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# Rewriting the Faust Myth: Goethe's *Faust* and the Advent of Modern Man

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**Aum, Gidong. "Rewriting the Faust Myth: Goethe's *Faust* and the Advent of Modern Man." *Studies in English Language & Literature* 47.1 (2021): 43-59.** This paper examines how Goethe appropriates, revises, and ultimately rewrites the Faust stories of the sixteenth century. Having emerged at the intersection of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Goethe's *Faust* is a cultural text which illustrates the dynamic history of European culture from the breakdown of the Roman Catholic orthodoxy, the Protestant Reformation, Renaissance, through the Enlightenment and French Revolution. In the process of rewriting the preceding versions of Faust, Goethe uses a number of different sources that include the Bible, Greek myths, and science, presenting his work as the dialogue between past and present, between classical and modern, and between Christianity and the Enlightenment. Focusing on his emphasis upon human striving in light of the epic tradition, this paper will present Goethe's *Faust* as a modern epic that portrays the adventure of the individual human being who strives to seek a meaning of the universe in the age of modernity. (Songwon University)

**Key Words:** Goethe, Faust, Rewriting, the Epic Tradition, Modernity

## I

Goethe's *Faust*[1] is significantly different from the preceding versions of Faust in

[1] Goethe worked on *Faust* for more than sixty years from its conception around 1770, when he was in his twenties, to its completion in 1831, a year before his death. The first appearance of Goethe's work in

many aspects. Above all, although Goethe's protagonist seems to be more audacious and blasphemous than his sixteenth-century predecessors, he does not descend into hell, does not meet with eternal damnation at the end, but with salvation. Intellectual curiosity and the pursuit of a forbidden knowledge, which would often prove Faust's undoing and damnation in the earlier versions, are no longer sin, but become a heroic deed that demonstrates the greatness of human wisdom and reason. The dramatic changes of the ending, of the attitude toward the intellectual quest for a meaning of the universe, were once suggested in a fragmentary version of Faust by G. E. Lessing,[2] one of the most outstanding representatives of the Enlightenment era, but it was Goethe who, for the first time in the history of the Faust tradition, explored these themes fully in yet unseen ways, while amplifying and rewriting the whole myth of Faust. Moreover, as Martin Esslin observes, Goethe's *Faust* exhibits "very postmodern mixing of heterogeneous elements" (19), making an amalgamation of literary forms of lyric, epic, and drama, Greek myth and German legend, faith and reason, religion and science, and the classic and the modern. Goethe suffuses the drama with echoes, metaphors, and themes of the Bible, Homer's epics and Greek myths. Indeed, throughout Part I and II, we can find the traces of those biblical and mythical figures, such as Job of the Old Testament, Odysseus, Achilles, Prometheus, and Oedipus. J. M. Laan observes that Goethe's *Faust* is "the pivotal version of all the Faust texts before and after," and "all the treads of the long tradition come together" in it (13).[3]

Goethe's *Faust*, not only rooted in the sixteenth century but emerging at the intersection of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, is a text which

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print was made in 1790 in the title of *Faust, a Fragment*, and in subsequent decades Goethe completed the early version into Part I, which was published in 1808. Most of the second part had been written from 1825 to 1831, and it was published posthumously in 1832. For more information concerning the writing and publication of Goethe's *Faust*, see Stuart Atkins's article "Survey of the Faust Theme."

[2] In the 1750s G. E. Lessing began writing his own version of Faust. Though Lessing's work was never completed, it is the first work that deals with the final salvation of Faust.

[3] Marshall Berman also notes that "Goethe's *Faust* surpassed all others in richness and dept of its historical perspective, in its moral imagination, its political intelligence, its psychological sensitivity and insight" (39).

illustrates the dynamic history of European culture from the breakdown of the Roman Catholic orthodoxy, the Protestant Reformation, Renaissance, through the Enlightenment and French Revolution. As Paul Bishop points out, "Faust is a lucid representation of cultural material from every area of Western thought and life, holding it up for our contemplation" (xxviii). Through the ages, the Faust figure had been deeply engaged with the battle between the old and the new, between the prohibited and the permitted, and between the divine and the secular. The very first Faust was appeared in the chapbook entitled the *Historia von D. Johann Fausten* (1587) by Johann Spies. According to Martin Swales, Spies's Faust, an overweening intellectual and necromancer, sells his soul to the devil for all manners of erotic, social, and cosmological adventures, but at the end of the allotted time he dies gruesomely, and his soul is forfeit (28). There is no possibility of repentance, no grace of God for Spies's Faust, but he bears the full burden of responsibility for sin and punishment. The Faust stories of the sixteenth century, on the whole, served as "religious and theological cautionary tale" (Laan 11). This representation of Faust as a religious apostate and a damned mortal was an attempt to restrict the senses of human wisdom, human experience, and human existence which had begun to flourish during the period of Renaissance.

However, the eighteenth-century Europe saw a great challenge to an absolute monarchy and the divine order of the universe through French Revolution, an embodiment of the Enlightenment spirit. Goethe's *Faust* is the product of that age, an age of transition in which the order of the universe was again decentered and restructured. According to Ludwig Kahn, the notion of a divine order and concomitant value system became critically suspect during that time, and Goethe's Faust represents the modern human being who exists in and represents this crisis of faith (128). Indeed, Goethe's rewriting of the ending from Faust's damnation to his redemption represents the great change of a paradigm which had long governed the social, cultural, and intellectual history of the West, from the age of God to the age of Man. Goethe's protagonist, more intelligent, extraordinary, audacious, revolutionary, and even

optimistic, becomes an archetype of the new era, an epitome of the modern man. Goethe, as Harry Redner notes, made Faust become "the fundamental myth of modernity" (42).

## II

Goethe's challenge to the absolute and divine order of the universe is yet manifested in "Dedication" and "Prelude in the Theater." These two pieces play a significant role in embodying Goethe's enlightened conceptions of Man, God, and the universe. Unusually written for the author himself, the "Dedication" reveals Goethe's longing to create his own poetic world, while the "Prelude" serves to add to that poetic world a fictional nature in a very modern way. Regarding the drama as a product of "illusion yet delights" (180),[4] Goethe attempts to keep a distance from the external world, but at the same time, he implicitly asserts the ownership of the fictional world he has created, a world where he is a dictating god with the power of creation. In other words, the universe represented in *Faust* is no longer the one created and governed by God, but a universe in which human beings, or Goethe himself, rule "creation's fullest circle from Heaven through the World to Hell" (240). The desire for creation is one of the most crucial themes dealt with in *Faust*, and Goethe develops this theme further in Part II, as it is manifested in the creation of Homunculus, the birth of Euphorion, and Faust's great design of a utopian society.

In this respect, the "Prologue in Heaven," though it deals with the wager between the Lord and Mephistopheles, should not be interpreted in Christian contexts. Rather, it might be more appropriate to read it in the context of what Goethe makes of traditional Christianity, and particularly in terms of how he challenges, mocks, and parodies it. It is important to note that the meeting and the ensuing deal between

[4] All citations from Goethe's *Faust* are hereafter marked by line numbers in parentheses.

Mephisto and the Lord, which precedes Faust's pact with Mephisto, is a product of Goethe's imagination. It is actually new to the entire legend of Faust, and Goethe uses this new scene as a backdrop against which he attempts to reverse such Christian notions as original sin, sin, and damnation and salvation. Throughout the "Prologue," Goethe treats the Lord as if he were a human being rather than the Divinity. It is the Lord who, with his optimistic outlook about the human condition, defends Man when Mephisto is accusing human beings for their fundamental futility and wretchedness. The Lord says: "And do you have no other news? / Do you always only to accuse? / Does nothing please you ever on the earth?" (293-295). Here, ironically, we see the Lord's faith in Man instead of human faith in God. It is worth noting that although Mephisto says to the Lord that he is confident of winning the deal concerning the seduction of Faust, it is yet determined that he is to lose the bet. The Lord responds: "And stand ashamed when you must own perforce: / A worthy soul through the dark urge within it / Is well aware of the appointed course" (327-329).

Goethe borrows a biblical story of Job in framing the "Prologue," providing an impressive parallel or comparison between Faust's pact with Mephisto and Satan's testing of Job.[5] In fact, Goethe's "Prologue" is very much similar to the Book of Job with its themes of a wager between the devil and the Lord, of the testing of human beings, of the nature of good and evil, and of the existential question of human suffering and limitedness. Despite these apparent similarities, however, Goethe's Faust acts as a parody of Job, or "Job's opposite and Anti-Job" (Laan 35). Whereas Job is a blameless and upright man who loses everything, Faust is an audacious and wicked man who gets everything he wants in conspiracy with the devil; also, whereas Job resists temptation, accepts his human limitations, and submits to the way of the Divinity, Faust makes a pact with Mephisto and resists such conditions to the bitter end. Moreover, unlike Job, Faust curses everything related to Christianity, especially

[5] Goethe seems satisfied with this association of Faust with Job, as suggested in a conversation with his close associate Johann Peter Eckermann: "If, too, the prologue to my 'Faust' is something like the beginning of Job, that is again quite right, and I am rather to be praised than censured" (Moorhead 83).

the three cardinal Christian virtues: “A curse on faith! A curse on hope! / A curse on patience, above all!” (43). Nonetheless, Faust is redeemed at the end, and it is ironically Mephisto who is damned and complains his lot, as suggested in the exchange between the Lord and Mephisto: “What ails me!-Job-like, boil on boil my skin. / All sores I stand and shake with self-disgust” (11809-11810).

Faust’s redemption is intimately associated with Goethe’s conception of sin. For Goethe, the notion of sin has nothing to do with Christian theology. Rather, the doubt, negligence, and ignorance of human reason and progress are regarded as the cardinal sin, and the individual who has no desire to know, to act, to overcome, to create, and to conquer becomes a sinner.[6] From the beginning, Goethe’s Faust is treated as an embodiment of the “energy,” “drive,” and “activity,”; a representative of the godless intellectual, of the impatient, indefatigable, and audacious seeker with an insatiable thirst for knowledge and experience. Faust says:

> I feel emboldened now to venture forth,
> To bear the bliss, the sorrow of this earth,
> Do battle with its tempests breaking
> Brave crunching shipwreck without quaking. (464-467)

Faust’s longing for action is well demonstrated in the scene in which he translates the first verse of the Gospel of John: “In the beginning was the Word” (1224). His translation begins with a rejection of “the Word.” Then Faust struggles to find an adequate equivalence of it among “the Sense,” “the Force,” and “the Deed,” and finally, he writes: “In the beginning was the Deed!” (1237).

According to Genesis, God creates the universe with his Word. Perhaps, Faust understood the connection between the Logos and the divine act of creation. Since

[6] Swales notes that “Goethe transforms the value-scheme of the story from the traditional, theologically and morally grounded opposition between good and evil, right and wrong, obedience and disobedience to a primarily secular, existentially defined scheme that pits energy against sloth, drive against apathy, activity against inactivity” (30).

creation had been regarded as the divine act which only belonged to God in Christian contexts, Faust's longing for the "deed," to some degree, reflects his secret yearning to be a god himself, a yearning which Goethe revealed earlier in the "Prelude" in terms of creating his own poetic world. For Faust, the "deed" is the passage to divinity, and he gives voice to this desire in his monologue in the "Night," where he audaciously identifies himself with god in his famous lines.

> Was it a god that fashioned this design
> Which calms the tumult in my breast,
> Floods my poor heart with happiness,
> And with a secret thrust divine
> Makes Nature's powers about me manifest?
> Am I a god? I feel such light in me! (434-441)

Faust's boldness makes him confidently tell the Earth Spirit that he is the match or the same as it, only to hear the ashamed response of the Earth Spirit: "Not me!" (513). However, this disappointing encounter with the Earth Sprit does not quench Faust's longing to be a god. Now, he wants to prove it by the "deed," still considering himself to be a god-like figure: "I, godhead's likeness, who had soared in mind / Close to the mirror of eternal verity" (614-615).[7]

The theme of creation pervades Goethe's Faust as I mentioned earlier. For instance, though he stayed with Gretchen and Helen for a short time, Faust has his offspring from both of them. And Wagner, who was once Faust's famulus in Part I, appears as the alchemy practitioner in Part II. He devotes his energies to the creation of Homunculus, the little chemical man in the test tube. Importantly, it is Homunculus who takes Faust to the exotic mysterious underworld in the "Classical Walpurgis Night." Wagner's satisfaction with his creature is more than ineffable: "What more do we desire, what more the world? / For now the secret is in reach" (6875-6876). Also,

[7] Erick Kahler notes that Faust wishes to his life "to be more than just earthly life" and "wants to embrace the beyond, the transcendental, the divine even in the Here and Now" (87).

Faust exhausts the last moments of his life in creating his own world. He pushes back the sea, clears the land, and finally constructs the new urban world, which is the product of his brave fighting against the wind and wave. As Laan says, Faust "longs to see himself as the Logos, the Doer, as the one who will create the world and at the same time come into possession of divine wisdom" (53).

All of Faust's endeavors have been made to know the "divine wisdom," but the transcendent knowledge he desperately seeks always eludes his reach. It seems that for Faust the knowledge is its own curse, even a great source of his suffering. The more Faust knows, the more he gets puzzled and frustrated, and the more his suffering enlarges. As the opening monologue of Faust makes clear, he is a man of knowledge. With fervent zeal, he studied everything about law, medicine, philosophy, and theology to transcend the human condition, and to penetrate the infinitude, the absolute and divine. But Faust finds himself desperate and hopeless, confessing that "And here, poor fool, I stand once more / No wiser than I was before" (358-359). His frustration peaks when he says, "Not like the gods am I-profoundly it is rued! / I'm of the earthworm's dust-engendered brood" (652-653). Given this situation, Faust's shift in interests from passive learning to activity seems to be appropriate, as it is manifested in the scene of Faust's translation of the Logos into the Deed. As Faust says, "Now is the moment to affirm by deed" (713).

Here, it is worth noting that Faust's preoccupation with the deed seems to be endorsed and justified by the Lord from the outset. Although Goethe's Lord puts Faust into Mephisto's hands, it is ultimately not to test his faith, but to awaken him, so that he must not rest but go on and on. The Lord says:

> Man all too easily grows laz and mellow,
> He soon elects repose at any price;
> And so I like to pair him with a fellow
> To play the deuce, to stir, and to entice. (340-343)

Significantly, Faust says something very similar to the statement of the Lord when he

talks with Mephisto about the conditions of the pact: "Should ever I take ease upon a bed of leisure, / May that same moment mark my end" (1692-1693). To clarify this point, we need to draw our attention to the moment Faust attempts to kill himself near the end of the "Night." Frustrated by the limits of human knowledge and experience, Faust decides to kill himself, which means his abandonment of the striving. Grasping a vial of poison, Faust says: "I see you, the agony decreases, / I grasp you, and the striving half-releases" (696-697). At this critical moment, however, the divine power intervenes in the form of the chorus of angels, stopping Faust from taking it. After this divine experience, Faust recuperates and makes a pact with Mephisto. And with him, Faust's out-of-time, out-of-space adventure for a meaning of the universe begins in a full scale in Part II. It seems that Goethe's Lord is the powerful supporter of Faust, and also the driving force behind his incessant striving. More importantly, the Lord justifies all of the wrongdoings Faust did in his somewhat ambivalent declaration: "Man ever errs the while he strives" (317). And it is confirmed in the last scene of the drama by the chorus of angels:

> Pure spirits' peer, from evil coil
> He was vouchsafed exemption;
> "Whoever strives in ceaseless toil,
> Him we may grant redemption." (11934-11937)

Faust is destined to strive all his life. If he ever stays for rest one moment, he would lose his wager with Mephisto. This condition of the wager makes Faust extremely impatient. In fact, impatience is an important character that defines Faust, as well. For example, when Faust seduces Gretchen, he asks Mepthisto for help because he seems to have no time. He says: "If I were granted seven hours, / I should not need the devil's powers / To lure a fledgling to my bed" (2642-2644). Similarly in the "Hall of Chivalry" of Part II, when the astrologer conjures Helen of Troy, Faust cannot wait to posses her, so that he attempts to seize her apparition, only to see it disappeared in his hands. And Faust confesses that the destruction of the little church

that the old couple Baucis and Philemon attend is caused by his impatience: "my inmost temper / Is soured by the impatient act" (11339-11340). Lastly, near the end of the drama, when Faust has the exchange with the gray crone named Care in looking back on things he has done, he says: "I only sped the while world through" (11433). Mephisto also exhibits the trait of impatience by dragging Faust onward when he tries to stay longer with Gretchen and Helen. Homunculus and Euphorion also share Faust's impatience in their own ways. Homunculus wishes to smash his glass vial and come fully into being while Euphorion, like his father, is so reckless and impatient that he flies to the limit of his capability, only to crash at Faust's feet. Indeed, the tendencies of impatience, recklessness, and the longing for action pervade Goethe's *Faust*, which may suggest the energies of modernity Goethe's drama has in itself.

The motif of the supreme moment is central to Faust's striving. In fact, it is the very essence of Faust's pact with Mephisto. Faust tells Mephisto:

> If the swift moment I entreat:
> Tarry a while! You are so fair!
> Then forge the shackles to my feet,
> Then I will gladly perish there. (1699-1702)

Faust first experiences that moment in his relationship with Gretchen. When Faust stays in Gretchen's bed, he experiences the feeling of peace and satisfaction. He expresses a stronger desire to linger with her when she takes his hands: "An ecstasy that must endure forever! / Forever!—For its end would be despair, / No, without end! No end!" (3192-3194). Before long, however, the feeling of the eternal satisfaction Faust experienced with Gretchen turns out to be ephemeral and tragic. In the very last scene of Part I, Mephisto pulls Faust away from the dungeon in which Gretchen is confined, and Faust finally leaves her behind, which results in her death.

Richie Robertson views the tragedy of Gretchen and Faust in light of the battle between the old and the new, between the traditional and the modern. According to Robertson, Gretchen is the symbol of Christianity, and Faust modernity. Gretchen's

representation of Christianity is suggested in her tenacious questions of Faust's religion. She asks him twice: "What is your way about religion?" (3415); "Do you believe in God?" (3426). Robertson notes that "Gretchen presumably accepts the Church's teaching on the sacrament and believes that in swallowing the Host she is making contact with Christ's body beneath the accidental guise of bread" (23). It is important to note that although Gretchen is redeemed with the voice from above at the end of Part I, it is not the Divinity of Christianity but Goethe's Lord who saves her at the moment when she is condemned by the church and by her Christian society. Gretchen's redemption can be understood in the same context of Faust's redemption because she seems to strive with the existential question of her own being through her love with Faust. As long as she strives, her wrongdoings, such as the murder of her mother and baby, are justified by the proclamation of the Lord: "Man ever errs the while he strives" (317).

Faust experiences a similar moment with Helen in Part II. There again, Faust feels satisfaction and expresses a desire to stay with her forever. During his adventure with Mephisto in Part II, Faust's longing for Helen has grown so strong that he nearly loses his senses when he first sees her in the magic show. He exclaims: "To thee I vow the stirring of all force, / All passion's sum and source, / Desire, love, worship, adoration, frenzy!" (6498-6500). Faust, a man of impatience, recklessness, and activity, dares to touch Helen's phantom, but the phantom is too unstable to sustain the corporeal appearance and gets dissolved in his hands. Later in Act 3 of Part II, famously called the Helena act, Faust's desire revives when he meets her again in the medieval castle. More enthusiastic than ever before, Faust is so tempted by the moment with Helen that he almost loses his bet with Mephisto. After the birth of Euphorion, Faust once more expresses his desire to stay with her:

> All is then enacted rightly;
> I am yours and you are mine;
> See us interwoven tightly
> As we must by love divine. (9703-9706)

But as in the case of Gretchen, the moment passes. Once again, Helen vanishes away with the last hug with Faust.

Although the unison between Faust and Helen does not meet the supreme moment, it provides us with a significant juxtaposition of Greek myth and German legend, of classical antiquity and modernity. Bishop points out that this juxtaposition reflects the problem of grafting the classical (the epic) on the modern (the drama) which "preoccupied many German eighteenth and nineteenth-century thinkers and writers" (xxvii). During the period, epic was still a dominant genre in German literature. Arnd Bohm says that "At one time the prestige of the epic led many poets and critics to believe that nothing but an epic could conclude a career" (81). Bohm also maintains that to write a great epic was not to recreate the great epics of the past, but to adapt those epics to contemporary expectations and circumstances (85). In Goethe's *Faust*, Helen embodies the ideal of classical beauty, just as Faust represents the Germanic or Romantic spirit of infinite striving. Since she is an essential part of the epics of Homer and Virgil, Helen provides a perfect material for Goethe's project to mix the classic and the modern in his work. Significantly, Goethe's Faust tries to teach Helen German verses, and the offspring of their union, Euphorion, is often described in the way that evokes the Byronic spirit of modern poetry. It seems that if Faust's consistent challenge to the authority of the Divinity reflects the change of a paradigm from the Age of God to the Age of the Enlightenment in social and cultural contexts, Faust's longing for Helen, in a literary sense, may reflect Goethe's longing to create a new literature out of the mixing of the classic and the modern.

Crucially, it is not in the love with Gretchen and Helen, but in his modern project of constructing a better world that Faust finally finds his supreme moment. After completing what he considers "A land of Eden" (11569), Faust proclaims the following lines:

> I might entreat the fleeting minute:
> Oh tarry yet, thou art so fair!

My path on earth, the trace I leave within it
Eons untold cannot impair.
Foretasting such high happiness to come,
I savor now my striving's crown and sum. (11591-11596)

While providing an impressive parallel to the poetic world suggested in the "Prelude" of Part I, this new Eden-like world culminates the themes of creation and deed that Goethe has consistently dealt with in *Faust*. Here, Faust's consistent desire to be a dictating god expresses itself in the assertion of his ownership and authority: "To bring to fruit the most exalted plans, / One mind is ample for a thousand hands" (11509-11510). And given the significance of the representative roles that both Gretchen (Christianity) and Helen (Classic beauty) play in Goethe's work, the fact that the ultimate goal of Faust's striving is the establishment of the modern world may show Goethe's firm belief in human reason and progress. Indeed, Faust is redeemed with this great deed, which also suggests that the Lord endorses this new world established upon Faust's firm belief in the potential of human power, not in any orthodox faith. As many critics point out, Faust's new world is modern of itself because it is the product of the grand application of human reason to nature and society; because it is not possible without technological rationalization, planning, and organization on a grand scale (Laan 98). Indeed, as Swales notes, Faust is "a figure representative of the cultural temper of modernity" (42).

While Goethe emphasizes human progress in characterizing Faust as a representative of the modern, he also addresses the transgressive energies of the modern with the motif of victimization. At a glimpse, Faust's urban world looks like a phenomenon of "wonder" (11111), but it has the dark, horrible, and devilish character in its core. Mephisto and his three might men commit the pirate raid upon the open sea by night upon which the urban world is primarily built. That aged couple Baucis and Philemon sense that there is something wrong and terrible about it that they cannot fathom yet:

Human victims bled and fevered,

Anguish on the night-air borne,
Fiery torrents pouring seaward
Scored a channel by the morn. (11127-11130)

Before long, Baucis's anxiety is turned into reality. Upset with the presence of the old couple on "the world in boundless arc" (11345) where he has great plans, Faust orders Memphisto to evict them: "Go, then, and clear them from my sight!—" (11275). Their home is burned down, and the old couple is killed in it. What seems to be the point here is that Faust, only to claim his ownership and authority, repudiates other people's land ownership and even kills their lives, which Goethe seems to suggest as one of the central paradoxes of modern culture. If Faust's great project of modernization necessarily accompanies the sacrifices of other inferior people, the successful completion of Faust's deed is just as questionable as the victory he achieved through the use of Mephisto's magic in the war between the Emperor and his rival. With this tragic event, Goethe may want to show that human reason could be transformed into a dangerous and counteractive force that may destroy human beings themselves when it is reduced to a mere instrument.

## III

In *Faust* Goethe emphasizes human striving over all other aspects of life. Goethe's Lord never judges Faust by a measure of morals. His primary concern is with whether or not Faust dare to live his life to achieve a goal. It is worth noting that it is not his deed of creating his own world at the end but all of his striving that makes possible Faust's redemption. Here again, readers need to be reminded that Faust is redeemed with voices of angels from above: "Whoever strives in ceaseless toil, / Him we may grant redemption" (11936-11937). It is also important to note that the divine statement of Goethe's Lord, "Man ever errs the while he strives" (317), has a

paradoxical nature in itself. Faust's striving could have never succeeded because the notion of striving necessarily has the meaning of error in itself. He can only fail in his striving. Faust considers the establishment of his modern world the supreme moment at the end of his life. Yet he probably knows that it is not a perfect deed after all, but another error per se, so long as "Man ever errs the while he strives." Such problematic nature of Faust's urban project as revealed in the destruction of innocent people may prove the fact. Throughout the drama, Goethe's Faust wants to be a god himself. But he is still a human being who suffers from the limits of human intelligence and experience—a modern man who desperately strives to seek a meaning of life in an age of transition and uncertainty, swinging back and forth between creature and creator, between the human condition and the transcendent.

The reflection of its own time, as well as the theme of human striving, links Goethe's *Faust* to the tradition of the epic. If a great epic poem is a "bridge thrown over the stream of time" (Reiman 336), Goethe's work is one of them because it deals with a cultural crisis of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which reflects the ebb of Christian faith and the flow of the Enlightenment. Moreover, the years in which Goethe had worked on *Faust* bridge that era. In his appreciation of Lord Byron's *Don Juan* as a modern epic, Donald H. Reiman asserted that *Don Juan* is an epic because it "bore a defined and intelligible relation to the knowledge and sentiment and religion and political conditions of the age in which he lived, and of the ages which followed it: developing itself in correspondence with their development" (336). Then, Reiman's measurement can be applicable to Goethe's *Faust*. Not only rewriting the Faust stories of the sixteenth century, but using a number of different sources from the Bible and Greek myths, Goethe makes his *Faust* the dialogue between past and present, between classical and modern, and between Christianity and the Enlightenment.

Goethe's *Faust* also has the elements of the Homeric epics. Like Homer's Odysseus, who has a grand design of going back to his home in Ithaca, Goethe's hero has an equally extensive design which is to establish his modern world. Moreover, it deals with the theme of human striving which characterizes Homer's epics the best.

Indeed, Goethe's *Faust* is a story of Man rather than otherwise, giving voice to something we always recognize as intrinsic to our human nature and existence, such as good and bad, faith and betrayal, freedom and restriction, activity and passivism, satisfaction and frustration, the transcendent and the corporeal, damnation and redemption, and God and Man. It is more than the German legend. As Harry Levin points out, Goethe's *Faust* "is probably the most elaborate literary crystallization of any myth we have had—or, more exactly, any legend" (114). It is not only a cultural text which illustrates European cultural history on the whole, but it is a modern epic which profoundly portrays the adventure of a modern man who strives to seek a meaning for the universe in the Age of the modern.

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