

The Aegean Festival

Notes on the Scene
“Inlets of the Aegean Sea”
in Goethe’s *Faust II*

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Foreword to the First Edition

The path to an understanding of the sea gods scene in Part II of Goethe's *Faust* has never been easy. Whether anyone has really attained this understanding remains very much in question. The contemporary reader has to struggle with especially great difficulties. Either the ancient mythology has become wholly unfamiliar to him or he is made uneasy by doubts that have arisen in subsequent history. Does he not have to deal with a rococo play, where the Greek names, or even the Roman, no longer express a relation with a true antiquity, and which in the best case is only an un-historically understood late and mixed antiquity? It is in this sense that Walter F. Otto—the classical scholar who has made the greatest effort to understand the divine in Greek mythology as well as in the German classics—has written *The Greek Myth of the Gods in the Works of Goethe and Hölderlin*. His words, which are among the finest ever written about this scene, have a place here:

In the second part of *Faust*, in the Classical Walpurgis Night, we find earth, water, and air, populated with Greek figures. Sea and heavens express again the wise language of the myth, and the blessed splendor of all things shines in announcing the proximity of Helena. But the eternal beauty manifests itself here not as Aphrodite but as Galatea. In this scene there are no gods, but merely nature figures. The author is thinking here in the style of the late Greeks, indeed even in an Ovidian-Roman style; he is able in this way to elicit from the daemonic figures their deepest secrets. From the nature spirits, however, as the Greeks themselves called them, there is, it is true, no path to the gods. These spirits belong to a special category of being. The truly divine—not in its aspects as the power to create, lordship, judgment, or salvation, but as a category of being worthy of veneration—is, however, a manifestation granted to the Greek spirit. And this idea, the understanding of which is of the greatest importance, touches the realm of Goethe's spirit only at its outermost periphery.

Yet the scholar of myth must recognize, as Otto certainly does, that it is just the sea gods scene in *Faust* that has an extraordinary power to attract him. The scene compels the scholar to concern himself with it. He finds it compelling from the moment that for him, as modern man, mythology in general begins to become a living entity. It is not merely its subject matter, the more or less mysterious divinities of a wondrous festive procession, that effects such an

attraction; rather, it is the atmosphere in which everything seems to be immersed. This atmosphere is a medium that is the very thing the scholar of myth is especially trying to get at—a vitalizing element like water itself, and yet not a literal wetness or the oceanic mood. *The element itself is seemingly pervaded with spirit, the mood of the sea as a mood of soul-origin.* It is “material” for research, yet in reality it is a *state* that takes hold of a reader or onlooker. Mythology, in this context, reveals itself to be something wholly natural, both in the sense of “nature” and in the sense of being self-evident and intelligible to the spirit—a state that we cannot easily recover from our modern religion and poetry.

Both, religion and poetry, must be taken into account when we are dealing with such a state in ancient mythology, such as in the case of the works of Goethe. Religion, in its turn, has been expunged from the life of modern man. Where are we to find the Greek (or other) mythology of a related type as a vitalizing component of a religion? At best, ethnologists and other fortunate witnesses of primitive festive ceremonies or of the mythological religions of great peoples even today encounter here and there a similar state. Meanwhile, it still falls to the poet, such as D. H. Lawrence in Mexico, to notice and tell us what was encountered.

The significance of the festival, as a periodically re-occurring, creative state in which mythological content is revived again and again, has for the most part escaped the notice of the ethnologists. The minimum and essential thing for the understanding of mythological religions has always been to reconstruct the nature of the festival. This understanding could also have been gained by consulting ethnographic examples.¹ In antiquity, the poem stood as an equal alongside the cult as a kind of festival; *its* atmosphere, too, made possible the appearance of divinities. Did not something similar occur later, we may ask, outside the narrowly religious domain? Are there no works of modern poetry that can again vitalize our almost completely faded experience of the festival, that can replenish us and thereby help us gain a knowledge of what a “festival” *is*?

Otto was in search of the festive possibility inherent in poetic art when he turned to Hölderlin, in his attempt to apprehend mythology in its living, indeed in its original, state. In addition to the essay already cited we note his *Ursprung von Mythos und Kultus*,² which pursues this goal. In Hölderlin’s poetry the

¹ See “Über das Wesen des Festes” in the journal *Paideuma*, 1938, and in the corresponding second chapter of my *Antike Religionen*, Amsterdam, 1941.

² In *Geistige Überlieferung*, 1940.

festival plays a special role, in addition to its being essentially festive.³ Still, Otto believed that he had to penetrate to the nature of the *festival as such*, to this primordial reality of human experience. In his studies, based entirely on the work of Hölderlin, his remarks on the festival are scattered here and there and make no direct reference to the poet. These remarks were, however, absolutely essential when light had to be shed on the origins of myth and cult. The festival is as it were the primordial locale and the primordial time of both. Its primordial locale: an ideal plane, to which the festive man is elevated. And its primordial time: the festivals are “high times,” in which the world is again “as it was on the first day.” They are the times for the appearance of the gods, for the creation or the re-creation of mythologies. Otto, again, states it very well:

The festival always signifies the recurrence of a world-hour that includes the oldest, the most venerable, and the most magnificent—a return to the Golden Age, when the ancestors associated so closely with the gods and spirits. That is the meaning of the festive exaltation: wherever there is a true festival, it is different from any other seriousness and from all other joys—hence the celebratory, in sublime, striving forms of the true cult activity, whose style can never belong to the sphere of practical purpose. He who draws from the uncommon, the primordially old and eternal, the divine, becomes one with a sacred abundance, an enchanted genius of the soul.

Such a state of “sacred abundance” and “enchanted genius” of the soul is, however, so closely related to that of a poet of Hölderlin’s type that it must be asked: Does the world-hour not also re-appear in the poets? Or, in modern times, not *at least* in them? Otto pondered this possibility, after his attempt to reveal the nature of the festival.

“The festive times of the spirit”—so Otto described the situation in Hölderlin’s case—“could bring back the Original only in a poorer form Despite his boundless veneration for the Greek spirit, he stood aloof from the Greek divinities and did not accept much more than their names. He felt that the manifestation of those primordial figures belonged to a world-hour that was no longer his own.” The tragedy of the modern age, according to Otto, lies in man’s isolation and loneliness. And in reality this is so. The unbroken chain of ecclesiastical, national-political, and courtly festivals, which, through the baroque period, the Renaissance, and the Middle Ages were still linked back to the old

³ Cf. Romano Guardini: Hölderlin, 1939, 310.

paganism, were beyond Hölderlin's grasp. He lived within that loftiness to which the festive man is elevated, but he lived alone. "I should like to celebrate" — thus Meno's lament to Diotima — "but to what purpose? And to sing with others, yet, alone, I lack any aspect of the divine." And yet he shows us his entire poetic art, that there is also such thing as a solitary festival. The paradoxes of Hölderlin's "Greek religion" require, according to Guardini's book and Otto's studies (not to mention important works of other authors), a correct understanding.

Much less paradoxical is Goethe's situation. Are not the great festive processions in *Faust II* as it were merely links in a chain of festivals that extends all the way to Weimar? Does Goethe not betray a special knowledge of "world-hours?" Is his awareness of the cosmic possibility of a true festival not linked to his own "sacred abundance" and "enchanted genius of the soul"? He consciously created a festival of divinities and his poetic genius, the powerful "unconscious" or "the world in him" — one names this overflowing font what one will — fills it with mythological content. Early or late antiquity — at such a festival everything is again original. Nothing resembles the idea of a natural moon festival as much as Goethe's sea gods scene. Perhaps a way to its understanding opens for us once we attain the conviction that we know more about the festival and about mythology generally than did our predecessors.

Goethe offers us an example of a true festivity also in the additional fact that every true poem is festive. His festive-mythological poem is a work that is as it were suspended between poetic art and mythology. The analysis and appreciation of poetic work demands a careful look at the hand of the creator, while the science of mythology has to consider as its subject the stream of symbolic content that is always coming in, with its ever-new associations; here, both approaches are united. What was begun with explanations of the nature of mythology and the festival⁴ and of the two great mythological themes — the divine child and the divine maiden⁵ — is immediately carried forward in the study of the Aegean Festival. The study was a natural, organic continuation. If thereby there has been any gain in the knowledge of Goethe's works, there must also be an indirect benefit in an improved understanding of antiquity.

The streaming-forth out of the primordial depths of being, a stream that reaches the light of day through the medium of the poet's soul, certainly

⁴ *Die Antike Religion*, Chapter 3.

⁵ These are published together in *Essays on a Science of Mythology* by C. G. Jung and the author.

constitutes a theme for the researcher of the soul, and certainly (in this case) for the psychological researcher who is concerned with alchemy. The remarks of C. G. Jung, in *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 1935, on the entry of the Kabeiroi into the sea gods scene by far do not exhaust what this great discoverer still has to tell us about the Aegean Festival. The sketches and explanations of Goethe cited in the essay that follows can also be found in G. Witkowski's annotated edition of *Faust*. Some can be found in W. Hertz' *Der Schluß der Klassischen Walpurgisnacht*.⁶ This last work became known to me after I had already delivered a series of lectures on mythology at the University in Budapest, which included an interpretation of the meaning (set forth in the present essay) of the entire scene. Still later, from A.M. Klett's collection *Der Streit um Faust II seit 1900*,⁷ I had the benefit of V. Valentin's interpretation. My study *Das Ägäische Fest* was written in August, 1940. W. F. Otto's *Ursprung von Mythos und Kultus* appeared immediately thereafter. In the present foreword, written in December, 1940, I can only make reference to his work. Only much later did Albin Lesky's *Thalatta, Der Weg der Griechen zum Meer*⁸ appear. May the above references complete these prolegomena in the Goethe year 1949.

⁶ *Germanisch-romanisch Monatschrift* 7, 1915-19, 281.

⁷ Jena, 1939.

⁸ Vienna, 1947.

Foreword to the Third Edition

It is no surprise that during the war years we saw an increase in the effort to come to terms with the “Classical Walpurgis Night,” particularly with the festive final scene “Inlets of the Aegean Sea.” This effort involved not just explanation and interpretation, not just an understanding of this artistic work, but an attempt to free this “material,” so often considered “hard” and unyielding, from its status as mere “educational material.” Indeed, there was an effort to free it from the surrounding world context of pathological hatred and compelled counter-hatred, so that it could help us to attain deliverance to a realm that is elemental, yet spiritual and festive. The so-called “hardness” was thrown into the crucible of one’s own soul, and that soul, threatened by a thousand hardships, was in turn cast into the crucible of the great, spiritually clarified sensibility of Goethe. One proceeded as Goethe did, as a scholar who was more untroubled than the other scholars. It was, whether admitted or not, an effort of care on behalf of oneself, almost an attempt at soul healing, and at the very least an effort to create a healing atmosphere around one’s own soul.

The benefit of that untroubledness, even a scholarly benefit, we enjoy today. The untroubledness made the war-time isolation from the rest of the learned world—in so far as such a world still existed—easier to bear. And both, the untroubledness and the isolation, brought about a kind of cultural collaboration, an unintentional and unusual sort of parallel effort in the field of the humanities. This effort can never be more than an attempt to master the never fully solvable problem: an exhaustive understanding of the entire historical, aesthetic, and universally human content of a work of art. The various attempts were carried out through experiential trials of a fine and noble kind, whose prerequisite, besides a knowledge of the subject matter, was an awareness of the limits of the knowable.

The encounter between the interpreter with the work rests upon a most solid, scientific foundation, which at its core is subjective. This encounter, so understood as the meeting of the interpreter and his work, is an objective event whose results can turn out to be quite varied. The results, however, viewed in this way, withdraw from the life and interior work of the interpreter and present themselves almost as the reactions of a substance to another substance. The importance of the agreement of the interpreter’s reactions increases when he attempts to attain an “absolute” encounter, a meeting in which he is left as it were alone with the author, presenting the author with his best knowledge and capacity for response. Such an encounter is detached from the ready-made opinions that come from others—hence the characterization as “absolute.” When

the viewpoints of the various interpreters nevertheless arrive at one's door, the importance of such a concurrence of reactions is still greater—perhaps even objectively decisive. This is to be judged by those interpreters who have moved beyond the subjective.

Let us therefore in this introduction turn our attention to the attempt by the classical philologist from Frankfurt, Karl Reinhardt, to discover the origin and significance of the Classical Walpurgis Night. Through his concurrence with Professor Reinhardt, the author feels encouraged to take another step in the direction of the insoluble task, a step beyond his own attempt that appeared in 1941 in the series *Albae Vigiliae*. This essay was again printed in 1949 (without the introduction that appears in the present volume) in the anthology *Spiegelungen Goethes in unserer Zeit*. Reinhardt's completely independent interpretation appeared in the 1942 and 1943 issues of *Albae Vigiliae*. It was published again in 1945 in *Antike und Abendland I*⁹ and in the volume of Reinhardt's collected lectures and essays *Von Werken und Formen*.¹⁰ The reader will find agreement among the different viewpoints, and perhaps may also feel the need to get beyond the point where both attempts find their common ground. A further spinning of the thread can be found in the present new edition (which reprints unchanged the text of the earlier study), in the Afterword. This new section seeks to go beyond the Aegean Festival to an interpretation of the rest of Goethe's "mysteries."

⁹ Hamburg.

¹⁰ Godesberg, 1948.

The Aegean Festival
Notes on the Sea Gods Scene in Goethe's *Faust II*:
A Mythological Study

Karl Kerényi

The Aegean scene in Part II of *Faust* is one of the most remarkable mythological creations of an increasingly unmythological age. The circumstances surrounding its creation are known to us through Goethe's own statements. The scene is perhaps even more striking than in Goethe's other works how decisively something wholly spontaneous prevailed in its creation, even as it did cost the poet a good deal of work.

On 24 January 1830 the eighty-one-year-old Goethe declared: "Nothing more shall divert me from *Faust*, for it would be odd enough if I should live long enough to finish it. And yet it is possible . . ." At that time Goethe was standing as it were directly in the stream of the figures of the Classical Walpurgis Night. "The mythological figures that press in upon me," he says to Eckermann, "are beyond number." But he "protects" himself and confronts only a selection. On 25 June, Goethe informed Eckermann that the Walpurgis Night was concluded, or rather was, as he himself said in correction, "released into the boundless."

Hence what became realized was not Goethe's original plan but something less—but also something more. The scene "Rocky Inlets of the Aegean Sea" took the form of that wondrous sea festival that, through the whole second act, hence through the Classical Walpurgis Night, provided the most brilliant conclusion conceivable, a finale the poet certainly did not foresee. And much else, too, he received as though from a divine power, defying any prior reckoning. Goethe says repeatedly that he "comes upon things that surprise even himself," that he has "succeeded in experiencing wonderful things beyond expectation." It is a god-given "more" alongside the equally unexpected "less."

As the truly logical conclusion to the Walpurgis Night, demanded throughout the whole storyline—the magical journey to Helena—Goethe, in his sketch of 6 February 1830, sketched a scene with Persephone in the underworld. There, Faust was to seek Helena's release. On 18 June, in a new sketch, Goethe relegated the Persephone scene to the prologue of the third act, to the earlier interlude with Helena, a scene he had in fact already completed. The prologue, however, he never wrote. In January of the following year, Goethe wrote to Zelter, revealing the important fact that he no longer regarded such a prologue

as necessary. "The first two acts of Faust are complete! The exclamation of the Cardinal d'Este, by which he thought to pay honor to Ariosto, may have a place here: 'Enough!' Helena appears immediately at the beginning of the third act, not as an incidental character but as a heroine." Whether Goethe had at the time of writing something more to add to the present scene he hints at strongly by the device of the Ariosto anecdote: the fact of the unsuspected, the wholly unforeseen, whose significance the poet himself begins to recognize only later. For the cardinal's words were well known: "Where in the world do you get all these jests, Signor Lodovico?"

A void, in its totality, cannot be revealed from the standpoint of a single onlooker. "The blessed splendor of all things shines in announcing the proximity of Helena." Everything here is full of Sea. At the beginning of the third act, Helena emerges from the shore; she, too, is full of Sea. The original plan, which Goethe laid aside, affords us a strictly mythological view, yet a useful perspective, before we turn to the sea gods scene.

In January 1827, Goethe spoke of his plan as having the potential for an enormous poetical achievement. "Faust's address to Proserpine, to bestir her to deliver up Helena, must not be regarded as a mere speech, for it moved Proserpine herself to tears! All this is not easy to accomplish and depends very much upon 'luck', indeed almost entirely upon the mood and power of the moment."¹¹ Earlier sketches cited the names that Faust—or more correctly, his wise guide in the underworld, Manto—was to refer to: Protesilaus, Alcestis, Eurydice, and the first revival of Helena herself (to wed her to Achilles on the island of Leuce). All this is conceived (and expressed in a rather rhetorical fashion) in the spirit of a classical emulation of Ovid and Virgil, of the underworld journeys of Orpheus and Aeneas. But the conception becomes much deeper in the last sketch, the sketch of the prologue to the second act; the plan loses completely its imitative character. That Indescribable, which is hinted at by the shattering scene in the "dark gallery"—the most significant mythological creation in modern literature apart from the Aegean Festival—was destined to be portrayed. In the "Passage to the Mothers," to the realm of the Nothing (thus can that mysterious domain of Mephisto be called) Faust counters, "In that Nothing I hope to find the All." That realm of the not-yet-existing and the long since no-longer-present portends its maternal aspect. In the hands of Goethe it was to

¹¹ Tr. note: The German for "luck" is *Glück*. This untranslatable term represents the combination of good fortune and the feeling of happiness and fulfillment that results. In the context of Goethe's poetical achievement, *Glück* denotes the fortunate experience of inspiration and the ability to sustain a powerful numinous experience.

show its further aspects in a great increase in what is humanly thinkable and what can be represented in poetry. Those two facets are one and the same: together they comprise this realm of a self-contained primordial figure that was to appear at this point in the work, whose radical unity the scholar of myth is only today beginning to recognize—the All-Ugly, the Gorgonic, and the All-Beautiful—a unity that, through its transitory and irretrievable nature, attains at its climax a glorious beauty, the essence of Persephone.

We should note the most important of the key phrases in the sketch: “head of Medusa,” “Proserpine¹² veiled.” In an earlier sketch, we read further, “Manto praising the beauty of her, the queen of the underworld.” The veiling of the goddess of Sais in Schiller’s poem is of a wholly other nature from that of Goethe’s Proserpine. The veiling of Proserpine corresponds to the veiling of the bride in antiquity, and to the veiling of all those who were consigned to the underworld—most especially to the veiling of those initiated at Agrai, who participated in the mysteries of the “underworldly Persephone.” With the unerring instinct of the sleepwalker, Goethe chooses for his subterranean queen a symbolic milieu through which the Greek religion itself expressed the nature of Persephone. This wisdom is exceedingly ancient and reaches far beyond the so-called symbolism of the age, the wood-allegory of Creuzer. Is the certainty of this wisdom founded upon a mere knowledge of the subject matter, and not rather upon the timeless reality of Persephone, whose nature is always to be expressed only in a mythological guise?

The unmythological *precedes* the ritualistic or artistic form, and perhaps also the plastically or dramatically represented form. The profound extent that Goethe is drawn in this direction is indicated by his intention to express the invisibility of the All-Beautiful not only with respect to the eye, through the veiling; he also wanted to re-express this same reality in another way, corresponding to the musical nature of the primordial-mythological. “Entertainment from the veiled side, seemingly expressed musically, yet unintelligible.” In the earlier sketch this is only followed by: “Manto declares....” But at this point, Goethe, at least in thought, dares something more, the most daring thing of all. “It is Faust’s wish to behold her veil-less. Foregoing rapture.”¹³ Thus reads the continuation in the last sketch. Rapture enables

¹² Tr. note: In this paragraph and elsewhere, Goethe and Kerényi sometimes write “Proserpine” and sometimes “Persephone.” The translation carefully distinguishes between the two.

¹³ Tr. note: The German phrase here is *Vorhergehende Entzückung*. *Vorhergehende*, in normal German usage, means “prior” or “foregoing,” either spatially or temporally. *Entzückung*

thought to behold the manifestation of beauty in its *unmitigated* divine-ness. In its mitigated, experientially bearable, Hellenic form, this primordial goddess—whom Faust had *almost* been able to perceive in her authentic, timeless aspect as Persephone—becomes transformed into Helena.

Goethe thus came this far, by the fact that he at least dared the thought. With the original plan laid aside, its poetic expression, however, was not carried out. Faust would not have been able to behold Persephone: “Manto quickly leads him back.” Goethe then abandoned the thought, also. Among his papers, only a very few verses have been found that are certain to have belonged to this scene. Did Goethe fall short of the “luck,” the “mood and power of the moment,” and prove unable to articulate the contemplation? Or did he afterwards succeed in attaining the indescribable, great experience, this great insight, expressible only mythologically, into the nature of an ancient godhead? Did he not also see that the motifs of veiling and incomprehensibility are the suitable *poetic* manner of expressing the *aposiopesis*, the cessation of speaking, and the Silence?

2

We wish to recall the poet’s own astonishment at what had occurred; indeed, he himself almost asked the question, “Where in the world do you get all these jests, Herr Goethe?” We also want to turn our attention exclusively to what he *succeeded* in doing. It was not merely a matter of his simply making use of the not inconsiderable amount of subject matter at his disposal, nor was it merely a matter of his coming up with variations on material he had learned. Rather, Goethe had help in experiencing the incalculable, the non-personal and transpersonal,¹⁴ mythical and divine—help that in a word can be termed “luck.”

It is in this case not merely a matter of “verbal felicity” (a considerable achievement in itself), not merely of an inspiration that finds the happy expression. Rather, we speak here of a particular state, which Goethe described as the “mood and power of the moment.” Mood and power, streaming forth from non-personal, primordial depths. For the Greeks, the muses were the transpersonal powers who provided the creative abundance, goddesses after the

is “rapture,” “delight,” or “transport.” I am taking this phrase to mean that Goethe is describing an experience of rapture that he has just had amid the mythological reverie within him that is inspiring *Faust*.

¹⁴ Tr. note: The translation carefully distinguishes between “non-personal” (*unpersönlich*) and “transpersonal” (*überpersönlich*).

manner of the water nymphs. Through these mythical creatures, the poet, by means of his “luck,” experiences in *every* respect the same as what the Romans, in regard to the underworld, expressed as *patet mundus*: the World lies open and overflows. According to Goethe, we do well, in the context of his sea gods festival, to open ourselves to a truly mystical degree of luck, not merely to take notice of dead matter and the hand of the Creator, but, much more, to heed what has streamed forth in a divine moment of a world opening—the opening of the world to the poet and the openness of the poet to the world—and what has infused both the *materia* and the creativeness with a meaning that extends beyond every personal intention.

The Walpurgis Night is the mediaeval form of the conception that there are moments when the World opens up and everything held in the underworld is released to follow its own course. This thought held an uncanny fascination for Goethe. He not only composed the Hartz Mountain scene but also invented a Classical Walpurgis Night and made it the basis and precondition of the Helena poem. However much we may wish here to free ourselves from those aspects of an artistic work that are merely personal, biographical, and literary-historical, which lie entirely outside the work, we must at least read *the* sketch in which Goethe attempts to lend to his Classical Walpurgis Night a calendrical-festive character. For this purpose, he makes use of the principal character of the second act, the homunculus.

“The formula for his creation is hinted at in a mystic way. He tosses off various examples of his abilities. In particular, it turns out that there is in him a universal historical world calendar—that is, he is able at any moment to state what has occurred among men since the creation of Adam at those times when the sun, moon, earth, and planets have been in the same position. As an example of this, he announces at once that the present night coincides precisely with that hour when the Battle of Pharsalus was being prepared, a night that both Caesar and Pompey passed sleeplessly. On this point he finds himself in dispute with Mephistopheles, who, relying on the statements of the Benedictines, does not accept that the great world event occurred at this hour but places it several days later; the homunculus is making the objection that the devil may not appeal to the authority of monks. But since the devil stubbornly insists upon this right, their dispute is in danger of lapsing into an irresolvable chronological controversy. But then the little chemical man offers further proof of his fundamentally historical-mythical temper by remarking upon the fact that this was also the moment when the festival of the Classical Walpurgis Night took place, which had been held in Thessaly ever since the beginning of the mythical

world and, in accordance with the complete coherence of world history throughout its many epochs, was the real cause of that disastrous event."¹⁵

But what remained of this carefully thought-out calendrical intermezzo in the realization of the poem? The homunculus, before his departure for Thessaly, incidentally remarks, "Just now it just occurs to me, tonight is Classical Walpurgis Night." Mephistopheles himself in this scene is asked by one of the sphinxes, "What do you say of the present hour?" He responds with equal brevity: "Star shoots past star, the phased moon shines bright." Hence it is August, the month of shooting stars (and of the battle of Pharsalus) and of no full moon. The rulership of the moon is emphasized again and again: in the prologue of Erichtho ("The moon, though less than full, is shining very bright; it rises and shines everywhere its gentle light"); in the words of Chiron ("Look up! Here stands, significantly near / In the moonlight the eternal temple there"); in the prayer of Anaxagoras to the only one present of the goddesses, Diana-Luna-Hecate; and then, in the celebration of the world-condition through the wonder of its timeless moment, of a moment emphasized to some extent in the title of the Aegean scene, "Moon *pausing* at the zenith."

The sirens in the course of the festival do not tire of their mindfulness of the ruling position of the moon:

Remain thou on thy height,
Lovely Luna, stay the grace of thy light,
That the night may continue on
Nor the day may disperse us. (8078-8081)

And to the Telchines:

You, to Helios dedicated,
You, to bright day consecrated,
Greet we in this stirring hour,
When all worship Luna's power. (8285-8288)

Of the whole chronology of the monks nothing remained. The calendrical aspect becomes reduced to the stirring reality upon which every calendar is based: the festival itself. The poet's creative outpouring chooses for its own free play of expression an original, purely natural festival—a lunar night of a peculiar

¹⁵ Kerenyi quotes this paragraph from Goethe's "Second Sketch for the Announcement of the *Helena*."

festivity that is only intensified through the evocative power of the legendary locale and the historic new year. What then occurs is something that partakes of the nature of a true festival: a mythological aspect of the world—here, the rulership of the moon—becomes revealed. *Patet mundus*. What appears is whatever may happen to appear. The most improbable mythological figure draws its actuality from *this* reality, the festivity of a Thessalian or Aegean lunar night.

3

The original plan and conception of *Faust* therefore became something quite different from what was to be expected from the sketch. This became so only gradually, however.

Chiron speaks of the Classical Walpurgis Night in its initial, continental phase—before the moon came to stand at the zenith and before the travelers arrived at the Aegean Sea—as of an “ill-famed night.” One thing was to be expected, a dangerous witching-hour that to mortals brings only disaster. It is a night of *welling-up*, of bringing forth out of the depths all the subterranean figures as from an overflowing fountain-head. Chiron says of Faust, the mediaeval stranger in the Hellenic spirit-world, the significant word: “Him hath this ill-famed night *caught in its whirl* and brought here to your sight.” As it whirls without restraint, the night is for the Arimaspians and for all mythical peoples and creatures an “unrestrained night of jubilation.” Heracles has slain the “last” of the sphinxes, yet on this unique night they again are all present. In this we find, as we have said, nothing unexpected.

Let us pause here for a moment. Whoever believes that the poet is thinking here of the style of the late Greeks, or of an Ovidian-Roman expressive style, must be reminded of the proto-Corinthian and the recently discovered early-Attic vase images with their amazing creatures. Goethe never saw any such works. He was familiar only with the soft and delicately human art of the Hellenistic-Roman period. Yet only those archaic vase images are suitable for illustrating the scene at Pharsalus. Goethe’s use of the sphinxes points us (should we like to meet them in the flesh) to the main hall of the little museum on the Greek island of Aegina, which in Goethe’s time displayed only late-archaic warriors. Those most noble sphinxes sit high and impressive in their pure Hellenism, a sight that can be compared only with that of the magnificent youths in the archaic art wing of the National Museum of Athens. And the discovery of the Powerful-Ugly in the world of Greek beauty, also presented by

Mephistopheles in the Phorkyads scene of the Classical Walpurgis Night, actually came to light only through the great archaeological find at Corfu—the gigantic Gorgons—in our own time.

The eddying-up of a medley of terrifying figures—of something that in itself is primordial-mythological, which the classical mythology of the Hellenes had already relegated to the underworld—forms merely the introductory phase. The climax, the sea festival—something wholly unexpected in the “ill-famed night”—is prepared by the Sirens’ song:

Hence! Ye noble guests and merry
To the ocean revel hurry,
Glittering where the waves are twinkling,
Heaving gently, shores besprinkling,
There where Luna twofold gloweth,
Holy dew on us bestoweth.
There is life astir and cheerful,
Here an earthquake dire and fearful.
Hence ye prudent, haste away!
For this place strikes with dismay. (7509-7518)

In this passage, something of Goethe’s invention emerges as the foundation of the unexpected “glad sea festival.” A geological theory is set against another, the Neptunist against the Vulcanist, and the Neptunist is extolled. Serious witticisms, as Goethe himself once characterized Part II of *Faust*, are the play of the spirit—or rather are “jests” in the sense of the Ariosto anecdote—and comprise the substance of a didactic poem. But whither does this spirit-play lead, what comes of the geological theory, when even the Vulcanist Anaxagoras himself offers prayers to the moon goddess? It reminds us already of a primordial-mythological situation where the moon is shining upon a newly created world, upon the mountain brought forth by the vulcanic power of an earthquake. The sphinxes in this scene name the island Delos, which similarly appeared out of the sea for the sake of a goddess in labor.

Nevertheless, Goethe’s natural science in this scene is not at all a pure mythology. A primordial-mythological experience of mankind—a close connection, found among so many ancient mythologems, between “origin” and water, between “primordial beginning” and ocean—appears for the first time in its perfect purity where the moon, pausing at the zenith, rules its own proper festival. It matters even less here that Goethe is speaking from scientific conviction than the fact that he is articulating it in an authentically mythological

way, that his conviction expresses itself in the very same manner as mythology itself does in its original forms: in the experience of a great festival.

The scholar of myth encounters everywhere in the world, among the sacred traditions of the various peoples, such pictorially rendered early experiences of humanity as the mythological theory of the origin of life from primordial waters. We find not merely *a* theory of the origin of life. Rather, all images that appeared in this or another similar primordial experience had for those who experienced them the status of realities, indeed of higher, divine realities. It is not purely scientific ideas that we are encountering here. Divine figures make their appearance, making sacred primordial experiences immediately present. Even if the festivals, the periodic recapitulations of the first manifestations of the Divine and of other sacred events, had not occurred in the religious life of the world's peoples, we have to assume there would have been great, festival-like moments in which the gods and the transmitted mythologems were experienced in their core essence.

The fact that there is such thing as a "festival" — in the form of, say, an awakening, or the illumination that engenders an idea — means that this assumption, which others, too, have proposed, is seen as completely natural. What "festival" is in its purest form, however, shows us moderns that we are accustomed to thinking of the "festive" as all too solemn, all too ceremonial. Because of this, we fail to recognize a delightful peculiarity of our human form of existence in its essence: Goethe's Aegean poem. Here, festival and mythology are present in their original unity and present themselves with the same ease and lightness as gifts of nature.

4

In the continental phase, we see a vortex with a myriad of forms, each with its evident unnaturalness, and even with an element of violence. At the sea we find the self-evident "thronging" and "ever-turning." This corresponds to the law of the water element, the most mythological element of all. There is at work in this element an unrestrained sorcery of a havoc-wreaking magic:

If of yore, by spells nocturnal,
Did Thessalian hags infernal
Draw thee down, a crime intending,
Gaze thou where night's arch is bending
Down with calmness never-ending

On the billowy, twinkling ocean,
And illumine the commotion
Rising from the billowing sea!
To thy service vowed are we,
Lovely Luna, gracious be! (8034-8043)

Such is the Sirens' song, and we are not surprised when the Tritons and Nereids, as "wonders of the sea," as the "festively enlivened hosts," appear out of the deepest, most tranquil depths and invigorate the festival's most wondrous and enchanting figures.

"No gods, only nature-figures" — thus we hear the reproach. Even so, Goethe's unfailing perception elicits from the daemonic figures their deepest secrets. From the nature spirits, however, as the Greeks themselves called them (for the Greeks they were gods and goddesses), there is, it is true, no path to the gods. These reproaches, and those of late Greek and of Roman thought, would appear to be correct. But they are so only in part and not to the detriment of the truly mythological. There were, in particular, Roman sarcophagi, with their representations of trains of Nereids, that provided a model. What impression these images make upon the receptive observer of the religious aspect of classical art the following account will show. It is written by one of the great mythologists, J. J. Bachofen, who went far beyond the Creuzer allegory but who was by no means so near to nature and to the pagan essence as was Goethe.

To most of the Tritons, Centaurs, and laden dolphins, the sea daughters appear in their full youthful beauty, naked or in a flowing raiment, in the midst of the ocean in which they, a chorus of blessed creatures, enjoy the bliss of elemental existence. The art summons forth all the means needed to lend to the highest measure of superhuman luck the greatest energy and grace of expression. The spirit of the observer is placed beyond the realm of earthly cares and sadness. It gazes upon the imaginal picture of a heightened existence, an existence that presupposes relations other than those of one's mortal nature. In the myriad of the forms of Nereids and Tritons and sea creatures there unfolds the undiminished power of that element in which lies the seed of all life and rejuvenation. No strain, no trace of weariness. Like the cursorily moving fish, they appear not to feel the burdens they carry; so also the Nereids themselves, with their noble bearing, are strangers to any fearfulness. Wholly surrendered to their bliss from their life in the sea, they return kindness to their bearers with

a trustful surrender that often intensifies to an intimate union in love. Infinite yearning, such as the infinity of the sea awakens in us, unites with that feeling of victory to which the trumpeting seashells of the Tritons give expression. Dolphins accompany the train, Erotes appear out of the gently moving waves or hover in the air—festive escorts of the bridal train that the sea once greeted during the abduction of Europa.¹⁶

Goethe could have learned also, from the relics of a later art and mythology, of such a peculiar style that, with these sea wonders and nature spirits, presents at the same time a divine reality that stands over them. The Tritons and Nereids appear mostly to comprise a supportive retinue—a festive train to honor higher divinities—or to form two festive trains that conjoin with one another. They accompany the ruler of the sea, Poseidon, with his team of four. They are present at the birth of Aphrodite and symbolize the great primordial occurrence of the cosmos. On mixing bowls and musical instruments they appear as the Dionysian Thiasos. They bear the peels of fruits and secret baskets and chests that evoke the contemplation of the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone. Or they have the attributes of Ares, Eros, and Aphrodite, indeed of Zeus himself, when the power of these great divinities returns to the origin of all the gods, to the primordial element—to the father Oceanus. “The Olympians themselves do not disdain to enjoy, in the manner of the Nereids, the bliss of elemental marine existence.” Thus Bachofen interprets this scene from the Corsini sarcophagus, which Goethe may have seen in Rome along with most of the works already mentioned.

In actuality, one thinks of what immediately follows, that all of these representations of higher divinities can be traced through the sea creatures to the mystery processions of the Tritons and Nereids. Erotes and torch lights highlight the nuptial (and the sepulchral) aspects of the portrayals that are known to us. This is so even when Poseidon and Amphitrite, as bridal pair—as on the famous Munich relief (formerly in the Palazzo Santa Croce in Rome)—do not appear on the sarcophagi. The ancient mysteries in their fundamental outlook even recognize the identity of marriage and death and the emergence of life out of death. We may almost identify an unconscious fundamental view that can be articulated apart from the mysteries themselves, a view that was evoked again and again among ancient peoples through the fact of death. It appeared as the

¹⁶ *Die Unsterblichkeitslehre der orphischen Theologie auf den Grabdenkmälern des Altertums*, 1867. Newly revised Berlin 1938, p. 184.

*idea*¹⁷ of a divine marriage that is the same as death, bound to no particular locale (perhaps at Eleusis), so that its celebration can only be conceived within the primordial element itself. The Orphic hymn to the Nereids says expressly that these goddesses were the first to celebrate the mysteries of Dionysus and Persephone. That first observance was the original marriage and the immediately following original birth, experienced in the form of a mystery celebration of the sea. Perhaps the Tritons and Nereids, as witnesses and executants of that first great mystery of birth (whose mythological variation is the birth of Aphrodite), have adopted for the first time the custom of bearing, along with their own attributes, the utensils of the mystery divinities: basket, chest, and mixing bowl—bearing thereafter also the sign of the highest Olympian power.

For this path of development we find the well-known relics. Tritons and Nereids, in addition to other festival participants appearing in animal form, adorn the garment of the great mystery goddess of Lycosura (now in the National Museum of Athens), to whom we in our interpretation shall have to return. In the Triton procession, which is depicted on the sandal of the late Roman colossus (today in the Conservatory Palace in Rome), we see a well-known instrument of the mysteries, the sacred winnowing machine. The gigantic statue to which the sandal belongs stands upon the primordial ground of being (this the representation tells us), upon the primordial ground where the primordial mystery of all existence, expressed in its Greek symbolic form, is continually enacted.

But even if the sarcophagus representation were not derived from such a model, the characteristic mystery elements—the nuptial motif, death, and birth—together implicated in a series of sea gods scenes, would be unmistakable. The nuptial aspect—in Bachofen’s words, “the self-yielding that so often intensifies into a love union”—even predominates. From this general impression, it is not for us a matter of interpretation or of historical guidance. How far in his imitation Goethe’s consciousness extends is equally unimportant. Consciously or unconsciously he is pointing to a situation that is analogous to a mystical marriage procession. In any case, he proceeds not through mere imitation but through creative effort, through “luck,” to the original significance of all Nereid processions and all Tritonic sea festivals.

¹⁷ Tr. note: By the Platonic term *idea* Kerenyi refers to the archetype of the divine marriage and not to a non-archetypal, mental notion.

We observe at this point how freely Goethe did as he pleased with his daemonic creatures of the Aegean Sea. He brought to the tumult in the festive moonlight more than he inherited from tradition. Of the Psylli and Marsi, peoples skilled in magic and with no connection with Cyprus, he made guardian spirits for the chariot of the great Cyprian goddess, Aphrodite. (Whether he did so in error or deliberately contrary to every source, makes no difference.) And like these guardian spirits, so all the nature spirits point beyond themselves toward the great Olympians.

If his Classical Walpurgis Night had not taken place so late, in the Middle Ages, but had occurred in a pre-Greek primordial time, his mythological sea world would have contained *in embryo* the entire realm of the Olympian gods. But because the event occurs in post-antiquity, this sea ensures the remembrance of that unique manifestation that belongs to the past, since the time when there assumed dominion eagles and the winged lion, cross and moon—Byzantium and Venice, Knights of St. John of the Cross and Turks. It is the Greek sea of Byron, with its desolate coasts and its abundance of memories, with its laughing paganism and a natural primordial divinity, with all of its daemonic and festive nature, watching in the deserted inlets for the traveler and the sailor. The Olympians have withdrawn from their precincts: their *idea*¹⁸ shines through their *eidola*,¹⁹ rooted in nature, faithful likenesses, never to be dispelled.

When we read Goethe's sea festival, we think of Herodotus' report of wondrous places and occurrences. The historian speaks of the celebrations of the mysteries at Eleusis, *taking place by themselves* when the place was deserted due to the Persian invasion. It is not Poseidon, the powerful bridegroom of powerful primordial goddesses, who takes part in Goethe's festival; rather, Telchines and sea horses and sea dragons bring forth his sign of rulership, the trident. Aphrodite does not appear; rather, we encounter in the brilliance of the heavens and in the sea waves what remains of her timeless essence, Galatea. And it is wonderfully fitting that in this epiphany—as in a natural apparition, as it were—the primordial goddess of the bull-venerating Mediterranean Sea makes good

¹⁸ Tr. note: As before, by the Platonic term *idea* (plural: *ideai*) Kerényi refers to the gods in their archetypal aspect and not to a physical representation or mental notion. The term *idea* is singular in Kerényi's text.

¹⁹ Tr. note: *Eidola* (from the Ancient Greek) are physical likenesses that embody the trans-concrete, archetypal *ideai* that are inherent in them.

her escape, that the guardians of her shell chariot ride in front, sitting upon sea bulls and sea calves (sometimes upon rams).

There are fifty daughters of Nereus, who, according to the Orphic hymn, were the first to celebrate the mysteries of Dionysus and Persephone. According to a chorus in Euripides' *Ion*, they are the Nereids who also take part with the moon and stars in the mystery dance at Eleusis—an image of a wondrous mystery-night that can be compared only with the Aegean scene. The Nereids are not to be imagined as “sea wonders” with fish tails; one of them was Thetis, “of the silver feet.” Goethe makes of them “graces of the sea,” the Dorids, named for their mother, the Ocean-daughter Doris—the mother-daughters, in contrast to the father-daughters, the Nereids. Goethe gives them to Galatea for her companions and in this way fashions an all-loving realm among the sea creatures, a maternal and flirtatious, loving world.

For Goethe, the Dorids are daughters of Nereus, just like their sister, Galatea. Yet it is said of them:

Bring, sweet Dorids, Galatea,
Her high mother's image quite.
Grave she seems like godly faces,
Shares immortals earnest worth,
Yet with all the luring graces
Of the loveliest maid of earth. (8385-8390)

In this sphere of the absolute feminine, Galatea, the very image of her mother, holds dominion. In vain do the Dorids desire eternally to love the youths they have saved:

The wave, your changeful fellow-rover,
Grants love's continuance no more,
And once the tender charm is over,
You set them gently back ashore. (8412-8415)

Constancy and faithfulness are not the law of the elemental world. The youths who have enjoyed the favor of this realm must acknowledge, however:

This is the best life we have had,
We want no other one. (8422-23)

Goethe joined his Nereids, the father-daughters, with the fish-bodied Tritons, probably in the same manner as they appear beside one another in

additional pairs on a sarcophagus in the Palazzo Giustianni. At the head of the whole procession there is similarly a little realm for the participant who comes face to face with “that other,” the perfect, more impressive femininity of Galatea. Here the feminine aspect is different from that of the Dorids (“ . . . you lusty Nereids / Hearty women, sportive, wild”). And how do they, the inseparable Nereids and Tritons, show that they are “more than fish”?

Off we go! One journey brief,
And we have proofs to force belief. (8067-8068)

and:

Off at once they race,
Making straight for Samothrace. (8070-8071)

They soon return holding a giant shield, like the giant shell found on the sarcophagi with the birth of Aphrodite, or the medallion with the image of the dead. It is the armor of a mythological primordial animal that for the Hindus (as Goethe well knew) bore the world itself, the turtle of Chelone:

Chelone’s shield gigantic
Gleams with stern figures antic;
They’re gods whom we are bringing. (8170-8172)

(Sirens):

Little in height,
Potent in might,
Who shipwrecked men deliver,
Gods old and honored ever. (8174-8177)

(Nereids and Tritons):

We’re bringing the Kabeiroi
To the peaceful pageant cheery,
For where they rule auspicious
Neptune will be propitious. (8178-8181)

They may glory in being more than fish, for they bear those great gods who still remain only in the Greek sea. They have *acquired the Kabeiroi*. Enigmatic words that are so important that they are repeated in unison.

What does one possess in the Kabeiroi? A question that is also very significant: What *is* man when he is worthy to possess them?

Goethe expresses himself very carefully here. Everything that has been introduced so far, apart from Chelone's shield, agrees exactly with the picture that contemporary mythological science has also succeeded in drawing of these enigmatic divinities. The Sirens have good cause to sing of them:

In shipwreck's hour,
With irresistible power
You rescue the crew. (8183-8185)

The Kabeiroi, like many gods, had already in antiquity been transformed into gods of healing. The same gods who ruled in the primordial element at the creation of primordial mankind now rescue those facing danger in the sea. And, like many primordial creatures, they have a dwarflike aspect, and even a titanic one. Their dwarf-likeness may not be doubted, especially after the excavation at Thebes of vases with representations of Pygmies. When we today think of the increase in the number of archaeological relics, as well as the already well-known evidence, and consider it all without prejudice, we must again marvel at the sureness of Goethe's wisdom, which in the midst of so many speculative valuations and interpretations expressed during his time is able to remain authentically mythological. In the light of the Kabeiroi vases, Goethe's description of the struggle between Pygmies and cranes on the newly created volcanic mountain proves to be an anciently styled, introductory variation on the theme of the Kabeiroi. One thinks of the grotesque scenes of struggle of that nature on one of the vases of the so-called "mystery painters."

The impression that these great gods make on the homunculus ("These shapeless figures look to me / Like old pots made of lead") are in the end based on ancient reports that they were of a style similar to the Palladium or the Penates in Rome, and which can be carried in a box. In Goethe's time, such idols were thought of as an Egyptian style of "jar gods." Only in this instance does Goethe deviate from ancient tradition in his *Faust*, in that in a completely analogous manner he places the little primordial gods on Chelone's giant shield instead of in a box—one might say upon the bare primordial ground of the world. From there they ascend upward to Olympus, step by step.

For it is *three* Kabeiroi that the Tritons and Nereids have acquired:

Three we have brought with us,
The fourth would not come with us;
He said that only he
Could ponder for the other three. (8186-8189)
...
In actuality there are seven. (8194)

(Sirens):

Where are the other three? (8195)

(Nereids and Tritons):

We have no notion. Seek
Them on Olympus peak.
They say an eighth there dwells
Of whom no one knows or tells.
All are kindly disposed;
Their number is undisclosed. (8196-8201)

What the number play is based on, at least outwardly, are statements from antiquity, the various Kabeiroi genealogies, and on their interpretation by Schelling. I intend no mockery here. *In a spirit of play*, Goethe takes from Schelling's little book, *On the Divinities of Samothrace*, which is completely unsound historically, what could serve for him as a point of departure. Goethe did not consider the book to have any greater value than this.

Today we should like to call out to the romantic philosopher, as Nietzsche himself once did, "That young soul should sing!" Schelling interpreted the names of gods from a false linguistic basis, in the course of trying to win for the Kabeiroi the same philosophical myth that Socrates, in the *Symposium*, expounded in honor of Eros. In the case of both Plato and Schelling it essentially came down to one thing: to find the appropriate philosophical manner of expression for that worldly reality whose primitive, plastic form of expression—the ithyphallic Hermes—Herodotus traces back to the cult of the Kabeiroi. The task of the philosopher at that time was to comprehend the *blind procreative drive*, so that he could also take into account the unconscious drive contained within it toward the Highest. Goethe *sings* just that of the Kabeiroi:

They are gods! Yet uniquely odd,
Self-creating and perpetuating,

Yet never knowing what they are. (8075-8077)

So much more ancient than Schelling! For Schelling, “all that lies in the profoundest depths—including the deepest-level godhead in the progression of Kabeiroi—can never be more real than an object of incessant yearning, a godhead that does not so much exist as merely strives to exist.” Yet this incessant searching, through the succession of the Kabeiroi, becomes transformed into a magic through which “the supra-worldly realm is drawn down to the plane of everyday reality.” Goethe proceeds from the ascending, purely speculative progression of Schelling, and his “luck” leads him to a place very near to the true Kabeiroi.

Goethe could not yet learn from the classical scholars of his day that the masculine principle in the Kabeiroi cult was not only Hermetic but was also portrayed in dual form: father and son, Kabeiros and child. On a vase fragment from a Theban sanctuary we see the pair as a Dionysian man, reclining forward, bearded, and wearing a wreath, while the boy is holding a wine jug in his hands. At the center of the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone stood a feminine pair as the expressive form of the unbroken continuation of life. In the dual form of the goddesses, the daughters were simply the mothers reborn, and those who became mothers did so only to give birth to themselves. The same can be said of the masculine expressive form of the same process: of the Kabeiroi, nothing more apposite can be said than that they ever beget themselves.

Let us not forget the first words: *They are gods!* The nature spirits are merely their bearers. Goethe’s Kabeiroi point beyond the mere animalistic continuation of life toward an Olympian existence (“The eighth Kabeiros dwells on Olympus”):

These incomparable aspire
Ever higher, ever higher,
Starvelings ridden with desire
For the unattainable. (8202-8205)

Goethe’s Kabeiroi are “more Faustian” than those of antiquity. One believes that he is hearing the answering voice of the “chorus mysticus” from the alluring eternal feminine. The Sirens answer with their song of the Unattainable:

It is our way,
Wherever its sway,
To sun or moon, to pray,

It's bound to pay. (8206-8209)

The Tritons and their hearty, sportive, fetching wild women are “more than fish,” in that they carry such gods and with them are permitted to conduct the festival. What *eternity* this means, compared with mortal fame! (“The heroes of story, / Lack for glory / Wherever it shines in splendor, / Though once they won the golden fleece . . . ”²⁰) The festive procession really begins with the high gods. They guarantee that the sea remains clearly worthy of this festival. Are they not at the same time, however, the fitting symbols of the conducting of a marriage procession? Do they not form the first, secret intimation of the great mystery that becomes fulfilled in this procession?

7

The Telchines are apparently the next group in the procession, bearing the trident of Poseidon only for this purpose: to ensure the festive stillness of the sea (“Serenely we drift in our festive content”²¹). Considered mythologically, they are a further variation on the Kabeiroi theme, even if the poet perhaps did not consciously intend this. In their nature as skilled forgers and as sea and island inhabitants they have much in common with the Kabeiroi, who are descended from Hephaistos, the god of forging, and who according to one tradition are themselves “Hephaisten.” For Goethe, they, like the Kabeiroi, point beyond the elemental. As spirits of the Helios-island, Rhodes, they are the emissaries of the Apollonian sun god at the festival of his sister, the moon god. And as representatives of the masculine joy of creating they announce another possibility of Faustian striving toward the unattainable: the creation of art (“We were of all peoples the first who began / To dignify gods with the aspect of man”²²).

Within the purely elemental nature of Proteus there abides something incomprehensible, a cause for laughing. (“To the holy and life-bringing Sun / Their dead works are mere jest”²³) The nature spirit par excellence, he is capable of transformation, is curious like a fish, but is not full of yearning as are the Kabeiroi—and man (“Creatures *striving* to become like gods, / And yet

²⁰ ll. 8212-8215.

²¹ l. 8284.

²² ll. 8301-8302.

²³ ll. 8306-8307.

condemned to be themselves, poor clods!"²⁴). Proteus gives to the homunculus his counsel on the elemental:

In spirit follow to the liquid world,
Life's length and breadth for you lie there unfurled;
There you can move which way you will.
But don't let higher orders lure you. (8327-8330)

In contrast to the striving spirits, the water element shows, of its many aspects, these two: in the person of the Old Man of the Sea, Nereus, water reveals its primordially old, unchanging, and thereby wise, aspect; its eternally changing, tempting side is expressed in the form of Proteus and, for the time being, in his directives ("Wed ye to the ocean").

As a primordial element, the sea also carries within itself the blind procreative urge: the Tritons and Nereids conduct the festive procession in company with three Kabeiroi (with the three most lowly, who are not possessed of thought). The nature of the Kabeiroi is for Goethe like Eros, "the beginning of all things"; it is rooted in the primordial ground of being and rises to higher levels. *This* festive procession, in the meantime, remains within the element; it does not wrest itself from it. On the contrary! It forms a powerful spiral, exactly as in Raphael's "Triumph of Galatea," but also includes the festive dancing of primordially old mysteries of death and rebirth:

Lightly moving, in tempered haste.
Round the chariot, ring on ring,
Line on line now interlaced
Now untwining, altering. (8379-8382)
...
Past, past already is their throng
In an arc of widening wake! (8426-8427)
...
In widening circles dancing,
Festively advancing,
Their countless hosts toward ocean veer. (8448-8450)

Yet the festival, however purely elemental it may be, is not a mere spirit-hour but a true divine festival. The unattainable ("We give its own / To every throne, /

²⁴ ll. 8096-8097.

Within the zone / Of Sun and moon"²⁵) announces itself through a sign
("Nocturnal travelers might maintain / That moon-ring was mere play of light
. . . "²⁶), and only then does the festival attain, not its end, but rather its
fulfillment:

What a ring of cloudlets gyres
Richly around the moon tonight!
Doves they are, lit with love-fires
Pinions pure and snowy white.
Only Paphos could so send
Ardent bird doves here to us.
Our festival comes to an end
In joy supreme and rapturous. (8339-8346)

Now Galatea can appear within the circle of the Dorids. In her is unveiled the
Temptress-Feminine of eternal beauty, *wherever she may reign*, in the heavens and
in the sea:

In Venus' seashell-car of rainbow hues
Will come my Galatea, whom they choose
The fairest, whom in Paphos they adore
As goddess since great Cypris left our shore.
My lovely girl has this long time been known
As heiress to the templed town and chariot-throne. (8144-8149)

8

The heiress of the classical, indeed even to some extent of the post-classical,
Aphrodite—that would be Goethe's Galatea, by the poet's intent. And yet she is
perhaps rooted still more deeply, just as much in nature as in the figure of the
primordial goddess. Goethe here, through the little cloud of doves, places the
Aphrodisiacal, the first concern of nature, in a marked relationship with the
moon. The classical Greek version of the myth, on the other hand, pushes even
the relation of Artemis to the moon somewhat into the background. That version
leaves so little connection between the two that the Pythagorean equation of
moon and Persephone cannot emerge at all. Goethe therefore seems, in the
prayer of Anaxagoras to the "eternally unchanging, three-named, three-formed"

²⁵ ll. 8206-8209.

²⁶ ll. 8347-8348.

Diana-Luna-Hecate, to be thinking very much in the manner of late antiquity—and quite correctly in this context, when he gives a new interpretation to Aphrodite’s lunar halo of doves.

Nevertheless, it is Hecate as moon goddess, the breast-extending (in the profoundest sense), calm-appearing, powerfully tender goddess, as Goethe celebrates her in the style of the Orphic poetic hymns—a mythological figure of high antiquity. Her place in the heavens, earth, and sea was already recognized by Hesiod; it is her primordial authority and right from the period of the Titans, an authority that Zeus let her retain, and even increased. Because the Original is usually contained within the realm of magic, the ancient sorceresses, especially, knew of Hecate’s lunar nature. It has been reported to us that the moon “on nights of horror was wickedly drawn down by Thessalian witches.” Originally this meant: Hecate appeared among them here upon the earth. Did she not moreover have in her nature a procession of Aphrodite, or the possibility of the Aphrodisiac? Has Goethe (again unconsciously) perhaps come upon something of the primordial-mythological?

Skopas, the creator of a wondrous Nereid scene, had made for Samothrace a statue of Aphrodite, with accompanying figures, of which one, probably the figure of a boy, has been interpreted as Pothos, the “one who yearns.” The other figure, which is understood profanely and non-mystically as Phaethon (assuming that the interpretation is not based on a false reading), may be a Kabeiros next to a second Kabeiros, both of them carrying what are probably torches. The elder Pliny, to whom we owe the report, says quite plainly that these divinities were venerated at Samothrace with the “most sacred rites.” The goddess of the Kabeiroi, who bore both the names Kabeiro and Demeter Kabeira, offered therefore to the human-passionate art of Skopas the possibility of being portrayed as Aphrodite. Otherwise, the great primordial mother of the Kabeirian sea in the vicinity of Samothrace was rather more of the nature of Hecate than of Aphrodite. The Kabeiros Dardanos emerged from the cave of Hecate on his way to Troy, when a flood covered the earth. It was the famous “Zerynthian cave,” a cult location on Samothrace, with which “Aphrodite Zerynthia” has been associated. Of the Kabeiros Alkon, of Lemnos, it is said that he was the son of Kabeiro and was a torch-bearing worshipper of the native Hecate, who assuredly was his own mother. (Lemnos, the Thracian coast, and Samothrace all belong to the same sea.) Today we are beginning to recognize in other respects that primordial goddess who was the undivided Hecate-Demeter and, here, Kabeiro. As Hecate, she preserved her ancient, close relationship with the moon and the sea. And she still, as the great goddess of the Demeter and Persephone mysteries

in the Arcadian Lykosura, had Nereids and Tritons as ornaments beside her throne—and, as we recall, on her garment.

Goethe again conjures up, as it were, through the same constellation—the moon in the daemonic August night, pausing at the zenith—the primordial goddess. She is present in the *cosmic* situation, and, it appears, in the *soul* of the poet, in the interplay of moon night and sea, as her sound is heard only in the background, “a melody that is unintelligible,” just as with Goethe’s Persephone in the underworld. The visual man grasps of her only as much of the loveliness of Galatea as he is able to apprehend. The religious man in the old Goethe has a presentiment of the nearness of the primordial goddess, and he approaches her as closely as our human nature is ever able to endure: to that last boundary where she still dispenses life, without proceeding to cause death.

Goethe’s sea festival returns us to the basis of a most authentic mythology. Here everything is still play and image and sound. And it goes one step further, to an annihilating divine presence—the fate, not of Goethe, but of Hölderlin.

9

That is also to some extent the fate of this wondrous festive night’s sacrifice, the homunculus. He is the pure spirit in whose unrestrained striving (“As long as I exist, / I must also be busy”) there is no aroma or flavor. A starveling, yearning in full consciousness, he estimates his condition as limited (“That’s how it is: when natural things seek place / The universe has hardly room enough / But artificial things need boundless space”), yet satisfactory (“I am the most content . . .”). Yet he is possessed by an urge that, in the face of the Eternal-Feminine, raises his situation to that of “powerful yearning,” to a true eros. And he knows what it is he seeks, he who “just like absolute thought, has no real existence.”

I float from place to place as best I can
And would like, in the best sense, to evolve;
I am on fire to break my glass. (7830-7832)

He attaches himself to human spirits, those who have proven worthy as natural philosophers and persons of substance, who in their time have associated with nature spirits. Thales, the philosopher of primordial water, leads him in a highly significant way to the sea, and there he perceives for the first time the aroma of the life-element (“There is a softness in this air, / Green fragrance that I love

wafts everywhere"²⁷). His progress is not impeded by following the enticement of Proteus and the counsel of Thales:

Yield to this laudable desire,
And from this creation's start, aspire.
Prepare for work at rapid rate.
You'll pass there by eternal norms
Through a thousand thousand forms,
In time you will reach the human state. (8321-8326)

Whoever considers this scene intellectually can easily establish: "With this the onlooker has in his hand the natural law of the formula for the entry of the spiritual being into organic nature, the final goal being the attainment of humanness. And with the appearance of Helena he can no longer be in doubt as to the "how" of her resurrection: she, too, has emerged into existence through natural law, yet she is also a strong, vital human being, the incarnate queen of Sparta.

The onlooker whom the Aegean Festival has prepared (with its splendor and its rolling of the sea) for the appearance of Helena, admittedly does not really require such a train of thought. But a true work of art, which, like the world, has many aspects, is well able to withstand the fact that its content will intellectually be developed further. If in this onlooker there is deeper World-content, as there is in the Aegean scene, this content immediately finds its analogies in the mythological, and through the mythological may as it were be traced back. The destiny of the homunculus requires such tracing back no less than the epiphany of Galatea requires it. At first this fate comes to manifestation only mythologically, remaining only a metaphor: the rebirth of Helena out of the mystical marriage of the homunculus and Galatea.

The homunculus is in reality only a creature of thought, even if in the end it is a many-sided symbol like every genuine creation of a high art. Those of its aspects that we attempt to grasp here correspond primarily to its historical origin. It is a creature of thought, hence, for whose coming into being Goethe wanted to even provide the formula. On the other hand, the homunculus-formula—just like the methods for finding the Stone of the Wise, in the broader realm of mythology—belongs to those mediaeval forms to which suppressed, primordial-mythological figures have escaped. According to Paracelsus, "from such homunculi, as they attain a mature age" come either giants or little dwarfs.

²⁷ ll. 8265-8266.

Such an alternation characterizes the primordial being—and the titanic-dwarf-like Kabeiroi, also. Goethe's homunculus is a little dwarf of sound and illumination, the simple and pure formula for radiant sunshine, or the music of an invented primordial child of a cosmogonic mythologem.

How that primordial child is suspended between being and non-being ("You are, before you were supposed to be!"²⁸). How that child appears to be a youth ("This lad here wisely wishes to evolve"²⁹), yet is hermaphroditic: a cosmological mythologem that embraces everything—the All—can originate from him. In the sequence of variations—Pygmies, Kabeiroi, Telchines, homunculus—the Pygmies correspond to the embryonic-ghostly nature of that primordial child, while the homunculus, who in this series assumes the highest, purely spiritual stage, is likened to the world-illuminating spirit. And Apollo, a god of spirit, becomes illumined in the image of the primordial child, in the midst of the primordial darkness. The homunculus is only apparently a chemical product; in reality he became a spirit like Mephisto himself, conjured up in the vial through the agency of Mephisto. A mediaeval "spirit" and yet almost a phenomenon of ancient mythology, he lets himself be carried in the sea by the Proteus dolphin. He appears as the dolphin-riding Greek primordial child (though not as inspired as the latter, yet filled with eros) in the Aegean Festival.

The situation of the homunculus is essentially the same as that of Pratolaos (from his name, the primordial man) as we find upon the Theban vase fragment already mentioned. Before both the great gods, the Kabeiros and Pais, stands this dwarflike figure, looking at the love-pair, the bride Krateia and a figure facing her, Mitos, whose name means "seed." But the homunculus unites in himself, in a manner that is authentically ancient-mystical, Pratolaos, the child that shall be born, and his begetter, Mitos. He is the true Kabeiroi bridegroom, who begets himself. The several figures Kabeiros, Pais, Mitos, and Pratolaos are merely the pictorial, humanly portrayable expressions of the self-begetting primordial god, as Demeter and Persephone express the unfolding of the primordial goddess who ever gives birth to herself. The Kabeiroi are the masculine version, the two goddesses the feminine, of the same primordial wisdom of the eternity of life.

This primordial wisdom may be termed "ancient-mystical," and is quite different from the peculiarly Christian-mystical. It is the recognition of a deeply founded identity between mother and daughter on the one hand, and between father and son on the other; both pairs possess the same conviction of the

²⁸ I. 8245.

²⁹ I. 8134.

irreducible nature of life. However eternally we may know the details of the mysteries of the Kabeiroi, fundamentally they are a birth-mystery like those of Eleusis or Lycosura. And a birth-mystery is at the same time the marriage of the homunculus and Galatea.

In that Eleusinian mystery-night, which the moon and stars and the Nereids all celebrate together, a great light suddenly blazed up and coalesced in the birth of a divine child. In this way the fire element let resound its symbolic language. Here it is similar to the light- and fire-nature of the homunculus. His glass shatters on the throne of Galatea. His spirit becomes pure fire and assumes the role of the bridegroom:

There! There spurts the flame as it gushed afar! (8473)

The Sirens are permitted to begin singing the wedding song:

What marvel of fire lights the waves as they dash
Against one another with glittering clash?
Such shining and waving and blazing of light,
All forms are aglow on the path of the night
And all things are bathed in a vastness of flame.
Prevail then great Eros, whence everything came!
Hail to the sea! Hail to the waves,
Which sacred fire in brilliance laves!
Hail to water! To fire, all hail!
Hail, rare marvel of this tale! (8474-8483)

The homunculus' adventure is the mystery of origination. None of the elements may thereby remain unmentioned:

Hail to the coursing airs!
Hail to earth's mysterious lairs!
Honor to be forevermore
To you elements all four! (8480-8483)

Persephone—as the Greeks and Goethe knew—preserves at her side the faithful images of the once-existing, of the “things long since no longer present.” Does she give over to this origination the likeness of Helena, so that it, with spirit and body united, again becomes alive? Idle question. Helena arrives,

Unsteady still from the tumbling motion of the rocking waves . . . (8490)

Afterword

The reader is now asked to return to the appearance of Galatea (“Galatea approaches on her shell-chariot”). Even the “non-mythological” interpreter Karl Reinhardt uses for his discussion a mode of expression drawn from the science of mythology. In this scene there appears, he says, the “mythologem that surpasses all others.” He places the emphasis on the personal aspect of the mythological, in this instance Goethe’s personal life, seemingly contradicting the known impersonal character of the mythologem. Mythology, however, has just this paradox, that the universally human becomes deeply and movingly human as soon as it finds consonance with our own personal experience. Hence it is correct to say that the generic, the “mythological” in the myth—such must be said at the beginning of any attempt at interpretation—comes immediately to our attention as soon as it assumes personal expression. For Goethe, the entire mythology of the sea divinities became real. Let us quote Reinhardt’s words on a mythologem that is hardly to be surpassed, which appears toward the end of the Aegean Festival, before we attempt to form a deeper interpretation of the whole final scene, the meeting of Nereus and Galatea and what follows:

Whatever parallels may well be found beyond those already found—for example, whatever the ancient tradition of the dolphin-riding youth may have contributed to the last ride of the homunculus upon Proteus as dolphin—I have so far never encountered the symbol of the dual divinities in the form of mother and daughter, as husband and wife, nor as mother or father and son (not to mention other cult pairings), but only as father and daughter. What an intimation! How like Goethe!

Like Goethe, certainly. But if it were only a matter of a parallel from a cultic mythology, the duality of Zeus and Pallas Athena would have to be considered, a pairing that by reason of the mythologem of the birth of Athena from the head of Zeus may truly be spoken of as “primal-mythological.”

This association is attested in Classical Greece from the period of Homer and Hesiod. In various cults we even find divine pairs that are emphasized by the use of identical appellations: Zeus Polieus and Athena Polias, Zeus Bulaios and Athena Bulaia, Zeus Agoraios and Athena Agoraia, Zeus Phemios and Athena Phemia, Zeus Kynthios and Athena Kynthia. In the archaic period we find Zeus Phratrios and Athena Phratrion, and the series could be extended further. This unique duality is exalted by the religious orator Aelius Aristides,

even independently of the added appellation. And the mystery cult in Ancient Greece did not fail to hint at a mystery. In the sacred precinct of Athena Itonia in the vicinity of the Boeotian city of Koroneia, Pausanias saw a statue of Zeus by the sculptor Agorakritos and the statue of the goddess. An ancient cameo shows the two divinities side by side. Pausanias identifies the god as Zeus, but probably does not intend the heavenly but the subterranean Zeus, Zeus Katachthaios, an identification that the cameo also expresses through the inclusion of Kerberos as an attribute. Strabo calls this figure Hades and notes that this god was venerated together with Athena "on some sort of mystical grounds." A reason for this may have been that Hades signifies the darker aspect of Zeus himself. The figure opposite in the cameo, and indeed the intimate connection between father and daughter, is by no means unattested in the Greek religion.

But the presence of the prior existence of this duality in mythology is not what is at issue here. The mystery of the meeting of father and daughter, in the form of the ever-found and ever-separated pair, Nereus and Galatea, belongs without question to the personal mythology of Goethe. A comparison between this pair and the classical father-daughter pair, Zeus and Athena, only emphasizes the difference between Pallas, the father's daughter, and Galatea, "an image of the mother," thereby enabling us to recognize another mythologem, one that is inherent in Goethe's personality and yet is also universally human. The re-encounter of a man who stems from a later, patriarchal period takes place not with his own feminine likeness, not with the father's daughter, but with the same alluring femininity that once and always is attracting him, a femininity that today belongs to another, younger generation. For that generation, the patriarchal man is father, the source of existence and the embodiment of the origin of being and wisdom. When he with his wise essence tries to approach that youthful femininity, he must nevertheless forego the attempt—he can no longer "be taken across." He must be content with the encounter, with the "glance" that in the periodic nature of mythological existence returns on a yearly basis:

Oh, let them take me across!
But I delight in the single glance
That must suffice for the whole year. (8429-8431)

This is not merely a personal experience but a universally human one. Even so, the content of a mythologem, which is ever suffered as the personal fate of mortal man, did on only one occasion, through Goethe, find its adequate artistic and—through the ingenious use of Greek divine figures—its ever-valid mythological creation. Goethe, with the "luck" of his genius, chose Nereus, the

“Halios Geron,” the Old Man of the Sea of the Greeks, to whom was given long life and its fullness of being and wisdom. They were given without any trace of saturnine melancholy, in contrast to the mask of Father Okeanos, who leads a melancholic train. Goethe himself was not granted that encounter with his own, corporeal daughter. How often he may have wished for that tender feeling in a meeting with the “daughters,” the femininity of a younger generation, and not only with a daughter-in-law—a feeling that finds expression in the words of Nereus to Galatea! And how often he may have seen that happiness in the young eyes that looked at him, a happiness that Galatea, in response to “You are my darling!” answers:

Oh father! The happiness!
Dolphin, linger! The sight binds me! (8425-8426)

With this look, with these words of Galatea, Goethe’s personal mythology becomes raised to a mystery that is no longer limited by the personal life of the poet: the mystery of the encounter of the feminine soul with its paternal origin. This experience of Goethe, like that of classical mysticism, and in contrast to Christian mysticism, takes place in the pure element, with choruses of charming and enticing elemental creatures playing about, not bothered by the irony of the poet but only made more festive and playful by it. Nereus, receiving the glance from Galatea, is no longer the mask of Goethe. Rather, the wise and handsome old man named Goethe was the mask of that divineness that in this context assumes an appropriate corporeal form in the figure of Nereus. And an aspect of that divineness is the capacity to hold fast to one’s own happiness when sight of the wise Old Man of the Sea elicits from a Galatea the exclamation, “Dolphin, linger!” With the attainment of such happiness, the poet abides at the periphery of that other mystery, whose beholder Nereus now becomes.

Goethe, at the time of his *Eastern-Western Divan*, at the generational divide, before he stood at the periphery with Nereus, had celebrated this mystery once before, noting that everything that now follows becomes clear as the resumption of the same theme: the resumption of the mystery on a plane of greater antiquity and profounder wisdom. The mystery begins with the injunction of Proteus, which opens the homunculus’ sea journey:

Wed ye to the ocean! (8320)

Thales then encourages the future bridegroom of the watery element by using the scientific language of Goethe’s time, and hints at the developmental doctrine of Oken. If we now compare this with a passage from a contemporary

psychologist, an analyst of the elements, Gaston Bachelard, a passage from his *Water and Dreams*. This comparison can for the present be instructive as an initial, general viewpoint:

When we have understood that every combination of material elements is, for the unconscious, a marriage, we will be able to give account of the almost always feminine character attributed to water by the naive imagination and by the poetic imagination . . .

But Greek mythology consists of much more than what Bachelard calls “the naive imagination” and “the poetic imagination.” It goes further, by wedding Okeanos to Thethys and Poseidon to Amphitrite, by giving a wife and daughter to Nereus, and by letting Aphrodite flirt with Neritos, the son of Nereus. Goethe’s Galatea is more than the idealized femininity of a younger generation: her stature also encompasses the watery element. As a goddess she bears the *femininity of water* no less than she bears the femininity of the “daughter.” Hence we see here a repetition here—with the elemental roles reversed—of that “Die and be anew!” to which the poem “Blessed Longing,” also a mystery-teaching (“Tell it to no one but the wise. . .”), was dedicated.

There in the dampness of the atmosphere was a living being, begotten by the “refreshing breeze of the love-night,” surrounded by the “shadow of darkness,” a creature that yearned for death in the flame. Craving for the light, it came flying and spellbound. Here the fiery spiritual creature is in the grip of an all-powerful yearning. It arrived “a spirit in the watery vastness.” We have to imagine that it finally abandoned the back of the Proteus-dolphin and came flying and spellbound: it took flame around the shell, around Galatea’s feet. And he who smashes himself there on the lustrous throne, him a fate overtakes in the water (“What fiery wonder lights the waves...”)—the fate of the butterfly whose “blessed longing” brings him to the flame. Is it a “higher copulation”? The image of the joining of the elements contains within it something that goes beyond the elements themselves, and beyond mere animal copulation—free of the burning torment of the death in the flame, making its classification in “higher” or “lower” spheres superfluous. In *this* “Die and be anew!” dying is no longer of any importance. Only Becoming holds sway.