CARLYLE’S APPRENTICESHIP: HIS EARLY GERMAN CRITICISM AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOETHE
(1822–1832)

In 1839 Carlyle’s friend and critic John Sterling wrote an article in the London and Westminster Review on Carlyle’s early periodical essays (collected and published in 1839 as Critical and Miscellaneous Essays). Carlyle was grateful for what he called the first ‘generous human recognition’ of his merit in introducing German literature, and in particular Goethe, to the English public.1 Indeed, Sterling was eloquent in his praise. ‘Grasshoppers had before chirped for and against the rumoured foreign singer’, he wrote, ‘and these are often pleasant verdant animals. But now it was no grasshopper; the creature is of a different race. Bos locutus est. It was the roaring of a bull, which the mountains needs must hear and reply to’ (xxxiii, 27). This view became commonplace among English and German critics in the nineteenth century, and has persisted well into this century.2 It still remains to be shown that this is a falsification of Carlyle’s achievement as a critic of German literature, and that the ‘mistake’, perpetuated by Goethe in Germany, stemmed from Carlyle himself.

Carlyle dated the commencement of his fame from his first two articles in the Edinburgh Review in 1827. Jeffrey had encouraged him, albeit cautiously, to ‘Germanize the public’,3 and he began with an article on Jean Paul Richter, following up with the much more ambitious ‘State of German Literature’ essay in October 1827. He begins the latter in a tone of unequivocal authority. ‘We have a word or two’, he writes, ‘to say on that strange literature itself; concerning which, our readers probably feel more curious to learn what it is, than with what skill it has been judged of’ (Edinburgh Review, xlvi, 305). He goes on to trace the recent history of German literature and its fortunes at home and abroad in a manner calculated to end the smart phrases of critics like the editor of the Edinburgh Review himself. When Carlyle declares that ‘there is, in fact, much in the present aspect of German Literature not only deserving notice, but deep consideration from all thinking men, and far too complex for being handled in the way of epigram’ (page 306), he is undoubtedly remembering certain disparaging remarks made by Jeffrey, among others, about the ‘bad taste’ and ‘immorality’ of ‘German literature’

1 The Life of John Sterling in The Works of Thomas Carlyle, Centenary Edition, edited by H. D. Traill, 50 vols (London, 1896–99), xi, 191. This edition is referred to throughout this article, though references to his early periodical articles are to the publication in which they first appeared.


3 See Carlyle’s letter of 4 June 1857, The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, edited by C. R. Sanders and K. J. Fielding, 4 vols (Durham, North Carolina, 1970—), iv, 228. This edition is used for the letters up to 1828, and is henceforth referred to as Collected Letters.
in general. There is, for example, Jeffrey’s attack in the Edinburgh Review (August 1825) on Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, in Carlyle’s translation of 1824:

To us it certainly appears, after the most deliberate consideration, to be eminently absurd, puérile, incongruous, vulgar, and affected; — and, though redeemed by considerable powers of invention, and some traits of vivacity, to be so far from perfection, as to be, almost from beginning to end, one flagrant offence against every principle of taste, and every just rule of composition. (XLIII, 414)

As Wilhelm Meister is, according to Jeffrey, ‘allowed by the general consent of all Germany, to be the very greatest work of their very greatest writer’, he is ‘forced’ to conclude that national tastes differ, the German taste erring in proportion as it differs from the English.

Carlyle’s article, historically and critically sound, and written in the most convincing style, is a real achievement in German criticism. In it, a proper discrimination is urged between the ‘false and tawdry ware’ of a Kotzebue and the wisdom of a Lessing. Carlyle answers those critics who denounce German literature as ‘mystical’ or in bad taste. Of course some German works are lacking in decorum, says Carlyle, but surely the excesses of ‘Monk’ Lewis and Mrs Radcliffe are equal to those of Heyne, Kotzebue, or Weber. British taste is no less liable to error than German. Indeed, as he had already pointed out in an early Schiller article in August 1824, ‘about the time of Wallenstein’s appearance, we of this gifted land were shuddering at The Castle Spectre!’ (London Magazine, x, 157). Each literature has its good and its bad examples; it is our ‘duty’ to study the better ones. As Carlyle later recalled, this article ‘made what they call a sensation among the Edinburgh buckrams’ and ‘set many tongues wagging, and some few brains considering, what this strange monster could be that was come to disturb their quiescence and the established order of Nature’. Jeffrey certainly thought Carlyle strange, as indeed he considered any enthusiasm for German literature as an aberration from good sense and good taste. Soon after Carlyle’s début in the Edinburgh Review, Jeffrey wrote that he was ‘more and more convinced of the utter fallacy of your opinions and the grossness of your idolatry. I predict too, with full and calm assurance, that your cause is hopeless, and that England will never admire, nor indeed endure, your German divinities’. It is probable that by his caution regarding the interest shown in Germany in the Edinburgh Review Jeffrey encouraged Carlyle in the belief, already strong in the latter, that he was a creature apart, with unique interests and talents.

Indeed, the ‘State of German Literature’ essay has led many readers of Carlyle to false conclusions. They have taken his forceful word for it that he, and he alone, set about ‘Germanizing’ the English public, even introducing ‘that strange literature’ to England at the end of the 1820s. To question this assumption we need only remember the enthusiastic efforts of R. P. Gillies, J. G. Lockhart, and De Quincey in Blackwood’s Magazine and the London Magazine during the early years of the decade, not to mention those of William Taylor and Henry Crabb Robinson

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earlier in the century.¹ No student of the German criticism in reviews and magazines of the early nineteenth century can accept that in 1827 the task still remained untackled which Coleridge had outlined eleven years before, in a letter to Thomas Boosey the bookseller. There he proposed to (but never did) write a history of recent German literature, in order to ‘remove the cloud of Ignorance & Prejudice which to a disgraceful and even inhospitable and ungrateful excess overglooms the mind of the learned Public with regard to German Literature’.² Moreover, Carlyle, and with him a host of ‘Carlyleans’, ignores his own intellectual progress in the field of German criticism. The ‘roaring bull’ of the Edinburgh Review from 1827 began his literary career five years earlier as one of the mere ‘grasshoppers’ who were ‘chirping’ on the subject. He to whom, according to Sterling, ‘is due almost all the just appreciation of Goethe now existing in England’ (London and Westminster Review, xxxiii, 23), wrote an article on Faust in April 1822 for the New Edinburgh Review, a shortlived periodical characterized by Carlyle himself as a ‘literary mooncall’ (Collected Letters, ii, 80).

Carlyle was not the first periodical article in England on Faust. In 1810, two years after the publication of the play in Germany, William Taylor had noticed it in the Monthly Review. Having translated Goethe’s classical play, Iphigénie, in 1793, he could not now reconcile himself to the unclassical and fragmentary form of Faust; and he was the first to object to its ‘bad taste’ and ‘immorality’, particularly in the ‘Prologue in Heaven’.³ He was unable to ‘recommend its importation, and still less the translation of it, to our English students of German literature’ (Monthly Review, lxii, 495). Despite Taylor’s warning, the play was to find more translators than any other within the next thirty years, beginning with John Anster’s, the next after Taylor’s, review in Blackwood’s Magazine in June 1820. Anster translates several extracts, and finds much to praise in the play, but he objects to the ‘light and irreverent’ tone of the ‘Prologue’ (vii, 235 ff.). Close on the heels of Blackwood’s Magazine came its rival, the London Magazine, with an article in August 1820. The reviewer notes Goethe’s ‘Proteus ability to give substantial and consistent forms to his poetical compositions, to point and trace their scope, and determine their effects’, but dislikes the ‘unpleasant’ interference with the main plot of the outrageous ‘Walpurgis’ scene (ii, 128–9, 139).


³ The integral importance of the ‘Prologue’ was missed by most early translators of Faust; see, for example, Lord Francis Leveson Gower’s preface to his 1823 translation, where he writes that ‘considerations of decency’ made him omit most of the ‘Prologue’.
Carlyle now joined the chorus of critics, finding, like the others, that 'there is a want of unity in the general plan of the work, and there are numerous sins against taste in the execution of it'. The 'Walpurgisnacht' scene clearly offends against his moral sense, though he regrets having to censure it. The unfinished state of the play to be completed by the publication in 1827 of the 'Helena Interlude', and in 1832 of the second part of Faust and the unheroic nature of the hero are a puzzle to Carlyle, who thus attempts to excuse Faust's misdemeanours and draw a moral conclusion where none is hinted at by Goethe: 'Faust mingles in this satanic revelry more than we could wish; yet he soon grows tired of it; and we can almost pardon him for having snatched a few moments of enjoyment, or at least forgetfulness, from a source however mean, when we reflect that they are the last allotted to him' (New Edinburgh Review, ii, 330). Carlyle is not to be blamed for his hesitancy in the Faust review, for which he apologizes in advance in a letter to his brother, saying, 'it will be very poor, being written on a subject which I have never expressed myself about before, and hence with no small difficulty' (Collected Letters, ii, 9). His reaction to the 'faults' of the play is much milder than Scott's or Coleridge's or Lamb's, though the first two at least were avowed students of German literature before Carlyle began to study the subject at all.¹ In 1822 Carlyle was still a novice in German criticism, having begun to learn the language only three years before. It is clear that while we may agree to some extent with those critics who stress the importance of Carlyle's articles in the Edinburgh Review and Foreign Review from 1827, we cannot accept that his 1822 Faust article is in any way exceptional. Still less can we follow the editor of the Publications of the English Goethe Society's 1888 reprint of the essay when he declares that it 'proclaims farewell to the age of ignorance, and ushers in the age of intelligent appreciation of Faust as a work of high art and sane genius' (iv, 86).

Carlyle's next attempt to deal with Goethe was the self-imposed 'duty' of translating Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, a work which was censured not only by Jeffrey, but also by such notable critics as Niebuhr and Jacobi.² The unrewarding task of rendering this elusive and often boring novel into English was by no means congenial to Carlyle. He undertook it with much the same feelings as those expressed by Thomas Lovell Beddoes (at this time domiciled in Germany) about Goethe's works in general — a 'double feeling of contempt of & delight in him'.³ Carlyle's letters and notebook in 1823 and 1824 abound with complaints about the 'insipid' and prosaic nature of the work (of which Novalsi also accused it, setting out to correct its 'coldness' and 'utilitarianism' in his own fantastic fragment, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, in 1802).⁴ In his preface to the published work, in 1824, Carlyle warns his readers not to expect an ordinary novel, full of romance and incident. He enlists Friedrich Schlegel's aid in requesting the public not to try to

² See G. H. Lewes, Life of Goethe, 2 vols (London, 1855), ii, 211.
fit *Wilhelm Meister* into a mental compartment marked ‘Novel’.\(^1\) The hero, as Carlyle himself says with justice, is a ‘milksope’. It is probable that these excuses for the weakness of the novel’s plot and characterization are made in an attempt to obscure the aspect which really worried Carlyle. When he says he ‘could sometimes fall down and worship [Goethe]; at other times I could kick him out of the room’, he is reacting not so much against the lack of action and character in the novel as against the clear subordination of the moral to the aesthetic sense. It cannot have been easy for Carlyle to translate Wilhelm’s words towards the end of the *Lehrjahre*. ‘O needless strictness of morality’, cries the hero, ‘while Nature in her own kindly manner trains us to all that we require to be! . . . Woe to every sort of culture which destroys the most effectual means of all true culture, and directs us to the end, instead of rendering us happy on the way!’ (*Works*, xxiv, 82). We may assume that Carlyle was much happier when translating the sequel, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (added by Goethe thirty years after the *Lehrjahre*), for his book *German Romance*, published in 1827. Indeed, as an old man, he recommended the *Wanderjahre* to a correspondent as ‘the Book of Books on Education of the young soul in these broken distracted times of ours’.\(^2\) The very subtitle, *Die Entsagenden*, and the infinitely greater moral emphasis of Goethe, suited Carlyle’s own temperament better than the bewildering succession of amorous adventures through which Wilhelm progresses (though not in any moral sense) in the *Lehrjahre*.

G. H. Lewes, in his article on Goethe in the *British and Foreign Review* (1843), states dramatically what he sees as the two main critical attitudes of the early nineteenth century towards Goethe:

‘Ah! now do you really think Götze was not a charlatan?’ asked a smart dogmatical critic, with that complacent smile, which, while it indicates a tender pity for the weakness of another, reflects so serenely on one’s own superiority. The speaker was ignorant of German — ‘but that’s not much!’ The speaker was also quite incapable of seeing into the significance of such a man as Götze, whatever knowledge he might have of the language — n’importe! The one thing definitely settled in his conviction was this curious fact of Götze’s being a charlatan.

Lewes undoubtedly had Jeffrey (or one of the other *Edinburgh* reviewers of Goethe, such as Palgrave) in mind.\(^3\) Equally clearly, he was thinking of Carlyle when he described the other type of criticism:

Goethe a charlatan! Such is one view of the man. Another view is, that he was a sort of god — a Weimarian Jove, sitting high above this imperfect world, smiling serenely, contemplating its short-comings with pity . . . speaking to mankind (with a star on his breast) a gospel which it were insanity or guilt to question! (*British and Foreign Review*, xiv, 78–9)

It is important to realize that Carlyle came to this acknowledged position as Goethe champion (a position which Lewes rightly finds extreme and tries to correct in his *Life of Goethe* in 1855) only after a struggle with what he, too, thought was the flippant and even immoral side of Goethe. To reach a positive stand towards the author of *Faust* and *Wilhelm Meister*, he had to ‘tailor’ Goethe to fit his own needs, overstressing the moral content at the expense of the purely aesthetic. His own ‘apprenticeship’ was spent translating from German and reviewing in lesser

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\(^3\) See *Edinburgh Review*, 26 (June 1816) and 28 (March 1817).
periodicals for five years from 1822 to 1827. Only against this background should we approach the next five years which saw him gaining fame with his sounding articles in the Edinburgh Review and Foreign Review.

Lockhart, reviewing Carlyle's translation of Wilhelm Meister in Blackwood's Magazine for June 1824, found time both to praise Goethe and to encourage the efforts of the translator, whom he described as 'a young gentleman of this city' (xv, 623). Carlyle had left his Dumfriesshire home in 1819, bound for Edinburgh, city of the famous Review, to which Carlyle early tried to gain access,¹ and of Blackwood's Magazine, in which Gillies, Lockhart, and Anster had been writing on German literature almost since its début in 1817. At this time, Carlyle had scarcely begun his German studies, but he was aware of a talent, as yet undirected, which he described to his brother Alexander in 1821 as 'something different from the vulgar herd of mortals; I think it is something superior; and if once I had overpassed those bogs and brakes and quagmires, that lie between me and the free arena, I shall make some fellows stand to the right and left' (Collected Letters, i, 327).

The decision to become an author was made early on, but Carlyle never lost the conviction that he had something special to achieve, nor did he ever forget the 'bogs and brakes and quagmires' which lay not only in his own way but, he felt, in the way of any worthwhile writer. Hence his early attraction to the life of Schiller, which Carlyle thought similar to his own in its difficulties and doubts. His picture of Schiller is one of the highest type of man (later formulated as 'hero'); Schiller is both poet and prophet, trying to withstand the buffetings of poverty and ignorance, 'cherishing, it may be, the loftiest thoughts, and clogged with the meanest wants; of pure and holy purposes, yet ever driven from the straight path by the pressure of necessity, or the impulse of passion; thirsting for glory, and frequently in want of daily bread' (Life of Schiller, Works, xxv, 42). The same qualities and fate were to be attributed to another of Carlyle's German favourites, Jean Paul (Foreign Review, 1830). Even Goethe was pressed into a darker mould than belonged to him, for Carlyle really formed his literary heroes in his own image. Thus when he writes of Goethe, 'I do feel that he is a wise and great man', the almost unconscious reason for his admiration is that 'the man seems to understand many of my own aberrations, 'the nature and causes' of which still remain mysterious to myself' (Two Note Books, p. 32).

It was with this feeling that he had something to say, coupled with the conviction that he was essentially alone, and doomed to misrepresentation or even obscurity, that in 1828 he took his wife Jane to the lonely farmhouse of Craigenputtock, which he described to Goethe as his 'Mountain Solitude'.² Here, in what for Jane was 'the dreariest spot of the whole world',³ he felt agreeably cut off from society; and when the couple moved to Chelsea in 1834, he made a sanctuary for himself just as lonely as that in the wilds of Scotland, as Jane's letters to her family testify.⁴ It was mainly during the six years at Craigenputtock, however, that Carlyle became

¹ See Collected Letters, i, 222–3.
² 23 May 1830, Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle, p. 185.
³ Letter to Carlyle, 6 October 1825, Collected Letters, iii, 384.
⁴ For example, her letter to her cousin of 15 February 1844, on taking 'all the principal losses off Carlyle', Letters to Her Family, 1839–1869, edited by L. Huxley (London, 1924), p. 188.
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convinced that he alone knew anything about German literature, the first subject to
which his talents were directed, and that it was his duty to teach it. He had already
set about ‘introducing’ it in the ‘State of German Literature’ article in October
1827. A few months earlier he had sent a copy of his Life of Schiller and German
Romance to Goethe, with the naive but honestly felt implication that his were the
only efforts on behalf of German literature at the time. He hopes that the books will
‘interest you likewise as evidences of the progress of German Literature in England.
Hitherto it has not been injustice but ignorance that has blinded us in this matter:
at all events a different state of things seems approaching; with respect to yourself,
it is at hand, or rather has already come’ (Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle,
p. 8).

Was Carlyle unaware of the ‘Horae Germanicae’ series in Blackwood’s Magazine
from November 1819, or of De Quincey’s articles in the London Magazine at the
same time that Carlyle was contributing a series on Schiller (the articles on which
the Life of Schiller was based) to the same periodical? He could not have been un-
aware of the fame which Blackwood’s Magazine won in its early days with the
‘Chaldee Manuscript’. Indeed, he mentions the magazine in his letters, calling it
‘a disgrace to the age and country’ (Collected Letters, ii, 490). The objection must be
to the criticisms of the ‘Cockney poets’ and their champion, the London Magazine.
No mention is made in Carlyle’s letters of the German articles in the magazine,
though one would have expected him to read them. Byron, Moore, and Beddoes
indicate, in their letters and journals, an acquaintance with the ‘Horae Germanicae’,
and a Westminster reviewer of German translations in April 1824
specifically praises Gillies’s efforts in the series (i, 557). Carlyle did, in fact, know of
Gillies, for while he was translating Wilhelm Meister in Edinburgh in 1824, he
wrote to Alexander, ‘there is one Pearse Gillies, an advocate here, who knows of me,
and whom I am to see on the subject of this book; he being a great German
Scholar, and having a fine library of books, one or two of which I wish to examine’
(Collected Letters, iii, 40). No answer came from Gillies to his request, and so poor
Gillies was dismissed as probably ‘a dandy and an Eding Dilettante’ (iii, 53). But
there is a hint in his ‘German Playwrights’ article of 1829 that Carlyle did know
specifically of Gillies’s work in the ‘Horae Germanicae’. The reference is
deliberately vague. ‘Dr. Müllner, of all these Playwrights, is the best known in
England’, writes Carlyle, adding, ‘some of his works have even, we believe, been
translated into our language’ (Foreign Review, iii, 113). As Gillies alone translated
Müllner, and as all his translations appeared in ‘Maga’, it seems reasonable to
suppose that Carlyle knew more about the magazine’s achievements than he was
willing to admit. Of Lockhart’s translations from Friedrich Schlegel and Schiller,
and of his excellent criticisms in Blackwood’s Magazine, and, from 1826, in the
Quarterly Review, there is no mention in Carlyle’s own articles. That Carlyle knew of
his work in the field is seen by his choice of Lockhart as the recipient of one of the
medals which Goethe sent him for distribution to the most important ‘Germanists’
in England. He wrote to Sir Walter Scott in 1828, ‘Perhaps Mr Lockhart, whose

1 See Byron, Letters and Journals, edited by R. E. Prothero, 6 vols (London, 1898–1901), v, 172;
Thomas Moore, Memoirs, Journal and Correspondence, edited by Lord John Russell, 8 vols (London,
1853–60), iii, 157; and Beddoes, Letters, p. 139.
2 See B. Q. Morgan, A Critical Bibliography of German Literature in English Translation, 1401–1927,
second edition, revised (Stanford, California, 1938), p. 345.
merits in respect of German Literature, and just appreciation of this its Patriarch and Guide, are no secret, will do me the honour to accept of one' (*Collected Letters*, iv, 354–5).

De Quincey, too, got less than his due. Carlyle admits the influence of De Quincey’s criticisms of Jean Paul on his own, though he deceives himself into thinking that the influence is less a direct one than a mere matter of hearsay. ‘Perhaps’, he writes, ‘it was little De Quincey’s reported admiration of Jean Paul — Goethe a mere corrupted pigmy to him — that first put me upon trying to be orthodox and admire’. The aids to self deception here are the introductory ‘perhaps’, the adjective ‘reported’, and the not strictly relevant reference to De Quincey’s irrational aversion to Goethe. Indeed it might have been this very blind spot of De Quincey’s where Goethe was concerned that made Carlyle less than generous to his fellow German scholar. We might expect a reference to De Quincey’s praise of Jean Paul in the preface to *German Romance*, which includes two of Richter’s stories, just as we might have expected some mention of the five collections of German stories, by Edgar Taylor, Richard Holcroft, George Soane, Thomas Roscoe, and Gillies, which preceded Carlyle’s own collection. But Carlyle is silent. In the *Foreign Review* article in 1830, he does begin by saying, ‘it is some six years since the name “Jean Paul Friedrich Richter” was first printed with English types’ (v, 1). But he contents himself with this generalized statement, though he is probably thinking of De Quincey’s two *London Magazine* articles on Jean Paul in 1824, one of them a rendering of the ‘Dream upon the Universe’, Jean Paul’s lyrical refutation of atheism, from which Carlyle himself loved to quote. When Carlyle, in the 1830 review, quotes from ‘one of Richter’s English critics’, it is not the words of De Quincey or William Taylor that we read, but those of Carlyle himself from the preface to *German Romance*.

Although Carlyle owed nothing directly to the work of the first ‘Germanist’, William Taylor, who belonged essentially to the previous generation (and even the previous century), his lack of justice is perhaps most flagrant in Taylor’s case. The man who had dedicated himself to German literature in the 1790s, and who had been the first to criticize Lessing, Jean Paul, and Herder, deserved more, even considering his shortcomings, than the cruel dismissal which Carlyle gave him in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1831. ‘Taylor is a clever old Philister, and I have salted him according to ability’, Carlyle wrote to his brother Jack about the article. In his journal, he was even more severe, writing in December 1830, ‘this Taylor is a wretched Atheist and Philistine. It is my duty (perhaps) to put the flock, whom he professes to lead, on their guard’ (*Two Note Books*, p. 182). To Goethe he wrote with a self-important flourish, ‘A certain William Taylor of Norwich, the Translator of your *Iphigenie*, has written what he calls a *Historic Survey of German Poetry*; the tendency of which you may judge of sufficiently by this one fact, that the longest Article but one is on August von Kotzebue’ (*Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle*, p. 255). The article itself is a long, thundering condemnation of this ‘one great Error’, of which ‘a tenth part’ ‘treats of that delectable genius, August von

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Kotzebue' (*Edinburgh Review, LIII, 151 ff.*). Certainly Taylor sometimes gets his facts wrong; equally certainly he overtakes Kotzebue. Lockhart, in a review of Robberd's *Memoir of Taylor* in 1843, points out Taylor's shortcomings, but he also notes that Taylor 'must be acknowledged to have been the first who effectually introduced the Modern Poetry and Drama of Germany to the English reader', his achievement being all the more remarkable because 'the mere possession of the German language was in those days a great rarity' (*Quarterly Review, LXXIII*, 33–4).

In his review Carlyle is not prepared to allow Taylor any merit beyond that of having produced the first attempt at a history of German literature; and, indeed, all his subsequent remarks are aimed exclusively at demolishing it.

Carlyle exaggerated both Taylor's faults ('wretched Atheist and Philistine') and his influence ('the flock whom he professes to lead'). He ought to have known that Taylor's chief work had been done in the *Monthly Magazine* and *Monthly Review* in the 1790s and early 1800s, and that his *Historic Survey of German Poetry* is largely a collection of his essays from that time. Carlyle makes no allowance for the change in perspective since Taylor began thirty years before, when Kotzebue made up the literary triumvirate with the early Goethe and Schiller.¹ Moreover, he could be charged with creating a storm in a teacup as far as Kotzebue is concerned. By 1831 no one in England, except the ageing Taylor, thought any more of Kotzebue than did Carlyle himself.

Carlyle is no more friendly towards his contemporaries in German criticism. His peculiar tendency to 'hope the worst', as Jane described it (*Letters to Her Family*, p. 160), shows itself again and again in his journal and letters. There is, for example, his assumption, not based on any acquaintance with them, that the rival collections of 'German Stories' by 'the Roscoe, Gillies & Company fraternity' are far inferior to his own (*Collected Letters*, iv, 128). And he feels it necessary to warn Goethe in advance about the expected review by William Empson of the recently published *Correspondence between Goethe and Schiller*, adding reassuringly that he himself will right the balance in his own article on the correspondence in *Fraser's Magazine*:

I must warn all German Friends to expect but little: the Critic, I apprehend, will be the same who criticised *Faust* and Lord Gower in the last Number of that Periodical: an admiring Dilettantism, but no true insight or earnest criticism is to be looked for. — I too am again to speak a word on that favourite subject, a word of warning and direction, where the harvest is great, and the reapers many and more zealous than experienced. (*Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle*, p. 255)

Empson's *Faust* article was, indeed, a hostile review, but all the hostility was directed not at Goethe but at Lord Gower, as one of the 'gentlemen who write with ease' (Carlyle's own phrase, from the preface to *German Romance*) and, even more revealingly, as 'the worst Irish secretary in the memory of man' (*Edinburgh Review*, LI, 231 ff.). The review is as personally and politically biased as Macaulay's *Edinburgh Review* article of September 1831 on his Parliamentary opposite, Croker, who had just published an edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. In the event, Carlyle had to admit in his next letter to Goethe that Empson's review of the *Correspondence* was better than he had expected (*Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle*, p. 283). It is fair and knowledgeable, more than worthy to stand beside Carlyle's own *Fraser's*

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Magazine article, which branches off into a panegyric of great men in general and his hero Schiller in particular. And Empson shows by his articles on Prince Pückler-Muskau (December 1831) and on Hayward’s Faust translation (January 1833) that he is no ‘dilettante’ as regards German literature, but is as keen as Carlyle himself to give an intelligent and fair picture of it.

There is a similar expectation of the worst with Hayward’s 1833 translation of Faust. Writing to J. S. Mill, Carlyle says he has been told that Hayward ‘has out his poor ’Translation of Faust’. He forecasts that ‘the cleverest of our second-rate men’ will ‘but have made a bungle of that business’. A few weeks later, having seen the translation, he recants, but only partially:

Hayward’s Faust is not nearly so bad as I thought it would be: considered as a matter of Business, he has really done it most handsomely, and his Book (Glossarially) is worth something; there is even here and there a touch of elegance; and no mistake (which Dictionaries, consultations or the like could remove) of any moment. The Prolegomena are very perfect in their kind; altogether worthy of our ‘cleverest second-rate man’, and will do good as far as they go.1

This grudging praise is perhaps all the more unjust because Carlyle himself had toyed with the idea of translating Faust, ‘for which’, as he wrote in a letter to Goethe of November 1830, ‘the English world is getting more and more prepared’ (Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle, p. 240). Fortunately for Carlyle, Goethe, and the play, he never got beyond the translation of Faust’s famous curse at the end of the second study scene. This unrhymed, and in parts nonsensical, translation appeared in the Athenaeum on 7 January 1832. Of all the versions of Faust this must be the worst, containing as it does four lines which do not adequately render the meaning of the original, or indeed any meaning at all:

A curse on all, one seed that scatters
Of hope from death our Name to save;
On all as earthly Good that flatters,
As wife or Child, as Plough or Slave.

(Verflucht, was uns in Träumen heuchelt,
Des Ruhms, der Namensdauer Trug!
Verflucht, was als Besitz uns schmeichelt,
Als Weib und Kind, als Knecht und Pfleg!)

Carlyle had already given proof in the Life of Schiller of his inability to translate poetry (nor could he write original poetry); and it is interesting to compare Jane’s early efforts at translating Goethe and Schiller poems with his wayward ‘corrections’, under the title ‘Variations by Hypercriticus’ (Collected Letters, I, 118 ff.). Yet he was unnecessarily severe on other translators: he called Tytler’s 1792 translation of Schiller’s Räuber a ‘yestery vehicle’ (in his Fraser’s Magazine article on Schiller in March 1831);2 he wrote to Goethe in 1828 that Charles Des Voeux’s translation of Tasso was ‘trivial’; and he was most grudging of all towards Coleridge’s magnificent version of Wallenstein. The translation, executed in 1800, when German literature had fallen into general disrepute as a result of the ‘Anti-Jacobian’ parody or the public’s surfeit of Kotzebue or both, had been forgotten until Lockhart brought it to

2 See L. A. Willoughby, English Translations and Adaptations of Schiller’s Robbers, MLR, 16 (1921), 297–315 (p. 301 n.), for Carlyle’s ‘ungenerous spirit’ towards other translators of German.
the public notice in *Blackwood's Magazine* in October 1823. Lockhart described
Coleridge's version as 'by far the best translation of a foreign tragic drama which
our English literature possesses', and quoted Scott's opinion that *Wallenstein* was
'more magnificent in the English of Coleridge than in the German of Schiller',
a remark which has caused a minor controversy among critics as to whether
Schiller or Coleridge deserves the greater praise.¹ Carlyle's Schiller article in the
*London Magazine* (August 1824), where he deals with *Wallenstein*, makes only brief
mention of Coleridge; in it, and in the *Life of Schiller* (1825), Coleridge's version
shares with Benjamin Constant's French translation a footnote of faint praise:
*Wallenstein* has been translated into French by M. Benjamin Constant; and the last two parts
of it have been faithfully rendered into English by Mr. Coleridge... Mr. Coleridge's
translation is... as a whole, unknown to us: but judging from many large specimens, we
should pronounce it, excepting Sotheby's *Oberon*, to be the best, indeed the only sufferable,
translation from the German with which our literature has yet been enriched. (*Works*, xxv,
151 n.)

It would not be necessary to stress the negative aspect of Carlyle's translating and
reviewing of German literature had not many critics, German and English,
accepted his own assurances that he was, if not the first and only worker in the
field, at least the only competent one. The first to take Carlyle at his word was
Goethe himself.

Carlyle sent a copy of his translation of *Wilhelm Meister* to Goethe in June 1824. The
reply came four months later, politely thanking Carlyle for his efforts, and enclosing
a few poems. Although not much more could be expected from the 'lion' of Weimar,
constantly besieged as he was by adoring visitors, not the least from England,²
Carlyle's pride at receiving a letter from his idol was not untempered by some
disappointment with the 'kind nothings' Goethe had written (*Collected Letters*, iii,
236). Soon, however, Carlyle was to be more to Goethe than yet another interested
Englishman who had to be politely flattered. Goethe, already over seventy, was
unable to keep pace with all that was being done in England on his behalf. Thus he
found Carlyle a useful correspondent; he could answer Goethe's queries about the
value of Des Voeux's *Tasso* translation, Goethe's English not being good enough to
decide, or about the authors of certain articles in the *Edinburgh Review*, *Foreign
Quarterly Review*, and *Foreign Review* (Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle, p. 38).
It is doubtful, however, whether he was at first really interested in details. Always
diplomatic, even in his conversations with his devoted amanuensis, Eckermann,
he insisted in 1827, apropos of a letter from Scott, that he remembered Lockhart
from his visit to Weimar in 1819, such an 'impression' did his 'personality' make on
him. Yet he was unaware that Lockhart had done anything in the field of German
literature, though he was willing to believe that the son-in-law of Sir Walter Scott
(who was by this time editor of the *Quarterly Review*) would do 'great things' in the
future.³

¹ See, for example, Paul Machule, 'Coleridges Wallenstein-Übersetzung', *Englische Studien*, 31
(1902), 182–239.
² See D. F. S. Scott, 'English Visitors to Weimar', *German Life and Letters*, 2, new series (1948–9),
330–41.
³ Johann Peter Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens* (Leipzig and
Magdeburg, 1856–48), Part 3, p. 179.
We cannot imagine that Goethe ever understood much of the work which Carlyle sent him. Fortunately it is unlikely that Carlyle saw what a friend of his later years did on a visit to Weimar. William Allingham, being shown round Goethe’s house in 1859, made a note in his diary about the ‘book-room, narrow and dark, row of shelves in the centre. Carlyle’s German Romances (uncut), with C.’s writing descriptive of sketches of his house in Scotland’ (A Diary, p. 79). If Goethe never read German Romance, he certainly read the Life of Schiller. This homage to Goethe’s friend and fellow poet was one of two things which probably contributed most to his high regard for Carlyle. Goethe wrote praising the work in his periodical, Über Kunst und Alterthum (1827), and he also sent a letter to the gratified author, expressing the ‘great esteem’ in which he held the biography (Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle, p. 14). He went on to talk of ‘Weltliteratur’, and his hopes for a greater understanding between nations through the general human element in literature, ending by calling every translator a ‘prophet’ to his countrymen. No wonder Carlyle, who had written to his mother in December 1826 that he felt he had ‘much to do in this world’, not in ‘the vain pursuit of wealth and worldly honours’ but in ‘the search and declaration of Truth’, was thrilled with this particular form of praise (Collected Letters, iv, 165, 245). Not only had his scholarship been justly appreciated, but the great Goethe had called him by the name he most revered, that of prophet.

Enclosed with this letter of Goethe’s was a poem, and also a translation of the Scottish ballad, ‘The Barring of the Door’, called by Goethe ‘Gutmann und Gutweib’. This is a clue to the second reason which probably lay behind Goethe’s interest in Carlyle. His imagination was roused by the image of Carlyle working alone in the wilds of Scotland. Perhaps he still felt some of the old Ossian fascination, poured out in his youthful work, Die Leiden des jungen Werthers (1774), where he quoted pages of the sombre Highland poetry. At any rate, he was pleased to think of a special Scottish–German relationship. He mentioned it in a letter to Carlyle in June 1828, and in his introduction to the German translation of Carlyle’s Life of Schiller in 1830. His readiness to believe that Carlyle was his only true champion in Britain may well have been due in part to his romantic notion of the ‘mountain solitude’ of Craigenputtock. That unexceptional building was sketched, at Goethe’s request, and its picture appeared on the frontispiece of the German Life of Schiller, and Goethe in his preface dwelt enthusiastically on Carlyle’s Scottish home. Moreover the letters of the two men, the lofty Goethe and the earnest Carlyle, were seldom sent unaccompanied by some homely token of Scottish or German life. Jane worked at ‘tammies’ for Goethe’s daughter-in-law, Otilie, and Goethe sent gracious presents of medals, as well as necklaces and little poems for Jane.

Strange reading as this polite, reciprocally flattering correspondence makes, it does indicate genuine pleasure on Goethe’s part and pride on Carlyle’s. No other contemporary Englishman except Byron fired Goethe’s imagination as Carlyle did. He was constantly praised in Goethe’s periodical, and Goethe sent a testimonial for Carlyle’s (unsuccesful) candidature for the Chair of Moral Philosophy at St Andrews in 1828. As a result, Carlyle became known and respected in Germany. The Berlin Society for Foreign Literature elected him honorary member in 1830.

1 For the relationship between Goethe and Byron, see William Rose, From Goethe to Byron (London, 1924), and E. M. Butler, Byron and Goethe (London, 1956).
Some of his periodical articles were noticed: Müllner quoted from his ‘German Playwrights’ (*Foreign Review*, 1829) in his newspaper, the *Mitternachtsblatt*. And perhaps the greatest tribute was Eckermann’s translation for the *Morgenblatt* of Carlyle’s eulogy, ‘Death of Goethe’, published in the *New Monthly Magazine* in June 1832 (*Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle*, p. 328).

Goethe took Carlyle’s pronouncements about the general ignorance of things German in England so literally that he wrote solemnly of the first volume of the *Foreign Quarterly Review*, ‘I find several essays on German literature: Ernst Schulze, Hoffmann, and our drama; I think I detect the hand of our Edinburgh friend [that is, Carlyle] in these, for it would indeed be wonderful if old Britain were to have produced a pair of twins’ (ein paar Menächmen) (*Correspondence between Goethe and Carlyle*, p. 38). The three articles in question were by George Moir, Sir Walter Scott, and Gillies, as Carlyle admitted in his reply. Nevertheless, Goethe remained attached to the idea of Carlyle as the lone ‘prophet’ of German culture, and it was an idea which took root in Germany. In 1875 Carlyle was honoured as none before him by a letter from Bismarck, congratulating him on his eightieth birthday and saying that Carlyle had not only introduced Schiller to his own countrymen, but had also presented the ‘great Prussian King’ (Frederick the Great) to the Germans themselves (*New Letters of Thomas Carlyle*, ii, 319).

It may seem strange that, despite invitations from Goethe and an occasional half-hearted plan on Carlyle’s part to go to Germany, the two men never met. Carlyle’s poverty in the late 1820s and early 1830s probably explains this partially, though he did manage to help finance his brother Jack’s visit to Germany in 1827. It is likely that Carlyle did not want to meet his idol, lest the ideal collapse into the reality of the Weimar ‘Bürger’, a debasement which Carlyle did not wish to see. The old man’s impartial diplomacy (or, as Carlyle saw it, his ability to suffer fools gladly) puzzled the less patient Carlyle, who wondered how it was that ‘the Author of *Faust* and *Meister*’ could ‘tryste himself with such characters as “Herr Heavyside” (the simplest and stupidest man of his day . . .) whom he mentions in his last epistle’ (*Collected Letters*, iv, 360). In a letter to Sterling in October 1836 he admitted that, on reading Eckermann’s newly published *Conversations with Goethe*, he found it ‘very curious to see the Welt-Dichter conditioned down into the Weimar Burgther and Staats-rath’, adding that ‘in place and work, he and I part wider every day’ (*Letters to John Stuart Mill*, . . ., p. 199). It is significant that all Carlyle’s heroes were either dead or at a safe distance; Napoleon, Luther, Rousseau, Burns, Goethe, Schiller, Jean Paul Richter, Frederick the Great. His bitterness towards Coleridge, due in large measure to their radically different opinions about the quality and functions of the established Church, is undoubtedly caused partly by Carlyle’s inevitable disappointment with the ‘real’ man. He had owed much to Coleridge in his early reading, especially where German philosophy was concerned.1 All his hostility, in the journal, letters, and the famous chapter in the *Life of Sterling* (1851), dated from his first meetings with Coleridge in Highgate in 1824. He had tried to ‘get something about Kant and Co. from him, about “reason” versus “understanding” and the like, but in vain. Nothing came from him that was of use to me that day, or in fact any day’ (*Reminiscences*, i, 230). It was the flesh and blood Coleridge, fat and

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elderly, letting his mind wander over several subjects in succession, requiring no conversational partner but only a willing listener, who alienated Carlyle. 'To sit as a passive bucket and be pumped into, whether you consent or not', he complained, 'can in the long-run be exhilarating to no creature; how eloquent soever the flood of utterance that is descending' (Works, xi, 55).

Carlyle did not visit Germany until August 1852, and the trip was undertaken only because he needed materials for his book on Frederick the Great. This visit, which included some time in Weimar, to the land of his greatest heroes gave Carlyle no pleasure; it was accomplished with endless complaints about his health, the noise and dirt he found in hotels during his travels, and the thriving tourist trade in Weimar. Inevitably, he was disappointed with the people he met. George Eliot tells of the mutual dislike between Carlyle and Varnhagen von Ense, a German critic with whom Carlyle had previously corresponded with great cordiality. Perhaps it is as well that he did not make his trip to Weimar during Goethe's lifetime. Even his supreme idol would have fallen from the 'upper realms' through which Carlyle thought he saw him walking (New Monthly Magazine, xxxiv, 507–8).

If Carlyle preferred heroes to real men, the 'universal man' he so revered had opposite tastes. G. H. Lewes, in an early article on Goethe in 1843, noticed that Goethe's protagonists, from Werther to Faust, are not heroic. He suggested that this was because Goethe knew the real nature of men too well to depict heroes, and that he was in general more interested in the real than the ideal (British and Foreign Review, xiv, 128). It seems strange that Carlyle, with his diametrically opposed interests, should have found, or thought he had found, in Goethe the answers to at least some of the problems aesthetic, philosophical, and even religious, which troubled him.

We have seen that aspects of Goethe's nature puzzled Carlyle. During his most pessimistic period, when he had had his first proposal of marriage refused by Jane and was frustrated by the fact that at twenty-eight he had not yet achieved anything, he had expressed his doubts in his journal. 'One is tired to death', he wrote in May 1823, 'with [Schiller's] and Goethe's palabra about the nature of the fine arts. Did Shakespeare know aught of the aesthetic? Did Homer?' Having drawn a candle, with the motto 'Terar dum prosim', 'May I be wasted, so that I be of use', he continued grimly, 'but what if I do not prodesse? Why then terar still, — dum I cannot help it! This is the end and beginning of all philosophy — known even to Singleton the Blacksmith — "we must just do the best we can, boy!"' (Two Note Books, pp. 41 ff.). The only answer was to do the work on hand, which was the translation of Wilhelm Meister, and it was this work, so alien in its philosophy to Carlyle, which helped him out of his despair. Carlyle's debt for his spiritual regeneration was one which he owed not so much to the real Goethe, the calm,
maddeningly elusive aesthete, who seemed to Sterling to be something of a pagan in his writings, as to his own ideal of the man.

In his brief rhapsodic sketch of Goethe for Fraser's Magazine and its 'Gallery of Literary Characters', Carlyle summed up his, and the modern world's, debt to Goethe in a style which was out of step with the other facetious 'portraits' in the series:

Reader! within that head the whole world lies mirrored, in such clear, ethereal harmony, as it has done in none since Shakespeare left us: even this Rag-fair of a world, wherein thou painfully strugglest, and (as is like) stumbllest — all lies transfigured here, and revealed authentically to be still holy, still divine. What alchemy was that: to find a mad universe full of scepticism, discord, desperation; and transmute it into a wise universe of belief, and melody, and reverence! Was not there an opus magnum, if one ever was? This, then, is he who, heroically doing and enduring, has accomplished it. (Fraser's Magazine, v, 206)

This one paragraph contains Carlyle's three main misconceptions concerning Goethe. His mental picture is that of a hero who has struggled through despair and disbelief to a position of stoicism, faith, and even religious zeal. Well might Sterling write that Carlyle, in his appreciation of Goethe, 'mixes a good deal too much of his own potent brandy with Goethe's pure wine'.

Carlyle early identified his own life with Goethe's, because he saw in it (and in those of Schiller and Jean Paul) a mirror of his own difficulties in the early 1820s, when he had questioned all his previous religious and philosophical assumptions. His own experiences are told in Sartor Resartus, in the episode of the 'Rue Saint-Thomas de l'Enfer', a chapter in which Teufelsdrockh closely resembles the young Carlyle in Edinburgh. The hero goes through a period of scepticism, when 'Doubt had darkened into Unbelief'. A defiant 'indifference' follows the Everlasting No, until, by a process of Self-Annihilation, he reaches a position of faith and devotion to Duty (Works, i, 128–57). The 'Sorrows of Teufelsdrockh' are indistinguishable from those of Carlyle in 1823, Die Leiden des jungen Werthers (1774), on the other hand, contained echoes from Goethe's experience: in representing the one-sided love affair between Werther and Charlotte, and the hero's painful situation in the household of Charlotte and her husband, Goethe had to some extent been ridding himself of a 'sickness'. But the novel was more than a painful experience recollected in tranquility; it was, as Goethe insisted to those who besieged him with questions, a carefully considered work of art. Werther represents more than a melancholy lovesick boy; his malaise is social as well as personal. As G. H. Lewes so excellently pointed out in his Life of Goethe, Die Leiden des jungen Werthers was an 'ideal expression of the age, and as free from the disease which corrupted it as Goethe himself was free from the weakness of his contemporaries. Wilkes used to say that he had never been a Wilkite. Goethe was never a Werther' (1, 194). Carlyle's mistake was due to his overriding interest in the 'private man', his inveterate tendency to see all literature, as well as all history, in terms of biography. Teufelsdrockh expresses Carlyle's thoughts on the matter when he says, 'as man is ever the prime object to

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1 See Carlyle, Life of Sterling, Works, xi, 147.
2 Sterling to the Blackwoods, 12 January 1840, Blackwood Papers MS 4052, f. 188, National Library of Scotland.
3 See Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter in den Jahren 1796 bis 1832, edited by F. W. Riemer, 6 vols (Berlin, 1843-4), ii, 44.
man, already it was my favourite employment to read character in speculation, and from the Writing to construe the Writer' (*Works*, i, 92).

Carlyle thought he owed his own rigorous ideal of 'self denial' to Goethe's doctrine of 'Entsagung' (renunciation), when in fact it was a product of his own Calvinism, strengthened by his reading of Fichte and Novalis. Carlyle's doctrine is a puritan one, inseparable for him from the social context, as is clear from the 'Signs of the Times' essay in the *Edinburgh Review* in June 1829, where he regrets that 'self-denial, the parent of all virtue, in any true sense of that word, has perhaps seldom been rarer' (XLIX, 456). The stern moral and social aspects are not Goethe's, whose 'Entsagung' is to be understood in a mainly aesthetic context, as the positive ordering of available materials (rather than Teufelsdröckh's 'Annihilation of Self') towards a personal culture and serenity. Carlyle ignores the aesthetic aspect when he quotes Goethe in *Sartor Resartus*, saying, 'Well did the Wisest of our time write: "It is only with Renunciation (Entsagen) that Life, properly speaking, can be said to begin'" (*Works*, i, 153). Throughout his writings, Carlyle attributes to Goethe aspects of his own puritanism. It has often been pointed out, for example, that one of his favourite quotations from Goethe was a misquotation. He transforms the maxim 'Im Ganzen, Guten, Schönen resolut zu leben' into 'Im Ganzen, Guten, Wahren resolut zu leben'. Even when he talks of Goethe's 'unworead earnestness' in the pursuit of self culture, he mistakes the man (*Foreign Review*, ii, 87).

Just as Carlyle foisted upon Goethe this struggle into the regal sphere of renunciation and supreme calm ('that in Goethe there lay Force to educe reconcilement out of such contradiction as man is now born into, marks him as the Strong One of his time', *Foreign Quarterly Review*, x, 38), so also did he overstress the moral aspect of Goethe's works. We have seen that he was eager in his 1822 article on *Faust* to excuse Faust's misdemeanours by referring to the mournful ending of Part One, and that *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* offended him because of Goethe's refusal to make judgements on the characters. Even in 1832 one can detect a sigh from the author of *Sartor Resartus* when he admits that 'in Goethe's Writings... we all know the moral lesson is seldom so easily educed as one would wish. Alas, how seldom is he so direct in tendency as his own plain-spoken moralist at Plundersweilern'. He goes on to quote the two lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Die Tugen} & \text{d is das huchste Gut,} \\
\text{Das Laster Weh dem Menschen thut!}
\end{align*}
\]

(*Foreign Quarterly Review*, x, 29)

This explains his preference for *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, a work of Goethe's old age, and one full of mystifications and half pointed morals. In the *Foreign Review* article of 1828, he refers to the symbolic 'Three Reverences' passage (ii, 108); and in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* four years later, he sees the 'Pagan or Ethnic' *Lehrjahre* as a mere prelude to the 'reverential' *Wanderjahre*. In the former, he writes, there is 'a free recognition of Life in its depth, variety and majesty', but 'as yet no Divinity recognized there'. The last triumphant stage in the process is 'reverence': a 'deep all-pervading Faith, with mild voice, grave as gay, speaks forth to us in a *Meisters Wanderjahre*, in a *West–Östlicher Divan* (x, 36).

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If a ‘moral’ may with partial justice be drawn from the later works of Goethe, it is pure distortion on Carlyle’s part to attribute ‘religion’ in any unqualified sense to the great ‘Pagan’. In a ‘tub thumping’ passage in the Foreign Review article, Carlyle simply uses Goethe in his attack on the Utilitarians. Talking of Dichtung und Wahrheit, he says:

To our minds, in these soft, melodious imaginations of his there is embodied the Wisdom which is proper to this time; the beautiful, the religious Wisdom, which may still . . . speak to the whole soul; 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. (II, 88)

Even when we understand ‘religion’ in Carlyle’s own peculiar sense, as embracing all facets of man’s life, especially the ‘sacredness’ of daily work (Sartor Resartus, Works, i, 181–2), we cannot see any resemblance to the ‘catholic’ mind of Goethe. When Carlyle sees Goethe as one of the ‘prophetic’ and ‘religious’ phenomena of modern Europe, the other being the French Revolution (Past and Present, Works, x, 236), we find ourselves agreeing with Matthew Arnold, who found in Carlyle’s ‘infatuation’ with Goethe no lasting value. ‘On looking back at Carlyle’, he wrote in 1877, ‘one sees how much of engouement there was in his criticism of Goethe, and how little of it will stand. That is the thing — to write what will stand’. There is little of value in the panegyric Carlyle wrote in the New Monthly Magazine after Goethe’s death. The Goethe whose departure he mourns is nobody’s Goethe but his own:

Beautifully rose our summer sun, gorgeous in the red fervid East, scattering the spectres and sickly damps (of both of which there were enough to scatter); — strong, benignant in his noon-day clearness, walking triumphant through the upper realms: and now, mark, also, how he sets! So stirbt ein Held: anbetungsvoll! ‘So dies a hero: sight to be worshipped!’.

Well might Maginn, in his good-humoured ‘portrait’ of Carlyle in the Fraser’s Magazine ‘Gallery of Literary Characters’ in June 1833 write in mock German fashion, ‘Here hast thou, O Reader! the-from stone-printed effigies of Thomas Carlyle, the thunderwordoversetter of Herr Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’ (vii, 706).

Carlyle’s Goethe worship did, in fact, herald a greater interest in the author of Faust. None of the periodicals in the first few years of the 1830s omitted to notice at least some of the volumes of posthumous works, and the many collections of reminiscences, memoirs, and correspondence which appeared after Goethe’s death. Countless Faust translations, in verse and prose, issued from the press, until inevitably protests were made about translating ‘madness’ and the ‘manufactory’ of English Fausts. Already in the poet’s lifetime there had been in Germany an anti-Goethe party, led by the critic Wolfgang Menzel, who complained of Goethe’s egotism, coldness, and lack of patriotism, as well as his immorality. Menzel’s

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1 Carlyle’s own apt description in ‘Schiller’s Life and Writings’, London Magazine, 9 (January 1824), 56.
3 See Beddoes, Letters, p. 219; and J. S. Blackie, himself a Faust translator, in Foreign Quarterly Review, 16 (October 1835), 26.
opinions were soon noticed in England, and J. S. Blackie, an able critic and German scholar, appeals in the Foreign Quarterly Review for a balanced attitude somewhere between Menzel’s and Carlyle’s:

We are not...apprehensive that the fame of Goethe is based upon a foundation that can be shaken even by the strong arm of such a man as Menzel. We only protest against the unlimited idolatry paid to a foreign genius, whom even his most ardent admirers confess to be in many views not altogether intelligible. We fear that the *omne ignotum pro magnifico* applies here, and that there is a great deal of childish mystification and sheer fudge written and spoken about Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. (xvi, 25)

In the 1840s and 1850s a real balance is reached with G. H. Lewes, who insists on the organic necessity in *Faust I* of the ‘Prologue in Heaven’, defends *Wilhelm Meister* against the charges of immorality by showing that Goethe’s intention was to ‘paint scenes of life, *without comment*’, and stresses the Artist Goethe, for whom ethics became subordinate to aesthetics (*Life of Goethe*, ii, 375 and *British and Foreign Review*, xiv, 111–12). It was Lewes, with his *Life of Goethe*, who did for Goethe what Carlyle had done for Schiller with the *Life of Schiller* thirty years before. He not only gave the English the first comprehensive, balanced criticism of Goethe, but he also succeeded, like Carlyle, in attracting the attention and praise of the Germans themselves.¹

It was Lewes, too, who recognized Carlyle’s achievement for Goethe, simultaneously pointing out his shortcomings:

Carlyle’s fervent and eloquent Essays...give no definite image of the man, they are exquisite exhortations to study, rather than information of what the student will find, or how to seek it. They did immense good in their time; they crushed the flippant tone of those Edinburgh reviewers, who thought Goethe ‘wanted taste’, and was ‘not a gentleman’; and they prepared the way for his reception amongst us. (*British and Foreign Review*, xiv, 80)

Carlyle represents neither the beginning nor the end of competent German criticism in England. It may have been his ‘roaring’ which finally established an already growing interest in German studies, but there were other voices to be heard on the subject, some of them not the less critical for being pitched in a lower key.

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¹ See preface to the second edition of *Life of Goethe* (1864), and *The George Eliot Letters*, iii, 274, and v, 218.