Albrecht Dürer, in: *Festschrift für Wolfgang Krönig (Aachener Kunstblätter)*, Bd. 41, 1971, S. 229-230.



fig. 14 Peter Cornelius, *The Apparition at the Rabenstein*, 1811, Städel Museum



fig. 15 Raphael, *The Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple*, detail, 1511-12, Vatican Museum

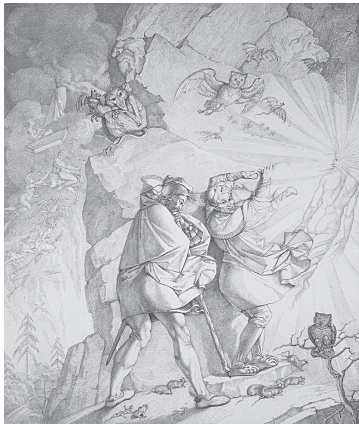


fig. 16 Peter Cornelius, *Walpurgis Night*, 1810-1811, Städel Museum



fig. 17 Peter Cornelius, *Walpurgis Night*, detail, 1810-1811, Städel Museum



fig. 18 Albrecht Dürer, *View of Arco*, 1495, Louvre Museum

has been divided with regard to these ‘rock faces’ (*Felsgesicht*), but Ladendorf’s views have been reconsidered in recent years, since Dario Gamboni, in his book *Potential Images*, reassessed these in the context of fantasy expression of the Renaissance era.<sup>31</sup> However, one can assume that Cornelius could not actually have seen Dürer’s ‘View of Arco’. This is because, although the painting originally belonged to the Cologne merchant Eberhard Jabach (1618-1695), Jabach went into debt and sold a large number of pieces from his collection to Louis XIV of France, and we know that this piece was already part of the royal ‘Cabinet du Roi’ collection in 1671. Since there is no possibility of Cornelius having seen this painting in Paris in the original, we must assume that the only way for him to know of these ‘rock faces’ would be through publications, but to the best of my knowledge, there were no printed versions of the work in existence at the time. This being the case, can we put the extraordinary similarity of this creative idea, employed by Cornelius and by Dürer, down to pure chance? Let us now look at the collection of lithographs of Albrecht Dürer’s *Christlich-Mythologische Handzeichnungen* published in 1808 by Johann Nepomuk Strixner (1782-1855), which Cornelius clearly looked at and quoted in his Faust drawings. Studying this collection might begin to give us an idea where the fantastic rock faces could have come from.

Strixner’s collection of lithographs is a set of reproductions based on original drawings created by Dürer for the *Prayer Book of Emperor Maximilian I*, a printed book which Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I distributed to members of the imperial Order of Saint George. Unfortunately the emperor’s plan did not reach the printing stage, and only Dürer’s ‘marginal drawings’ (*Randzeichnung*), designed to surround the text, survived. The lithograph collection published by Strixner proved very popular; we know that Goethe himself owned a copy (fig. 19), which is now in Goethe’s personal library collection in the Classical Foundation Weimar.<sup>32</sup> We can immediately see that these reproductions of Dürer’s exquisite arabesques, executed with the most extraordinary artistry in continuous sweeping lines, captivated Cornelius and provided an importance source of inspiration for his Faust series. For example, Cornelius employs these arabesques in the ‘Title Page in Arabesque’ (fig. 20) and ‘Prologue for the Theatre’, and that the stork in the lower right of ‘Gretchen before the Image of Mater Dolorosa’ (fig. 21), while based on the stork which appears several times in Strixner’s *Prayer Book of Emperor Maximilian I*, also incorporates the form of the bird with strange cockscomb in Folio 15 of the lithograph collection (fig. 22).

In a letter of May 8<sup>th</sup> 1811, Goethe draws Cornelius’ attention to these Dürer drawings:

*...In my opinion, Albrecht Dürer has never produced as free, ingenious, great and beautiful work as he does in these, as it were, improvised sheets.*<sup>33</sup>

In his reply of 1<sup>st</sup> July 1811, Cornelius wrote:

*Dürer’s marginal drawings have been in my workshop from the day I started my work.*<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Dario Gamboni, *Potential Images: Ambiguity and Indeterminacy in Modern Art*, London, 2002, pp. 31-37.

<sup>32</sup> KuSaDepot:KuD224 (Sammlung Privatbibliothek Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Klassik Stiftung Weimar).

<sup>33</sup> Goethe to Cornelius on 8th May 1811: „...weil nach meiner Überzeugung Albrecht Dürer sich nirgends so frei, so geistreich, groß und schön bewiesen, als in diesen gleichsam extemporirten Blättern,“ zit. nach Ernst Förster, Peter Cornelius. Ein Gedenkbuch aus seinem Leben und Wirken, Bd. 1, Berlin, 1874, S. 80-81; Sonnabend, S. 15. ([https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb11181497\\_00104.html](https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb11181497_00104.html)).

<sup>34</sup> Cornelius to Goethe on 1st July 1811: „Albrecht Dürers Randzeichnungen habe ich von dem Tage an, da ich mein Werk begann, in meiner Werkstatt.“, zit. nach Ernst Förster, S. 86. ([https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb11181497\\_00104.html](https://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb11181497_00104.html)).

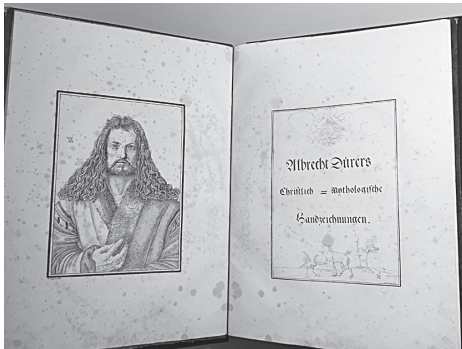


fig. 19 Johann Nepomuk Strixner, *Albrecht Dürers Christlich-Mythologische Handzeichnungen*, 1808, Sammlung Privatbibliothek Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Klassik Stiftung Weimar

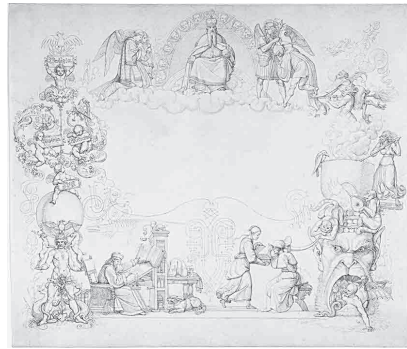


fig. 20 Peter Cornelius, *Title Page in Arabesque*, 1814/15, Städel Museum



fig. 21 Peter Cornelius, *Gretchen before the image of Mater Dolorosa*, 1811, Städel Museum

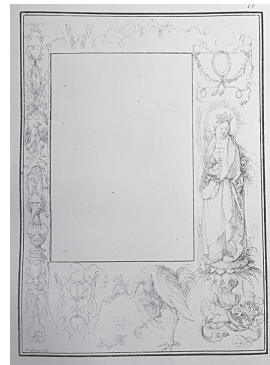


fig. 22 Johann Nepomuk Strixner, *Albrecht Dürers Christlich-Mythologische Handzeichnungen*, fol. 15, 1808, Sammlung Privatbibliothek Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Klassik Stiftung Weimar

In other words, Cornelius was open with Goethe about the fact that he referred to Strixner's reproductions of Dürer's work from the very beginning of his work on the *Faust* drawings.<sup>35</sup> Is it perhaps an overstatement to suggest that the correspondence between Cornelius and Goethe indicates that the rock faces in 'Walpurgis Night', one of the first 5 drawings Cornelius sent to Goethe, are a product of Cornelius' appreciation of the free and fantastic formative process that generated Dürer's arabesque motifs? That is to say, this is not a question of taking motifs directly from a source, but more about whether the artist has adopted the creative principles of that source. Karl Möseneder concludes that Dürer's anthropomorphic forms stem from his methodological process; he maintains that naturalistic depiction and anthropomorphic forms should not be thought of as opposites, but rather that faithfully

de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb11181497\_00110.html).

<sup>35</sup> Sonnabend points out that this exchange of letters between Goethe and Cornelius led to the influence of Dürer's drawings in Cornelius' work, and that Strixner's publication was the model for the stork in 'Gretchen before the Image of Mater Dolorosa', produced in Frankfurt in summer 1811. Sonnabend, op. cit., S. 16.



depicting external appearances breathes life into natural forms, and that human, animal and man-made structures are intermingled within these natural forms.<sup>36</sup> This kind of motivic syncretism is certainly realised in the arabesques of the *Prayer Book of Emperor Maximilian I*. Here however, let us avoid rushing to a conclusion about whether or not Cornelius was really able to draw on the Dürer's *Prayer Book* arabesques to this extent, and simply content ourselves with comparing the two works. So I would like to consider whether Dürer's 'View of Arco' had already been reproduced in printed form, and whether Cornelius would have had the opportunity of seeing it, on a future occasion.

#### 4. Epilogue: Arabesques binding Two Styles

The Faust drawings which Cornelius produced after moving to Rome and joining the Nazarenes in 1812 show even greater influence from Dürer's drawings for the *Prayer Book of Emperor Maximilian I*. The final five drawings in the Faust series were produced in Rome from the end of 1812 through 1816; two of these, 'Title Page in Arabesque' (fig. 20) and 'Prologue for the Theatre', make extensive use of the kind of arabesques seen in the marginal drawings of Dürer's *Prayer Book of Emperor Maximilian I*. It even appears that by deliberately concentrating on Dürer's drawings for the *Prayer Book* while in Rome, Cornelius was trying not to dilute the Northern Renaissance feel his work had acquired in Dusseldorf. On the 'Title Page in Arabesque' Cornelius illustrates everything appearing at the beginning of the story of Faust. In the lower left corner stands the Earth Spirit appearing in the 'Night' scene, and above him four Putti lift up plaques bearing the names of Faust's fields of study. To the right of the Earth Spirit, Faust sits at his desk intently translating the Bible exactly like St. Jerome in his Study, and on his right-hand side Gretchen and Martha face each other, while in the bottom right-hand corner is the Devil with his mouth wide open, beckoning to Gretchen. Above the Devil, a witch stirs the contents of a cauldron, and the demons emerging from the cauldron send Mephistopheles forwards, in front of the figure of God, indicating that the story is about to begin. All these motifs are loosely connected by the "free and ingenious" arabesques which Dürer so magnificently employed in his *Prayer Book* drawings. Dürer's arabesques, created with his prodigiously skilful, fluent linear penmanship might seem impossible to reproduce, but thanks to Strixner's printed plates, Cornelius was marvellously successful in doing just that.

Moreover it is not just the Dürer-style arabesques that we should notice in this drawing; we must not overlook the figures of God and the angels at the top of the drawing (fig. 20). The reason being that these were clearly inspired by the upper section of Raphael's mural, 'Disputation on the Holy Sacrament' (fig. 23). Overbeck, who loved to paint religious subjects and used Raphael as a model throughout his career, based his magnum opus 'The Triumph of Religion in the Arts' (fig. 24) on Raphael's 'Disputation on the Holy Sacrament', but Cornelius actually predated him in this. It is just as though Cornelius, in his 'Faust' series, was declaring himself the successor to the artistic styles of both of the Nazarene founders: namely Overbeck (*id est* Raphael) and Pforr (*id est* Dürer). The light lines of the vines travel up the right and left sides of the drawing from the Dürer-like figures along the bottom as far as the Raphael-style figure of God the Father at the top; the arabesques firmly

<sup>36</sup> Karl Möseneder, *Blickende Dinge. Anthropomorphes bei Albrecht Dürer*, in: *Pantheon*, XLIV, 1986, S. 15-23; Gamboni op. cit., p. 33.



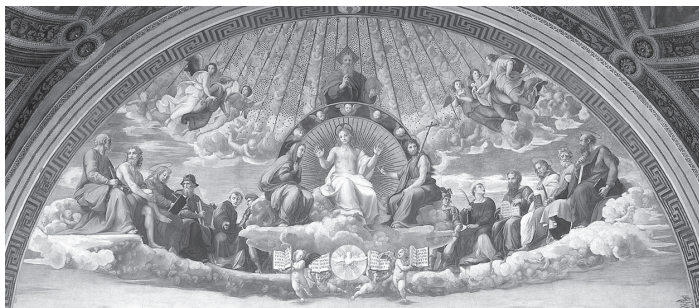


fig. 23 Raphael, *Disputation of the Holy Sacrament*, detail, 1509-1510, Vatican Museum



fig. 24 Friedrich Overbeck, *The Triumph of Religion in the Arts*, 1829-1840, Städel Museum

connect the German and the Italian, or the Dürer and Raphael-like elements.<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, who exhorted Cornelius to change his approach to art and “study Raphael and Dürer”, stressed that the arabesque was an important element in the new art of the Romantics. In *Gespräch über die Poesie (Dialogue on Poetry)* of 1800 Schlegel goes further, declaring that in an age where art was becoming superficial and dying out, the arabesque was a uniquely privileged artistic form with latent potential.<sup>38</sup> In the words of Naoki Watanabe, Schlegel’s aim was to use the arabesque, “not to try and resolve the divergence and conflict between ancient and modern art, but rather to integrate and harmonise them as a universal entity”.<sup>39</sup> Cornelius adopted this approach, employing the arabesque tendrils to deftly intertwine these two elements. However, this was not a fusion of ancient and modern art, but the very embodiment of the Nazarenes’ ideal of unifying Italian with German, namely, Raphael with Dürer.

English Translation by Martie Jelinek, MA

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<sup>37</sup> Naoki Sato, ‘Nazare-ha ni okeru rafaero to dyūra-. Puforu kara koroneriusu e’ in: *Zen rafaero-shugi, Kakoniyoru 19 seiki kaiga no kakushin*, ed. Chikashi Kitazaki, Sangen-sha, Tokyo, pp. 78-79 (Japanese Text) (Naoki Sato, Raphael and Dürer for the Nazarene. From Franz Pforr to Peter Cornelius, in: *Pre-Raphaelism. Revolution of the 19th. Century Painting through Finding the Past*, ed. Chikashi Kitazaki, Sangen-sha, Tokyo, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> Günter Oestrelle, Von der Peripherie ins Zentrum: Der Aufstieg der Arabeske zur Prosaischen, Poetischen und Intermedialen Reflexionsfigur um 1800, in: *Verwandlung der Welt. Die romantische Arabeske*, hrsg. von Werner Busch und Petra Maisak, Petersberg, 2014, S. 33.

<sup>39</sup> Naoki Watanabe, ‘Romanha no bungaku • hihyōron— furi-dorihi shure-geru no resshingu ron’, in: *Utsunomiya Daigaku Gaikoku Bungaku Kenkyūkai*, Volume 54, 2005, p. 157 (Japanese Text) (Naoki Watanabe, ‘Literature and Critics of the Romanticists. Friedrich Schlegel’s “Über Lessing”’, in: ‘Utsunomiya University Foreign Literature Research Group’, Volume 54, 2005).