

## Book Review

Lorraine Byrne Bodley, ed, *Music in Goethe's Faust – Goethe's Faust in Music* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2017). xix + 336 pp. £60.00

In January 1825 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was introduced to a young Englishman, one 'Mr H.', who revealed in the course of their conversation that he had begun reading *Faust*, but that he was finding it rather difficult. Goethe is said to have replied jovially:

Really, [ ... ] I would not have advised you to undertake *Faust*. It is mad stuff, and goes quite beyond all ordinary feeling. But since you have done it of your own accord, without asking my advice, you will see how you will get through. Faust is so strange an individual, that only few can sympathize with his internal condition. Then the character of Mephistopheles is, on account of his irony, [ ... ], also very difficult. But you will see what lights open upon you.<sup>1</sup>

We might well sympathize with Mr H., a student of German, confronted with a work of such philosophical complexity and poetic virtuosity, a work of which one critic noted in 1986: 'No masterpiece of the European tradition has received more lip service and less real understanding than *Faust*'.<sup>2</sup>

The tension between meaning and understanding, the dissonances in the work and in its reception, have also been reflected in its musical afterlives. Composers have been fascinated by Goethe's drama since the beginning, and they have re-imagined and appropriated it in new and extremely varied ways. The significance of Goethe's poetic works to the development of the lied in the nineteenth century has been well documented; yet there is a need to acknowledge and explore the role of *Faust* in a broader range of musical styles and periods, as Lorraine Byrne Bodley stresses in her introduction to this new collection of essays, *Music in Goethe's Faust – Goethe's Faust in Music* (p. 10). While this study is by no means the first to explore music and Goethe's treatment of the Faust story, its originality lies in its strongly interdisciplinary approach and in its scope. The title encapsulates well the balance between musicology and literary analysis which it successfully strikes. It explores *Faust's* afterlives in music from the nineteenth century to the present, taking account of composition, performance, and reception, and also considers the role of music – literally and metaphorically – within the text itself. The volume developed out of an interdisciplinary conference held in 2012, from which there was a special issue of the *Publications of the English Goethe Society* in 2014, also edited by Byrne Bodley (with Florian Krobb).<sup>3</sup>

The essays are divided into four sections. Part I focuses on Goethe's *Faust*: the text, its genesis, and the way that music plays an integral part in its composition and its afterlife in German culture. Bodley's chapter on the reception of Goethe in musicology makes for a comprehensive introduction to what follows, as does her

---

<sup>1</sup> *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*, trans. by John Oxenford (London: Bohn's Standard Library, 1892), 103–4.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Brown, *Goethe's Faust: The German Tragedy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Lorraine Byrne Bodley and Florian Krobb, eds, *Goethe's 'Faust': Musical Responses*, special issue of *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 83 (2014).

detailed close reading of Schubert's *Gretchen am Spinnrade*, a work about which much ink has been spilt but about which there is always more to say. Bodley argues that, contrary to the commonly held belief that Schubert misinterpreted Goethe's poetry, *Gretchen am Spinnrade* demonstrates the composer's 'immediate understanding of the poet' and 'the dramatic and social context in which the scene was written' (p. 44). Nicholas Boyle offers a detailed examination of Goethe's treatment of the sources of the Faust story, pointing out how he both preserved and subverted elements of the legend. This is, Boyle, suggests, 'a tragedy, perhaps the tragedy, of modernity' (p. 60), an important idea which is picked up again later in the collection. Martin Swales asks how Goethe's *Faust* can be considered a musical work, a question which is touched on frequently across the volume. As many of the contributors point out, Faust is not a musical character – he observes rather than makes music – but *Faust* is undeniably a musical text. J.M. Tudor draws on metaphor theory to examine the 'substantial network of musical allusion' within the text (p. 73). He makes a compelling case for the need to consider Goethe's 'metaphorical concepts of music' (p. 84) so as to fully appreciate the language and meaning. Osman Durrani then traces the instrumentalization of Faust from the earliest citation in 1507, via Martin Luther and Shakespeare to Goethe, and then to Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (1947). He concludes with a brief but fascinating discussion of Faust in a 1975 Marvel comic ('Captain America and the Falcon'), which seemed to point uncannily forward to the events of 9/11 (pp. 96–7).

In Part II, essays explore nineteenth-century adaptations of *Faust*. Of the 72 settings of Goethe's work by Schubert, John Michael Cooper examines four from *Faust* written between October 1814 and May 1817, including Schubert's use of the chorus 'Christ ist erstanden', based on the Catholic liturgical sequence 'Victimae paschali laudes'. Schumann's *Szenen aus Goethes Faust* are treated by Julian Horton and Christopher Ruth, who both provide excellent close-readings of the work. Horton's extremely detailed analysis of four passages shows the dualisms at work in Schumann's piece: 'the sacred and the secular, the public and the private, the symphonic and the theatrical' (p. 121). Ruth examines the ambiguous motif used in the Lemures' chorus, arguing for it to be interpreted as a 'signifier of the unconscious' (p. 148), drawing on the writings of Carl Gustav Carus. There is some very detailed intertextual work here and persuasive analysis, even if as the author acknowledges, it is impossible to determine whether Carus's ideas influenced Schumann directly. Glenn Stanley provides a very interesting overview of Wagner's *Faust Overture*, its genesis, publication, and performance history, and the influence of Goethe on the composer. Mark Austin then considers the programme that Wagner wrote for audiences attending a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Aston shows how Wagner made use of his understanding of Goethe's *Faust*, to approach and explain Beethoven's work. This section ends with an enlightening essay by Eftychia Papanikolaou on Mahler's Eighth Symphony, the second part of which 'comprises an exalted melopoiesis' (p. 183) of the final scene of Part II of *Faust*. Papanikolaou explores the religious aspects of the piece, which Mahler reportedly referred to as the closest he had come to composing a Mass setting.

Part III explores 'stagings and critical reception', and there is some very engaging discussion here of 'adaptation', its definitions and possibilities. Siobhán Donovan considers adaptation in the context of translation theory, and how Goethe's *Faust* made its way into French. Her focus on Gounod's *Faust et Marguérite* (1850) includes a discussion of Ken Russell's much-anticipated

production of the work in Vienna in 1985. We remain in the French context for Heather Hadlock's chapter on Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* (1846) and Raoul Gunsbourg's staging in 1903. This sheds important light on the way musical works are adapted, staged, and re-imagined. Mark Fitzgerald explores Italian composer Ferruccio Busoni's preoccupation with Goethe's *Faust*, and his opera *Doktor Faust* on which he worked between 1916 and his death in 1924. With a strong link back to Boyle's article, Fitzgerald charts the influence of Nietzsche on Busoni's composition, and concludes that the piece, although unfinished and less often performed than it deserves, is 'an intriguing transferral of Goethe's enlightenment Faust into the age of Nietzsche' (p. 241).

Part IV consists of four chapters on recent versions of *Faust*, and broadens the discussion to include non-classical genres. Ursula Kramer writes persuasively about the composition and reception of incidental music written for Max Reinhardt's 1937 production at the Salzburg Festival. This is a useful addition, because it extends the focus beyond musical adaptations of Goethe's text to the function of music in performance. Kramer considers how the role of the director of a performance of the play might affect the interplay of text and music. We then move to the German Democratic Republic to consider how *Faust* was utilized in this politically and culturally restricted context. David Robb explores the way Goethe's text, claimed by the GDR since its inception as a cornerstone of the state's cultural heritage, could be used to critique the ruling power in performance. The final chapter takes us right up to the present, in its discussion of Rudolf Volz's rock opera *Faust: Die Rockoper* (1997) which continues to be performed in 2018. This kind of 'event' theatre is popular in Germany, and Waltraud Maierhofer takes account of the marketing, the production itself, and its reception. Ultimately, she is cynical about the value of the project as a means of encouraging 'critical analysis and reflexion' (p. 303) as well as its pedagogical potential. Nevertheless, the rock opera is a pertinent example of the way the story continues to be adapted and retold, and as Durrani signals at the end of his chapter, it underlines how 'the rapidly changing political climate of the present will provide many opportunities for further reworkings of a theme that has gripped the cultural imagination of the world for more than five centuries' (p. 97). And, in considering the interplay of text and music, it raises the question as to how engagement with one form might encourage interest in the other.

Several important insights emerge from the collection. Just as Goethe's *Faust* is not easily classified in terms of genre, especially in its integration of music, so the musical adaptations of Goethe's text defy clear-cut definitions. For example, Berlioz's *La Damnation de Faust* was dubbed an 'unstageable' opera (p. 214), and Schumann's *Szenen aus Goethes Faust* 'have no proper generically defined locus' (p. 136). There is a hybridity about the work and its adaptations which endures and which is addressed fruitfully in different ways here. It is also striking just how profound the influence of Goethe's *Faust* was on composers, particularly in adolescence (both Wagner and Berlioz encountered *Faust* at a young age and were captivated by it). This kind of focus broadens the field of influence from the merely intellectual to the impact of literature and culture on the individual, in the past and the present.

One of the book's particular strengths is its attention to the critical field and it provides an extremely thorough picture of the critical reception of Goethe's *Faust* and its musical afterlives in historical and contemporary contexts. The essays draw on an impressive range of theoretical concepts and employ varied methodological approaches. Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (1947), a 'Musikroman'

[music novel], provides a particularly useful reference point, and prevents the analyses simply looking backwards to Goethe (as well as further supporting the book's interdisciplinary qualities). Indeed, there is a pleasing and productive interconnectedness throughout the book as links are drawn not just forward from and back to Goethe, but across genres, periods, and disciplines. The essays all hold up as stand-alone pieces, but it is in combination that they really sing. There are multiple connections and cross references, and it is refreshing to read an edited collection in which so much care has been taken to achieve this.

Byrne Bodley's volume is thus an extremely welcome study of the relationship between music and Goethe's *Faust*: music as a part of dramatic performance, the musicality of the original text and its metaphorical fields, and later musical interpretations and adaptations of the work. Heinrich Heine called Goethe's *Faust* 'the Germans' secular bible' (die weltliche Bibel der Deutschen),<sup>4</sup> summing up the cultural significance of Goethe's treatment of the Faust story, to be spoken of in the same breath as Luther's translations of scripture. The German-American author Paul Carus made a similar comment, claiming that it had exerted 'an influence little less than that of the Bible'.<sup>5</sup> The influence of Goethe's text, the profound effect it had on writers and composers, and its enduring fascination centuries later, is well reflected in this study. It has an impressive range of contributors, including early career scholars and established academics, and the interdisciplinary approach gives room to musicologists, Germanists, and musicians. As Byrne Bodley acknowledges, there are of course further avenues which might have been explored – the topic is vast – and this book certainly will benefit from being read in conjunction with the *Oxford Handbook of Faust in Music*.<sup>6</sup>

Alexandra Lloyd  
University of Oxford  
alexandra.lloyd@seh.ox.ac.uk

doi:10.1017/S1479409818000502

First published online 15 February 2019

---

<sup>4</sup> Heinrich Heine, *Die romantische Schule* (Hamburg: Bey Hoffmann und Campe, 1836), p. 99.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Carus, *The Surd of Metaphysics* (Chicago: Open Court; London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1903), p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Lorna Fitzsimmons and Charles McKnight, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Faust in Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).