2012

The Meaning of the Eternal Feminine in Goethe's Drama Faust

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THE MEANING OF THE ETERNAL FEMININE IN GOETHE’S DRAMA FAUST

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A Thesis submitted to the
Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Degree Awarded:
Spring Semester, 2012

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude goes to Dr. Weber who supervised this work. He generously gave me his time and directed me to the necessary resources that I needed in my analysis. His patient guidance and continuous support were pivotal factors that contributed to the successful completion of this work. Dr. Weber introduced me to the treasures of German culture such as the great works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Taking Dr. Weber’s course on Goethe’s *Faust* sparked my interest in this renowned drama and directly lead to the writing of this thesis.

My special thanks goes also to Dr. Maier-Katkin, Dr. Homann, and Dr. Lehleiter for providing intellectually stimulating German classes that I had pleasure to take while pursuing my Masters in German Studies.

Finally, I would also like to thank the entire German department for all the resources, advice, and other forms of personal and technical support they offer to students while disseminating the treasures of the German language and culture.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................... v

INTRODUCTION .........................................................................................................................1

THE ETERNAL FEMININE IN PLATONIC, POST-PLATONIC AND CATHOLIC
THOUGHT, MYTH AND CULT. .................................................................4

  Introduction ...............................................................................................................................4
  Eternal Feminine in Platonic Thought ...................................................................................5
  Eternal Feminine in post-Platonic Mystical and Christian Thought .........................10
  Eternal Feminine in Catholic Thought ...........................................................................16
  Conclusion ...............................................................................................................................20

ETERNAL FEMININE VS. ETERNAL MASCULINE IN GOTHE´S FAUST .....................23

  The Theme of Evil ...................................................................................................................24
  The Role of the Father Figure ...............................................................................................36
  Conclusion ...............................................................................................................................41

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ETERNAL FEMININE IN FAUST .............................43

  Eternal Feminine as the Platonic World of the Perfect Forms and as Indian Feminine
  Goddess: The Mothers in Faust .........................................................................................44
  Eternal Feminine as the Abundant Fruitful Mother Nature .............................................49
  Eternal Feminine as Sublimated Sexual Energy .................................................................55
  Conclusion ...............................................................................................................................63

REFERENCES ..............................................................................................................................67

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .......................................................................................................70
ABSTRACT

This work analyzes the theme of the Eternal Feminine and its significance within Goethe’s famous drama Faust. The first chapter delineates and explores the various rich definitions of the Eternal Feminine found in the realms of theology, philosophy, and literature. The chapter concludes with the assertion that although the definitions of the Eternal Feminine are myriad and complex and that there is no one clear definition, that a careful inspection of these definitions allows one to ascribe to the concept of the Eternal Feminine certain characteristics. Thus, the Eternal Feminine is Beauty, Truth, Good, Love. The second chapter addresses in detail the theme of evil as represented in Faust with the purpose to show that the Goethe’s Eternal Feminine is a form of salvation and therefore cannot be understood without a discussion of the theme of evil to which it acts as an antidote. The chapter proceeds with the analysis of the role of the Eternal Masculine or the Father Figure as represented in Faust and its relation to the Eternal Feminine in the drama. The third chapter focuses on the various representations of the Eternal Feminine in Faust (as the Perfect World of Platonic Ideals (Eros), as the Indian Feminine Goddess, the Fruitful Mother Nature, and the Sublimated Sexual Energy). Finally, the Platonic and Pagan elements in Goethe’s idea of the Eternal Feminine are examined and contrasted with the Christian idea of salvation. A conclusion is asserted that Goethe’s Salvation via Eternal Feminine is the return to the pre-Christian search for life’s meaning and redemption from suffering and evil.
INTRODUCTION

Alles Vergängliche
Ist nur ein Gleichnis;
Das Unzulängliche,
Hier wird`s Ereignis;
Das Unbeschreibliche,
Hier ist`s getan;
Das Ewig-Weibliche
Zieht uns hinan (Goethe, 12104-12111. 488-489).

Faust:

Nun gut wer bist du denn?
Mephistopheles:
Ein Teil von jener Kraft,
Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft (Goethe 1336-1337. 65).

These two well-known citations are from Goethe`s world renowned drama *Faust*. Both citations challenge the reader to ponder two important topics: the meaning of the world`s existence and the mystery of the concept of evil. Both citations have been translated, rewritten, and/or reinterpreted by countless thinkers (writers, philosophers, mystics, theologians, etc.), all coming from different perspectives and belonging to different cultures. At the same time Goethe himself was influenced (directly and indirectly) by the philosophical and religious ideas of Plato and such Post-Platonic thinkers as Jakob Böhme. Goethe`s ideas and his vision of the Eternal Feminine influenced Christian theological and mystical thought. This connection will play a central part in this exploration of one particular aspect of Goethe`s concept of the
Eternal Feminine and that is of its function as an agent of salvation. Salvation is the central theme of Christian thought and the main purpose of this work will be to show that Goethe’s idea of Eternal Feminine has strong redemptive elements to it. In other words, I will examine Goethe’s *Faust* primarily as a drama of the salvation of its main character and the role that the Eternal Feminine plays in it.

In the beginning of my discussion, the varied definitions of the Eternal Feminine found in the Platonic and Post-Platonic philosophical thought as well as in the realm of Catholic theology, will be explored. The mystical experience of the Eternal Feminine in the writings of Jakob Böhme will be given a special attention. I will also delineate the experiences of the Eternal Feminine that are as various as its definitions. For example, for Plato the idea of the Eternal Feminine was a product of both intellectual contemplation and his observations of what he saw as an imperfect world around him. For the German mystic Jakob Böhme, it was a personal mystical encounter personified by a powerful vision that gave rise to philosophical thought.

The choice of the two aforementioned quotes from *Faust* was not accidental. The discussion of salvation elements of the Eternal Feminine necessitates the discussion of evil. The types of evil such as social, personal, metaphysical, and natural and their representation in *Faust 1* and *Faust 2* will be analyzed. The personification of evil within the character of Mephisto as well as the topic of the nature of evil will be afforded special attention as they contain the key to the understanding of evil as viewed by Goethe. A main argument of this work is that the Eternal Feminine is the manner by which Goethe tried to solve the riddle of the meaning of the world’s existence and to overcome the contradictions posed by the presence of evil in the different aspects of life.

The existence of evil should be analyzed in its connection to the Masculine Principle. This concept is directly introduced in the drama through the figure of God the Father in the *Prologue in Heaven* and then presented indirectly throughout the entire drama via its main character Faust and the host of minor masculine characters. The
Masculine Principle and its connection to the social evil (stagnating conservatism, merciless competition, suppression of creativity) will be discussed in detail. In the drama the Masculine Principle is in many regards the darker side of existence. The role of the Feminine Principle is both to counteract and enlighten the negative side of its masculine counterpart as well as to harmonize and complete it. Though the Eternal Feminine is introduced to the reader directly only once, and that at the very end of the drama, it is actually expressed indirectly throughout the entire drama in such female characters as Gretchen and Helena as well as in the descriptions of Nature. The detailed analysis of these characters as well as the Goethe’s representation of Nature provides the key to its redemptive qualities and answers the question of how exactly the Eternal Feminine counteracts the evil in the material world and within society. Beauty in its multiple forms, through unrestrained sexual desire which via sublimation leads to the free creative striving and through nature’s limitless procreative power, all result in constant propagation of life.

Ultimately, Goethe’s idea of salvation through the Eternal Feminine will be contrasted with the concept of the traditional Christian Salvation with the conclusion that these ideas are not identical. The Eternal Feminine also plays an important role in Christianity where the Mother of God and the Divine Sophia (God’s Wisdom) are venerated. However, the central redemptive role belongs to Christ without Whom Christianity is unimaginable. Therefore, my analysis will reveal that Goethe’s Salvation via Eternal Feminine is the way of going back to the pre-Christian search for life’s meaning and salvation from evil.
CHAPTER ONE

ETERNAL FEMININE IN PLATONIC, POST-PLATONIC AND CATHOLIC THOUGHT, MYTH AND CULT.

Introduction

No author can create something out of nothing. The basis for one’s work lies in the rich heritage of those who came before him or her. Philosophical concepts, legends and myths, and religious ideas spread not only from one person to another, but can influence the collective subconscious of entire nations across civilizations and cultures.

The idea of the Eternal Feminine as expressed in Goethe’s drama Faust is no exception in this regard. The German genius was not the inventor of the concept of the Eternal Feminine. His thoughts have been influenced by those who came before him and were created on the fertile soil of his rich cultural heritage. Goethe himself repeatedly stressed the fact that from the very moment one comes into this world one is influenced by his surroundings and culture. It seems that even Goethe undermines the very possibility of the absolute originality in art, poetry and philosophical thought: “Die Freude des ersten Gewahrwerdens, des sogenannten Entdeckens kann uns niemand nehmen. Verlangen wir aber auch Ehre davon, die kann uns sehr verkümmert warden; denn wir sind meistens nicht die Ersten. Was heißt auch erfinden und wer kann sagen, daß er dieß oder jenes erfunden habe?” (Goethe-Grumach, 788). It is impossible to identify every source of influence upon Goethe’s concept of the Eternal Feminine as represented in his drama Faust. There are many characteristics of Goethe’s concept of the Eternal Feminine that reveal the influence of Platonists. Goethe considered Plato one of the most important thinkers of the Western world. He designated Plato, along with Aristotle and the Bible, as the three foundations upon which the entirety of Western
Plato was indubitably the source of Goethe’s inspiration. However, Goethe’s idea of the Eternal Feminine cannot be considered to have a purely Platonic or neo-Platonic character. The ideas contained in Faust are too irrational and antinomical. The world as described in Faust is too chaotic, unpredictable, dynamic and polarized to perfectly fit into the classical, well-defined and rationalized categories of the Plato’s world of Perfect Forms. Though a self-confessed admirer of the Greco-Roman antiquity, Goethe belongs to an entire different generation of writers, philosophers and thinkers that have been influenced by the Romantic Movement. It is generally accepted that Goethe was influenced by the ideas of German romanticism and Faust has not only classical but also many romantic elements in it. Therefore, in order to better understand Goethe’s idea of the Eternal Feminine, I will discuss in addition to Plato, the ideas of Jakob Böhme, a 16th century German mystic and a figure of a great importance to Romanticism. In many ways it is impossible to understand Goethe’s ideas of the Eternal Feminine without describing the most important points of Plato’s and others’ representations of the concept. Therefore I will start with a discussion of the Platonic representation of the Eternal Feminine and then move on to Jacob Böhme. Since Mother Gloriosa is an important Character of the Drama and she is also named by Goethe as the Eternal Feminine, the Catholic view of Mary will be discussed in this chapter.

Eternal Feminine in Platonic Thought
(as Intermediate between the Perfect World and Reality, Eros, God’s Wisdom)

One of the most important philosophers related to the concept of the Eternal Feminine was Plato. He was the first to realize that the world which man perceived with
his six senses was not the only possible reality. What one sees, feels, tastes and hears can be only the shadows of the perfect reality which these shadows and shapes represent. This reality was a spiritual world of Perfect Ideas to which human souls belonged. Each idea in this perfect realm was an immaterial prototype of the multiplicity of material objects on earth. The perfect ideas themselves formed not just a mechanical aggregation but rather a perfect unity. This unperceivable (to the human senses) spiritual unity was the true reality while the multiplicity of material objects was no more than its broken shadow. Thus, what one can see with the physical eye is less real than what one can learn to see with the inner-spiritual eye. This perfect other world of Ideas possesses the only true value and should be the object of one's strivings: “Sie stehen vor uns als unsinnliche Realitäten, faßbar nur dem Verstande, erhoben über Raum und Zeit, von ewiger Geltung. Sie bilden das wahre und eigentliche Sein, etwas so Wesenhaftes, daß jedes Ding nur dadurch lebt, webt und ist, daß es an diesen Vollwesenheiten, den „Ideen“, teilnimmt” (Schwarz 35).

This world of perfect ideas contains a unity that represents perfect beauty. The human soul is of eternal value and is infinitely beautiful and immortal. However, each soul has been trapped in the material body and cannot escape that prison. What makes it even more problematic is that the soul has lost its memory of its perfect origin. The memory remerges sometimes to someone as an eternal earning and eternal desire, “ein ewiger Wunsch und eine ewige Sehnsucht” (Schwarz 36). This eternal desire cannot be satisfied with anything that belongs to the material world alone since this world consists of the things that are in themselves no more than shadows of the perfect Ideas: “Die Dinge dieser Erde reizen unsere Sehnsucht, befriedigen sie aber nicht. Sie sind ja nur schwache Abbilder der unermesslichen Fülle, die der Seele im Jenseits gegenwärtig war (Schwarz 37). This eternal striving for the lost paradise of the soul’s otherworldly homeland can serve as a source of poetic inspiration: “ich besaß es doch einmal, was so
köstlich ist, daß man, ach, zu seiner Qual nimmer es vergißt” (Goethe qtd. in Schwarz 37).

If there are separate realities, the world of the harmonious unity of the perfectly beautiful Ideas and the imperfect material world of worldly things, what is their relationship? It seems that somehow the immortal, immaterial souls keep falling into the bodily traps of the material world, therefore, there must be a channel that connects these two separate worlds. Plato considered Eros to be the passage or intermediary between the two worlds: "Mit der innersten Kraft des Trieblebens, der Sehnsucht des Eros, werden wir nach Platon zu den Ideen gedrängt” (Schwarz 36).

Eros is the main theme of Plato’s Symposium. The philosophical ideas of Plato are presented in the form of dialogues that occur between the guests of a banquet that takes place in the Agathon’s house in Athens. Each guest is asked to deliver a speech in praise to the god Eros. The guests say the Eros makes people dutiful and brave, that he is young and beautiful, that Eros inspires lovers to give their lives for each other, and that it is a source of the highest bliss. As Love brings peace to the world of men and to the nature, it thereby defeats evil. One of the guests named Aristophanes asserts that love has a healing power in this imperfect world: “For Love is of all the Gods the most friendly to mortals; and the physician of those wounds, whose cure would be the greatest happiness which could be conferred upon the human race” (Plato 26).

Aristophanes proceeds further by telling an interesting legend which can explain the reason of the power and tragedy of sexual attraction. Based on the legend as told by Aristophanes, the true original man was not of male or female gender but was androgynous. This androgynous race was strong and became a threat to gods: “They were strong also, and had aspiring thoughts. They it was who levied war against the Gods” (Plato 27). The Gods, in return, punished the proud people by cutting them in half (male and female) which made the humans weaker and produced the tragic attraction of the two sexes. The two halves are constantly seeking each other out and
trying to reunite, but even the sexual union can only be temporal though it became since then the only mode of procreation for the new human race:

> In this manner is generation not produced, by the union of male and female; so that from the embrace of a man and woman the race is propagated . . . from this period, mutual Love has naturally existed in human beings; that reconciler and bond of union of their original nature, which seeks to make two, one, and to heal the divided nature of man. Every one of us is thus the half of what may be properly termed a man, and like a flat fish cut in two, is imperfect portion of an entire whole, perpetually necessitated to seek the half belonging to him (Plato 29).

This interesting Platonic view of the perfect man as an androgen is important for the explanation of the neo-Platonic view of the role of sexual love as views of androgen as the ideal state of humanity of Jakob Böhme which will be discussed later.

There is another view on the nature and the role of Love-Eros presented in the Symposium and that is in the speech of Socrates. Socrates in his famous manner starts challenging his listeners to come to the most interesting conclusions. He states that love desires something which is not of itself. Therefore, its main characteristic is not necessarily that it is the most beautiful of all things or an immortal deity, but rather an intermediary, a messenger, a bridge and the way between the world of the spiritual and the material:

> he is neither mortal or immortal, but something intermediate. . . He interprets and makes a communication between divine and human things, conveying the prayers and sacrifices of men to the Gods, and communicating the commands and directions concerning the mode of worship most pleasing and to them, from Gods to men. He fills up that intermediate space between these
two classes of beings, so as to bind together, by his own power, the whole universe of things (Plato 45).

Socrates concluded that Eros, or Love, is a striving for Wisdom and that Wisdom is the most significant and the most desirable of all things. Wisdom is the goal of all desire. One achieves Wisdom through philosophy which is an “intermediate state between ignorance and wisdom” (Plato 47).

Plato via Socrates communicated one important quality of Love and that is its dynamic and contradictory nature. By repeating the word “intermediate” many times Plato shows that Love is not a fixed entity, but a mobile power that pulls the lovers to the new heights and leads them to the most important virtues and values. Eros moves the world to perfection, it is dynamic and it makes the world dynamic. Eros leads humans to beauty and fruitful spirituality. Thus, Love/Eros is the source of all creativity: “Wherefore, whenever that which is pregnant with the generative principle approaches what is beautiful, it becomes transported with delight, and is poured forth in overflowing pleasure and propagates” (Plato 51). Plato noticed here another important quality of love in relation to the material world. Love maintains life on the level of the species by propagation in every creature. It counteracts the law of death that is present everywhere in natural world. “In this manner everything mortal is preserved: not that it is constant and eternal, like that which is divine; but that in the place of what has grown old and is departed, it leaves another new like that which it was itself...” (Plato 53). Every creature dies on the individual level but continues to live on at the level of the species: “Wonder not, then, if everything by nature cherishes that which was produced from itself, for this earnest Love is a tendency towards eternity” (Plato 53). This striving for perfection meant not merely an intellectual contemplation for Plato. Plato believed that the ideal of eternal perfection should be reflected by the creation of a society that would resemble the perfect divine world through justice, laws and proper organization:
“The greatest and most admirable wisdom is that which regulates the government and states, and which is called moderation and justice” (Plato 54).

Plato via Socrates pointed out another important quality of Love. It is always the love of the supreme beauty and beauty cannot be defined or limited to the beautiful proportions of the material body of a human being or of an animal. Beauty can be anything material since the sole reason why anything can be experienced as beautiful is through the participation in the highest Beauty which is essentially harmony and unity. It is good, wise, excellent and virtuous. All these qualities bring out the most important characteristic of Love, which is that it is the key to immortality: “it is not easy to find a better assistant than Love in seeking to communicate immortality to our human natures” (Plato 58).

Eternal Feminine in post-Platonic mystical and Christian thought

Plato’s teachings of the Eternal Feminine, as well as other aspects of the thought of the great philosopher, have influenced and continue to influence Western philosophical and theological thought up to the present day: The neo-Platonic Philosophy, the ideas of the Church Fathers, the Cabbalistic Jewish Mysticism, and the Christian Mysticism of Jacob Böhme have all been inspired by Plato. Although these thinkers and their schools of thought are different in many aspects, they all have similar goals in common: to explain the higher spiritual reality and the mystery of the universe by giving a special attention to the Feminine principle and by trying to define the special role of this principle and trying to juxtapose it to the Masculine principle or that of the eternal Father which plays the central role in the Jewish-Christian tradition. Among German post-Platonic thinkers, the German shoemaker Jakob Böhme deserves a special attention. Though his primary vocation was not that of a philosopher, a writer or a poet, Böhme’s writings eventually gained influence upon prominent thinkers and
scholars and thereby influenced the Western philosophical, religious and literary thought for centuries including up to the present time.

Herbert Deinert, in his review of the Weeks`Böhme`s biography, points out that the Böhme`s knowledge of Plato and of the neo-Platonic tradition was most likely informal: “Weeks readily admits Böhme`s proximity to Gnosticism and neo-Platonism, also here he was probably more besprochen than beleisen.”(Deinert 398). Herbert Deinert makes another important point related to the influence of Böhme on the Romantic movement in Germany. Thus, Böhme influenced one of the Sturm and Drang`s greatest proponents, Goethe. However, the influence of Böhme on Goethe was indirect: “It is in this spirit that Andrew Weeks sets out to interpret a body of writing that has fascinated and influenced people as diverse as Liton and Newton and Goethe (the latter by way of Gottfried Arnold), the romantics, von Baader and Hegel, Buber and Steiner and Berdyaev...” (Deinert 398).

One of the most interesting and original aspects of Böhme`s thinking is his interpretation of the Divine. Traditionally, Christian understanding of God does not allow for any dark aspect or any imperfection to be part of it. God is light, love, completeness, goodness. Evil is the result of the disobedience of the first created, and then fallen angels, and the sequential disobedience of the first man - Adam. In accordance with traditional Christian doctrine, there lies a great gap between the created natural material world and that of the Divine. Although a firm believer in the basic Christian truths, Böhme dares to think of the Christian God in a very unorthodox manner. Trying to understand the origins of evil, Böhme finds them in the mysterious abyss that lies outside of God and that is not part of the created world either. In other words, Böhme allows in his thinking the possibility of the existence of something outside of God, something that is not part of God. This abyss is the center of everything that is created: “… the groaning birth of eternity in the centrum of nature, toward the
anger for the birth of darkness, anguish, torment and characteristics … this locus of the world … the abyss” (“The Way to Christ” 127).

For Böhme there is no darkness that is not God. Everything is God, the good and the bad, the dark and the light, the positive and the negative. This view can be (though mistakenly) considered pantheistic and resembles the Eastern spirituality which does not view the Divine as only good, perfect and positive, but as something that can be dark, incomplete and negative. Thus, the Divine in Eastern spirituality (e.g. in Hinduism) is life and death, beauty and ugliness, bliss and horror. Likewise for Böhme, God unites in Himself all possible characteristics and qualities and yet He remains the ultimately good and perfect God:

9. God is all. He is darkness and light, love and wrath, fire and light. But he calls Himself only God according to the light of His love. 10. There is an eternal contrarium between darkness and light. Neither grasps the other and neither is the other. And yet there is only one being separated solely by the source and by the will. Yet it is not a divided being, but one principium divided so that each is in the other as a nothing (“The Way to Christ” 127).

Böhme’s mystical experience brings him to the highly paradoxical, antinomical conclusions, such as the following: “And on the other part life proceeds out of death, and death must therefore be a cause of life … Fierce wrathful death is thus a root of life” (“Six theosophic points” 20-21). His ideas are irrational, contradictory and therefore, hard to grasp. They cannot be put into a neat logical chain and cannot be turned into a strict philosophical or theological system. They are meant to be experienced, not analyzed or logically understood. They are colorful images and symbols and not systems. His ideas are similar to poetry that is meant to be experienced, felt, and not analyzed or logically understood. Böhme’s mystical poetical theology and philosophy are exactly what Goethe meant when he wrote that there is no need for pure
philosophy, that poetry and religion already contain all the necessary philosophical thoughts: “eine abgesonderte Philosophie sei nicht nötig, indem sie schon in Religion und Poesie vollkommen enthalten sei; da in der Poesie ein gewisse Glaube an das Unmögliche, in der Religion ein eben solcher Glaube an das Unergründliche stattfinden mußte. . . .” (qtd. in Grumach 983).

Böhme brings the irrational into the Divine. He makes the unexplainable, the bottomless abyss, the inexhaustible source of all life, of all creativity. God, or the Divine for Böhme, is all in all (the light and darkness). His Eternal Feminine, or the Divine Sophia, is the God’s Other, the perfect universe, the perfect humanity. What was Böhme’s presentation of the Eternal Feminine? He gave the Eternal feminine a Biblical name he found in the Old Testament—Sophia, God’s Wisdom. There is one passage in Proverbs that gives the following characteristic of the God’s Wisdom and makes her mysterious appearance a riddle to be solved for the mystics and theologians:

Then I was by him, as one brought up with him,
And I was daily his delight,
Rejoicing always before him,
Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth.
And my delights were with the sons of men (Proverbs 8:30-31, 836).

Wisdom hath builded her house,
She hath hewn out her seven pillars: (Proverbs 9:1, 836).

It is difficult to define the role of God’s Wisdom within the Christian doctrine and to understand Sophia’s place next to the Trinity. Generally, the concepts of God the Father, the Son and of the Holy Spirit are considered masculine. In contrast to the idea of God’s Wisdom, Sophia suggests the existence of a forth feminine Principle next to the concept of the Trinity.
Böhme calls his Sophia by many names and gives her various characteristics. When trying to explain the origins of Sophia, Böhme used the language of myth. In accordance to the myth, Sophia was once in unity with the original man Adam. She was his Virgin, his purity and God’s Wisdom within him, but as a result of the Fall, Adam loses his Virgin and receives a woman (here the myth resembles Platonic myth of the Androgen, described in Symposium). The goal of man is to get God’s wisdom back, to regain his original wholeness and, thus, to unite with God again: “Aber im lichten Prinzipium oder Mysterium gewinnt der Mensch, dank der “eingeleibten Gnade”, sein verlorenes paradiesisches Bild zurück, wenn sich Sophia mit der Seele neu verbindet” (Böhme qtd. in Tesch 30).

It is important to make a clear distinction at this point. The Noble Virgin of Böhme is not the equivalent of the Virgin Mary. Böhme, staying true to Lutheran tradition does not give as much thought to the role of the Virgin Mary as Catholics do. However, he refers to her, though briefly, in his mystical righting as well:

O great, holiest, Name and Power of God JEHOVAH who has moved Yourself in our corrupted heavenly humanity by Your sweetest power JESUS in the promised fulfillment of the covenant made with our father Adam in the woman’s seed of the Virgin Mary, You have led Your living being in Yourself, Your holy power, in the Virgin Wisdom of God, into our corrupted humanity, and have given us life, victory and an new birth (“The Way to Christ” 52).

As it seems from the passage, the Virgin Mary and the Virgin Wisdom of God are two different concepts and here Böhme makes a clear distinction between these two ideas. However, there is a relation between the Feminine principle of God’s Wisdom Sophia and that of Mary, the Theotokos, and this relation is stressed in the works of the Catholics mystics. The Virgin Sophia for Böhme is a redemptive aspect of Christ in its relation to the fallen humanity, in this sense she cannot be Christ’s Mother and is not
necessarily of a feminine gender: “... conversation in the internal ground of man, between the poor wounded soul and the noble Virgin Sophia, as between the spirit of Christ in the new birth of the soul” (“The Way to Christ” 56).

Böhme visualizes the process of the spiritual transformation of the soul and of the repentance using the image of marriage that occurs between the unworthy lover (the sinful human soul) and his beautiful bride (the God’s Wisdom, Sophia). In a manner of the Old Testament’s Songs of Songs, Böhme gives the description of this mystical union passionate, erotic undertones, which makes some of the passages of Böhme’s writing sound like a love poem, where religious and erotic motives intervene and religious and mystical experience of repentance is likened to the erotic experience of being close and receiving a kiss from one’s beloved one:

But the noble Sophia draws Herself near to the soul’s being and kisses it in a friendly manner and tinctures the dark fire of the soul with Her love beams and penetrates the soul with Her loving kiss. Then the soul leaps in its body for great joy in the power of his virginal love. It triumphs and praises the great God, by virtue of the noble Sophia (The Way to Christ 57).

In Böhme’s mystical experience of the Sophia, the romantic and erotic interpretation is applied to the passages of the New Testament, wherein Sophia is speaking through Christ: “I do not marry your earthly flesh for I am a Queen of heaven and my kingdom is not of this world [John 18:36]” (“The way to Christ” 60).

In such passages Sophia is Christ, or a certain aspect of Christ that is directed to humanity. In the New Testament there is an interesting image of the Church representing as a bride that marries Christ, the union of the perfect humanity and of the Word Logos is compared to a marital union. Initially, Böhme’s marriage of the Divine Sophia to the human soul appears to be no more than an another rendering of the famous New Testament motive. However, regardless of the similarities, Böhme’s looks
at the mystical union with the Divine from a different perspective. He speaks not of the entire Church as a bride of Christ but rather about an individual soul that unites with one aspect of God, His Divine Wisdom (The Virgin Sophia) and with his perfect humanity through Christ:

Immediately the marriage with the Virgin Sophia begins when the two lovers receive each other in joy, and press into each other with completely inner desire, in the sweetest love of God. Then in a short time the marriage of the lamb is prepared when the Virgin Sophia (as the worthy humanity of Christ) is wedded with the soul. And what happens then, and what kind of joy then arises, Christ indicates [by referring to] the great joy over the repentant sinner that is held before God`s eyes and all angels in heaven for the man than for more than ninety-nine righteous who need no repentance (Luke 15:7) (“The Way to Christ” 70).

Here again, the well-known Biblical passage is rendered with the help of erotic imagery and the ideas of the Scriptures are given a new mystical interpretation. If for Böhme the Virgin Sophia is the true Queen of Heaven and does not have any direct connection to the Virgin Mary, in Catholic thought the latter bares the title of the Queen of Heaven and is of foremost importance.

**Eternal Feminine in Catholic Thought**

In the concluding scene of his drama *Faust*, Goethe refers to the Virgin Mary as the “Mater Gloriosa”, “Jungfrau”, “Mutter”, “Königin”, “Göttin” (Faust 12102-12103. 488). Many identical or similar titles have been commonly assigned to her by the Catholic Church. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the role of Mary within Catholicism. Mary has always been an object of fascination, admiration and devotion by the clergy and by the laypeople of artists and poets, theologians and
mystics alike. Being the Mother of God is probably the most fascinating title a woman could have. Even Martin Luther considered Mary’s divine motherhood a sufficient reason for the admiration of Her: “For that reason her dignity is summed up in one phrase when we call her Mother of God; no one can say greater things of her or to her, even if he had as many tongues as leaves and blades of grass, as stars in heaven and sands on the seashore. It should also be mediated in the heart what that means: to be the Mother of God” (quot. in Haffner 123).

Mary’s special significance is not restricted solely to Catholicism. The belief is held that Mary mysteriously conceived Jesus through the Holy Spirit without participation of man is held by almost every major Christian denomination, which makes this conception immaculate and in every aspect supernatural. In addition to the dogma of the immaculate conception, the Catholic Church believes in the perpetual virginity of Mary, who was a virgin before Christ’s conception and remained a virgin after Her Son’s birth, which makes Mary a perfect example of sexual purity and gives her Motherhood a unique and a paradoxical hue. She is simultaneously a birth mother and a virgin when in all known human history one state always necessitates the exclusion of the other. One the most fascinating attributes of Mary in the Catholic tradition is Her complete freedom from sin and corruption during Her earthly life. Thus, Mary was untouched by original sin to which the rest of the human race was subjected by the disobedience of Adam’s wife, Eve. In this sense Mary is granted a unique position by the Catholic Church as it is only Christ who is supposed to be without sin. By being the Mother of God and the sinless, Mary is given another important role in the Catholic understanding of Her, and that is of an active participant in the redemptive work done by her Son. She is a mediator between the believers and Christ. She is both a protector and a counselor. She intercedes for the souls of the faithful who pray to her and continues the works of salvation in the heavenly realm where He dwells after her assumption:
Mary is the meeting point for those who dwell in heaven and those who dwell on earth; hers is the totally pure hymn of praise, hers is the most efficacious prayer; she is the benign and maternal presence which brings about in the community of disciples growth toward greater fraternity and family. In a discreet manner, she is present to the Church where her Son, the High Priest, the only Master and Lord, dwells; she is the sign that the liberation of the cosmos (cf. Rm 8:19-22) has already begun … (Pontifical International Marian Academy 66).

Mary occupies another important title within the Catholic theology. She is not only the Mother of God, the Mother of Christ, but also the Mother of all believers. Her maternal protection and care reaches out to all the member of the Church whom she assists in their quest for salvation and for whom she constantly intercedes before her heavenly Son. As a suffering Mother, Mary shares the passion of Christ and understands in the most intimate way the sorrows of those who come before Her in prayer.

In the drama this consolatory and patronizing role of Mary is emphasized. It is to Her to whom Gretchen cries out when she finds herself in a desperate situation of unwed pregnancy. Mary is the One to whom Gretchen pleads for protection after being abandoned by everyone else including her lover Faust. Mary as presented by Goethe in the drama is the ultimate symbol of mercy, forgiveness, acceptance, and loving kindness:

Jungfrau, rein im schönsten Sinn,
Mutter, Ehren würdig,
Uns erwählte Königin,
Göttern ebenbürtig.
Um sie verschlingen
Sich leichte Wölkchen,
Sind Büßerinnen,
Ein zartes Völkchen,
Um ihre Kniee
Den äther schlürfend,
Gnade bedürfend.
Dir, der Unberührbaren,
Ist es nicht benommen,
Daß die leicht Verführbaren
Traulich zu dir kommen (Goethe 12009-12023. 485-486).

As the merciful Queen of Heaven, the image of Mary conforms to that of the Catholic doctrine. In the concluding scene of the drama She leads the host of angels and repented sinners to meet the newly saved soul of Faust and to take him to the place of eternal bliss and rest. Faust in his new state, unconscious, without yet a formed body and therefore completely dependent and helpless, is indeed accepted by the Mother Mary as her newly adopted prodigal son.

As has been shown, the image of the Virgin Mary within Catholic Doctrine inspired Goethe’s representation of the Mater Gloriosa. However, there are certain interesting aspects of Goethe’s image of the Queen of Heaven that make it problematic to put an equal sign between Goethe’s Mater Gloriosa and the Mary of Catholicism. One such problematic aspect is found in the following appellation of Mater Gloriosa: “Göttin, bleibe gnädig!” (Goethe 12103. 488). Here Goethe’s calling of Mary a “Göttin” (the Goddess) is rather non-orthodox, non-Catholic and even non-Christian. In Christian doctrine, in contrast to many of the Eastern religions, there is only a masculine God. There is no place for such a concept as a Goddess. This compels us toward the conclusion that Goethe’s understanding of the Mater Gloriosa was not a Christian-
Catholic one. In *Faust*, Goethe partially modified the Catholic concept of Mary in order to create and express his own unique image and understanding of the Eternal Feminine. Therefore, I believe that in the following verse whom Goethe calls Mary the “Jungfrau, Mutter, Königin” and the “Ewig-Weibliche” (the Eternal Feminine) represents a different concept than that of the Catholic Mother of God, the Ever Virgin Mary:

```
Jungfrau, Mutter, Königin,  
Göttin bleibe gnädig.

Chorus Mysticus:  
Alles Vergängliche  
Ist nur ein Gleichnis;  
Das Unzulängliche,  
Hier wird's Ereignis;  
Das Unbeschreibliche,  
Hier ist's getan;  
Das Ewig-Weibliche  
Zieht uns hinan (Goethe 12102-12111. 489).
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This unique Goethian concept of the Eternal Feminine will be the topic of investigation in the two chapters to follow.

**Conclusion**

Thus far the concept of the Eternal Feminine has been shown as an infinitely complex and subsequently difficult idea to define. The primary reason for this difficulty is that this philosophical and religious concept has multiple and often unclear definitions and has been defined differently by different authors over the course of the centuries. Plato and Socrates, the German mystic Jakob Böhme, and the thinkers and
mystics of Catholicism all offered their own ideas of the Eternal Feminine as well as their own definitions of the concept.

There are also different types of experiences of the Eternal Feminine. Some thinkers (like Plato) conceived the Eternal Feminine intellectually by means of conscious contemplation and logical reasoning. For others like Jakob Böhme, the acquaintance with the Eternal Feminine was that of the personal encounter of the spiritual vision.

It has been shown that the concept has multiple names. It is called the Eternal Feminine (das EwigWeibliche) in Goethe’s Faust. It is also called the Divine Sophia (God’s Wisdom) in Eastern Christianity and in the Old-Testament Tradition. Böhme also referred to it as the Jungfrau. In the Catholic tradition, the Eternal Feminine is associated with the cult of Mary. Eternal Feminine is also associated with the fertile and giving Mother Earth or with the infinite Matter that transforms itself in the infinite forms of creation in the philosophical tradition.

The application of the word “feminine” to the idea can lead to misconceptions as it is not a clear indication of gender in a strictly biological point of view. Though the Divine Sophia of Jacob Böhme is to some degree associated with Logos/Christ, it is not considered to be of the masculine gender, but rather feminine in relation to God. The femininity of Eternal Feminine is not a biological gender quality, but rather its reciprocity and passivity in relation to the God Father, to the Creator. Thus, the concept goes beyond our traditional gender ideas since it is not a biological/naturalistic but rather a spiritual/intellectual concept.

Though it has undergone many transformations across epochs and cultures, the concept of Eternal Feminine has never lost its religious, mystical, or philosophical significance. Even after a relatively brief examination of the concept of Eternal Feminine, it becomes obvious that the concept in its various expressions has some similar qualities and characteristics. It is always defined directly or indirectly in relation to its masculine counterpart: either as an identifiable and mysterious (in some cases
forgotten) Heavenly Father of ancient cults and Greek Philosophy or as God the Father of the monotheistic religions.

The most important quality of the Eternal Feminine is its relation to immortality. As the fruitful and abundant Mother Earth, it has the propagation of life as its main function. Like the Eros of Plato, it preserves life in two ways: by means of sexual love and by communicating to the people the higher realm of perfect Beauty and Wisdom, thus allowing the mortals to reach the realm of the divine. As the Mother of God (Mary or Theotokos), it leads the world to immortality by giving birth to Christ. As the Divine Wisdom (Sophia), it immortalizes people by uniting them in the perfect humanity. This connection of the Idea of the Eternal Feminine to that of immortality highlights its redemptive attributes. In other words, the Eternal Feminine counteracts death which is an inevitable fact of every aspect of the material existence. The Eternal Feminine unites a divided human nature and points out the beauty of the higher world.

The concept of Eternal Feminine found its unique expression in the masterpiece of German literature, Goethe’s drama *Faust*. In the drama, the Eternal Feminine has many names and shares many redemptive characteristics with those found in pre-Platonic, Platonic and post-Platonic thought. The next two chapters will examine in detail Goethe’s idea of the Eternal Feminine (Das Ewig Weibliche) as well as the Goethe’s view on the relation between the Eternal Feminine and the Masculine principle and the theme of evil to which the Eternal Feminine acts as a counterforce.
CHAPTER TWO

ETERNAL FEMININE VS. ETERNAL MASCULINE

In this discussion of the Eternal Feminine (Das Ewig Weibliche) we have examined the origins of this concept and its major representations: Platonic, post-Platonic and Catholic. As has been demonstrated, the concept of the Eternal Feminine implies some kind of duality principle. It cannot be thought of on its own without its masculine counterpart. In other words, the existence of the Eternal Feminine presupposes the existence of the Eternal Masculine principle. The Eternal Mother is connected to the Eternal Father. As has been previously stated, Goethe’s representation of the Eternal Feminine has a strong redemptive element to it which becomes apparent in the concluding part of the drama Faust. The very essence of this concluding episode is Faust’s salvation, his escape from the clutches of Mephisto and eternal damnation. The leading agent of salvation is the Feminine principle. Mater Gloriosa is at its center. Faust is being fought over by an army of the feminine and attractive Angels who battle the powers of Satan with love and use their charms to disarm Satan. Another feminine figure, Gretchen, is leading Faust to his new world, again surrounded by female repented sinners: Magna Peccatrix, Mulier Smaritana, and Maria Aegyptica.

The concluding scene stands in sharp contrast to the Prologue in Heaven where all the main characters are masculine: Archangel: Raphael, Gabriel, Michael, God, and Mephisto. It is significant that God, the Father, is not even mentioned in the concluding part of the Faust’s salvation scene. Another important element is the absence of Christ throughout the tragedy as well as in the Prologue in Heaven and in the concluding scene where Christ is only briefly mentioned as Mary’s Sohn, “Bei der Liebe, die den Füßen/Deines gottverklärten Sohnes” (1236-1238. 486). In Faust, Christ is not the Savior but rather the Mother Gloriosa and the Eternal Feminine that “Zieht uns hinan” (Goethe
Though the Masculine Principle (God the Father and Christ the Son) is mentioned in the tragedy, Goethe seems to purposefully leave them behind the curtains at the back of the stage. In the background of the tragedy stays the Eternal Feminine in its various manifestations. The Eternal Feminine is the leading agent of the concluding salvation part of the tragedy. This chapter will be focused upon the theme of salvation and the discussion of the role of the Masculine principle in Goethe’s Faust.

**The Theme of Evil in Goethe’s Faust**

The concept of salvation implies the presence of imperfection and Evil in this world. The Eternal Feminine acts as a counterforce to Evil. If it is not Christ but the Eternal Feminine that functions as the agent of salvation, another question then follows: in which way does she lead Faust to salvation? If Goethe meant that his character Faust and the world at large needed to be saved, it is necessary to find out how evil and imperfection are represented in the drama.

There are different types of evil. The most common manifestation is the internal evil that every person has to confront directly and which is known to all of us. This evil comes in a form of our subconscious desires and urges in the form of our passions which can enslave us. Our will for dominance and power and an impulse of cruelty toward outsiders, and the primary herd instincts of submission. The powerful and dark subconscious, so well-studied by Freud, seems to dominate the individual. Through the power of subconscious, the individual is often compelled to do what he or she does not want to, even something that he or she finds repulsive and morally wrong.

Another form of evil and a cause of suffering are found in the realm of the material world. It is the law of death that governs the universe and the inevitable deterioration of every form of life. The physical law of entropy makes even the infinite universe a place of slow deterioration and death. One day every star will disappear or
turn into a black hole, every planet will become a cold chunk of ice and this is the
destiny of the Earth as well as every known planetary body and as the universe itself.

In *Faust* the most significant and relevant types of evil are social and personal. The idea of social evil as represented in *Faust* resonated so strongly that future Marxists eventually appropriated the drama as their own, citing the elements that criticize the unfair social order that they saw as anti-bourgeois, anti-church, and anti-capitalistic. As F.J. Lamport puts it: “... In particular, interpretations of the so-called ‘perfectibilist’ school have been repeatedly appropriated to serve the ideological purposes of a succession of aggressive and/or authoritarian political regimes ... Some of the most confident exponents of the ‘perfectibilist’ view in recent years have indeed been the Marxists, inside and outside the former GDR” (193).

Indeed social criticism plays a major role in the drama. In the dialogues in the *Prologue in Heaven* and in the *Prelude in the Theater*, the social critique of the life of man is present. Mephisto in his dialogue with Almighty God states that the life of man on Earth is so miserable that even he, the devil himself, seems to spare humans for a moment of their earthly existence. In other words, according to Goethe, the social conditions of man are worse than hell and the reality is horrific enough even when measured by the Devil’s standards: “Nein Herr! ich find es dort, wie immer,/ herzlich schlecht. / Die Menschen dauern mich in ihren Jammertagen, /Ich mag sogar die armen selbst nicht plagen” (Goethe 296-298. 26).

The social critique of the material inequality and oppression is expressed directly and unequivocally not only by Mephisto, but by Faust, by Gretchen and by the other characters of the play. Gretchen, in many respects innocent, young and naïve, is still aware of the satisfactions that material possessions can provide. In the episode where she receives a gift from Faust, a case full of jewelry, she admits that even such natural gifts as youth, health and beauty are of no use when one does not have material riches:
Wenn nur die Ohrring meine wären!
Man sieht doch gleich ganz anders drein.
Was hilft euch Schönheit, junges Blut?
Das ist wohl alles schön und gut,
Allein man läßt’s auch alles sein;
Man lobt euch halb mit Erbarmen.
Nach Golde drängt,
Am Golde hängt
Doch alles. Ach wir Armen! (Goethe 2796-2804. 123).

In this passage her views are very similar to those of Mephisto who also believed that the things one possesses were more important than the natural talents with which one was endowed. It is possible to buy pretty much anything and that the essence of man is not something internally intrinsic. It is not something with which one is born. It is not the result of one’s aspirations and efforts, but rather something one possesses, something one can buy, something extrinsic. In other words, Mephisto forces Faust to doubt the validity of all his higher aspirations and all the hard work that he expended in order to acquire wisdom and intellectual treasures. The only thing that matters in the material world is money and everything that it can buy:

   Was Henker! freilich Händ und Füße
   Und Kopf und Hintern, die sind dein;
   Doch alles, was ich frisch genieße,
   Ist das drum weniger mein?
   Wenn ich sechs Hengste zahlen kann,
   Sind ihre Kräfte nicht die meine?
   Ich renne zu und bin ein rechter Mann,
   Als hätt ich vierundzwanzig Beine (Goethe 1820-1826, 81-82).
Even before his meeting with Mephisto, Faust is aware of the hard lot of the simple folk who have labored all their lives in difficult conditions. Faust understands and laments the fact that the destiny of a simple man is not creative endeavors, as was possible for a man of higher social and material standing, but exhausting physical labor which brings very little psychological or spiritual satisfaction and very few material benefits. People work in order to survive and the goal of their work never goes beyond mere survival and that reality is detrimental for a spiritual life. In the following passage Faust compares the everyday life of a working man to death or something opposite to a true life. He uses the metaphor of resurrection when describing the contrast between the people’s everyday life and work with that of them finally getting some rest on Easter Sunday when they get to put on their best clothing, go out, dance, sing, and relax:

Denn sie sind selber auferstanden,
Aus niedriger Häuser dumpfen Gemächern,
Aus Handwerks- und Gewerbesbanden,
Aus dem Druck von Giebeln und Dächern,
Aus der Straßen quetschender Enge,
Aus der Kirchen ehrwürdiger Nacht
Sind sie alle ans Licht gebracht (Goethe 922-928. 50-51).

The last two lines of the aforementioned quote are interesting since they contain a critique of the church. The ‘night,’ or darkness of the church, is compared with the light of a life full of meaning. The church is purported to be a light for men. It is offered as a source of spiritual inspiration and its intent is to be a beacon to man’s spiritual calling. It should enlighten people and lead them to spiritual heights. It was meant to alleviate the sufferings of men on earth. In Faust’s reality, it is nothing more than an oppressive social institute full of greed. The church takes advantage of the simple
people, gets richer at their expense, maintains the unjust social order and status quo, and turns a blind eye to the abuses of those who have power and wealth:

- Die Kirche hat einen guten Magen,
- Hat ganze Länder aufgefressen
- Und doch noch nie sich übergessen;
- *Die Kirche allein, meine lieben Frauen,*
- Kann ungerechtes Gut verdauen (Goethe 2836-2840. 124).

Probably the harshest critique of the Christian church as a social institution and of its morals in society is contained in the entire story of Gretchen in the first part of *Faust.* Gretchen is a victim not only of the personal sin of Faust but of that of the entire society in which she lived. Her tragic end shows the partiality of society and the church in their attitudes towards the sins of men versus those of women. Though considered a weaker sex, a woman is supposed to endure all the consequences of the transgressions committed by her and by Faust. It is clear from the tragedy that Faust is the one to blame. He is the older, more educated, more rational and experienced. He seduces Gretchen who is young, morally pure and innocent. Gretchen is a devote Christian. However, she cannot expect any mercy from the church whose primary stated tenant is to forgive and to have compassion. Faust, by contrast, gets away with everything, including the murder of Gretchen`s brother, Valentin.

However, Gretchen herself is a representative of the evils of the patriarchal morals of the Christian society. She, like her friend Lieschen or one might say any typical woman of that society, does not rebel (even internally) against the unjust treatment of her sex by the church and society. Until getting in trouble and becoming a social outcast because of her out of wedlock pregnancy, Gretchen was an active supporter of the unfair and cruel patriarchal social order. As a surprising contradiction
the following line comes out of the mouth of the young girl over whom, based on the words of Mephisto, the Satan has no power while she is blameless:

Wie konnt ich über andrer Sünden
Nicht Worte gnug der Zunge finden!
Wie schien mir's schwarz, und schwärzt's noch gar,
Mir's immer doch nicht schwarz gnug war,
Und segnet mich und tat so groß... (Goethe 3578-3583. 156-157).

Goethe acutely felt the overarching characteristic of any evil, namely—the platitude and banality of every aspect human of life be it personal or social. Banality leads to unbearable boredom and the sense of futility of every man’s effort, of any aspiration, hope, or goal. On the personal level Faust’s moral descent commences with his disappointment in his ability to achieve the highest knowledge and to learn the secrets that govern and move the universe. He had doubts that what he learned during his academic studies was of any worth and that whatever he taught his students while being a professor was of any benefit and value to them. He is too intelligent to be satisfied with the life of an aloof scholar (as was his assistant Wagner whom he apparently despises) and yet he does not possess the spiritual strength to rise above his mundane reality. Having been raised in the Christian tradition, Faust loses the faith of his childhood and without that faith he has no faith at all. He witnesses the people around him and the platitude ridden banality that governs their lives that he finds incompatible with man’s higher calling. His aspiration to be “der kleine Gott” is also futile and becomes a source of constant torment. If man cannot be the “der kleine Gott,” then he is worse than any animal. An animal has only one nature - its lower nature, while man has the awareness of the presence of the Divine in him. (Goethe 281. 26). He has already seen “den Schein des Himmelslichts” and is tormented by his humiliating
position of a mortal creature, simply another animal, that just happens to be on the top of the food chain and nothing more:

Ich sehe nur, wie sich die Menschen plagen.
Der kleine Gott der Welt bleibt stets von gleichem Schlag,
Und ist so wunderlich als wie am ersten Tag.
Ein wenig besser würd er leben,
Hättst du ihm nicht den Schein des Himmelslichts gegeben; (Goethe 280-284. 26).

Faust is a creative soul. He is anything but an average man. He is intelligent and gifted and therefore the banal and common life he views about him is in painful contrast with the artistic and creative inspiration he yearns. There are rare and precious moments that lead the artist to unearthly heights that allow him to forget the grey reality of the toll of daily existence. The ecstasy one feels in moments of suddenly being overwhelmed by the rushing power of the inspiration leads one to pick up a pen and hastily jot down the proper, long searched for expression to ones deepest thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Such inspiration helps the creator to finally formulate the idea that has been previously felt only intuitively and suddenly becomes so clear and convincing under the surge of the inspiration. Such blessed moments are often described by the artist, scientist, philosopher as if he or she has been visited by a Muse or as if some Divine otherworldly power has visited him or her and granted the ability to get a glimpse of the higher world. After surging to such heights he is plunged down to the Earth; this fall is most painful and brings a lot of suffering: “In jenem sel’gen Augenblicke/ Ich fühlte mich so klein, so groß; / Du stießest grausam mich zurücke / Ins ungewisse Menschenlos” (Goethe 626-629. 40).

Another type of ecstatic experience that raises one above everyday life, and seems to be also otherworldly, is that of love. Everyone who has experienced this
beautiful feeling understands why the state of being in love has been compared to being in paradise. Songs, poems, books, myths, paintings, dramas and entire philosophical works have been created to recognize, describe, glorify and to praise love. An entire chapter of the Old Testament, the Songs of Songs, is devoted to erotic love. God is love. Yet, as with everything in human life, even this most beautiful of all feelings and experiences can be communized and debased. It is not without irony that Faust’s love for Gretchen turns out to be the first stage of his moral fall. The tragic destiny of Gretchen, who allowed herself to surrender completely to her erotic passion, is just an extreme representation of the bigger human tragedy—namely the inability of men to live out the beautiful ideal of love. Love as the complete, inseparable and eternal union of two beings, when “two become one flesh,” is contrasted with the reality of the customary union of marriage which often takes the form of a mocking contrast to the higher ideal of love (Mathew 19:5). Gretchen witnesses the conversation between Marthe and Mephisto about Marthe’s missing and allegedly deceased husband. The naïve and romantic ideas of marriage of Gretchen as a union of love and genuine care are contrasted with the reality of the mutual disrespect, indifference, seeing of one’s own selfish interest, greed, and vulgarity of the actual marital relationship of the older and more experienced Marthe. This caricature of an idealized image of love is a prelude to the fate of Gretchen’s own passion. She will also experience the evil banalization of love in the form of betrayal, irresponsibility, and indifference of Faust, the evil of which will lead to more evil in her losing her mind, the killing of their child, the deaths of her mother and brother and her own humiliating death through execution.

Mephisto is the key character in the discussion of the representation of evil in the drama. After all he is Satan, the dark spirit and the personification of evil. However, his image is as difficult to understand as it is unclear. His answer to Faust’s question of his identity: ”Ein Teil von jener Kraft,/ Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft” (Goethe 1335-1336, 65) does not explain much about his relationship to the mystery of
the origin and presence of evil in the world. Mephisto’s evilness is in many respects no greater than that of an average man. In some respects he even seems to be presented by Goethe in a more positive light than some other people. Mephisto covets bad things. He is full of bad schemes and he skillfully carries out those evil schemes, yet, unlike some of the other characters including Faust, Mephisto is honest with himself. He does not create any illusions about himself and does not try to justify his evilness as most people tend to do. Here comes to mind such a paragon of perfection as Gretchen. Before her moral fall Gretchen self-admittedly was full of spiritual pride and enjoyed gossip. She derived pleasure from making herself look good at others’ expense and she never felt any guilt while judging others.

Another example of such appalling bigotry as represented in the drama is the prior aforementioned social institution of the church which is supposed to represent God on earth and yet, it is full of corruption, injustice and evil.

In contrast to the Church and society, Mephisto seems to not be a personification of evil but rather no more than simply a cynical realist. In which manner Mephisto “stets das Gute schafft” (constantly creates the good) remains unclear in the tragedy (Goethe 1336.65). I would argue that what Mephisto really is, or what is the true essence of evil, is the platitude ridden hypocrisy of everyday life. The Devil is the final emptiness, nothingness, and boredom. He disguises himself as something exciting, highly interesting and, therefore, irresistibly attractive. Yet in reality Mephisto, with his denial of everything that is high and beautiful in creation, is the ultimate nothingness which cannot be interesting in any way.

Throughout the tragedy Goethe reveals his disappointment with people. They tend to carry the responsibility for their choices and actions and, by their majority (with rare exceptions), do not pursue their higher calling as creative, free agents endowed with the ability to reason. Rather they live as does a beast in a debased condition in respect to others and, even worse, in respect to themselves. Such scenes as the drunkard
party of jolly fellows in Auerbach’s Keller, as well as the empty conversations showing the futility and vanity of the people as well as the aristocrats at the court, display the image of man as presented by Goethe as simply misanthropic. This misanthropic image of man stands in sharp and direct contrast to the overall humanistic message of Goethe’s *Faust*. The human being is not the image of God. He is not even human enough. He is worse than any animal in that, unlike an animal, he knows right from wrong: “Er nennt’s Vernunft und braucht’s allein,/ Nur tierischer als jedes Tier zu sein “(Goethe 1285-286. 26).

Probably the most important point in the discussion of Goethe’s representation of evil is his views on evil in nature. As has been previously demonstrated, Goethe mercilessly exposes both societal and individualistic evil, the two levels where there is a place for moral choice, but how about the organic level where a moral choice is not possible?

The Russian philosopher Nikolai Berdiaev divided people in two major categories. There are those who painfully feel the imperfection and evil in the natural world and to whom the realization of the imperfection and the fact of suffering in this world causes enormous torment. And there are those who are indifferent to the realization of this natural imperfection and to the sufferings of others (Berdiaev 428). Here comes to mind the founder of Buddhism, Gautama Buddha. Based on his legend, the young prince was from birth spared the knowledge of the presence of ugliness and death in this world. He lived a protected life and considered the world a perfect place until he inadvertently met an old, feeble, and repulsive looking man. The prince was shocked and terrrified to discover that it was the destiny of all people to become old and die. The fact that everything in the nature is going toward deterioration and death lead him to a decision to flee his palace and not return until he found a remedy to the natural and inevitable evil: “Until I have conquered old age, disease and death, I shall not return to this palace” (Masani 42). In other words for those who view the world as
Buddha, to have a normal life in the presence of natural imperfection and to have spiritual peace is not possible.

Buddha's world view was not that of Goethe. Although he recognized the imperfection in nature and the inevitability of the old age and death, these realities did not create a painful, violent protest in him, but rather a melancholic elegy, the sweet longing that he expressed in many parts of the play, including the dedication. The following verse is filled with the beautiful, enchanting sweet sorrow, a peaceful lamenting of the fact that everything eventually passes away and is turned to dust by the time:

Ihr naht euch wieder, schwankende Gestalten,
Die früh sich einst dem trüben Blick gezeigt.
Versuch ich wohl, euch diesmal festzuhalten?
Fühl ich mein Herz noch jenem Wahn geneigt?
Ihr drängt euch zu! nun gut, so mögt ihr walten,
Wie ihr aus Dunst und Nebel um mich steigt;
Mein Busen fühlt sich jugendlich erschüttert
Vom Zauberhauch, der euren Zug umwittert (Goethe 1-8.11).

The words of the poet in the Prelude in the Theater are written in the same spirit of longing for the past and youth which are the source of everything worthwhile in life. Youth was full of the beauty, boundless energy, overflowing inspiration, constant hope, the ability to appreciate the little joys of life, to look at the wonder hidden in nature, to wonder at the things which seem to the jaded eye so commonplace and mundane, to be free and supple and ready for change:

So gib mir auch die Zeiten wieder,
Da ich noch selbst im Werden war,
Da sich ein Quell gedrängter Lieder
Ununterbrochen neu gebar,
Da Nebel mir die Welt verhüllten,
Die Knospe Wunder noch versprach,
Da ich die tausend Blumen brach,
Die alle Täler reichlich füllten.
Ich hatte nichts und doch genug:
Den Drang nach Wahrheit und die Lust am Trug.
Gib ungebändig jene Triebe,
Das tiefe, schmerzenvolle Glück,
Des Hasses Kraft, die Macht der Liebe,
Gib meine Jugend mir zurück! (Goethe 184-197. 19-20).

The dilemma of aging is a crucial one for Faust who was trying to become younger in order to experience the joys of life after selling his soul to Mephisto. However, the transformation seems to be only temporary and does not contain the promise of immortality. Even after drinking the elixir of youth at the Witches’ Kitchen, Faust is destined to eventually grow older and die. Death presents itself as an inevitable fact of life present in the natural world. It does not seem to be evil for Goethe, but simply another part of the natural cycle which can be accepted by the one who possesses wisdom. Faust himself does not seem to covet immortality. As Faust puts it:

Das Drüben kann mich wenig kümmern;
Schlägst du erst diese Welt zu Trümmern,
Die andre mag darnach entstehn.
Aus dieser Erde quillen meine Freuden,
Und diese Sonne scheinet meinen Leiden; (Goethe 1660-1664. 76).

Therefore, the fact of the inevitability of death in nature that tormented the young Buddha, or death that is called the main enemy of God in Christianity, is not
considered evil, but rather natural in Goethe’s *Faust*. By the same token Mephisto is, in some inexplicable way, the power that denies creation and tries to destroy it and yet is constantly creating good.

**The Role of the Father Figure**

Evil for Goethe, as represented in *Faust*, is a wrong choice made by man that has all the power of reason and yet does not use that reason. The source of evil as has been demonstrated in the aforementioned discussion is not that of nature, but rather societal. This point is important for the next point of our discussion: the role of the Masculine principle or the Father in *Faust*. To this discussion I consider the immediate (direct) representation of God the Father in the very beginning of the play in the *Prologue in Heaven* of crucial importance. In the *Prologue in Heaven*, the Biblical tale of Job is given a new meaning as it presents a sharp contrast to the Old Testament, and subsequently Christian, view of God, the Father. In the traditional Biblical account, God is mysterious but after all He is a just Father who cares for humanity. The latter point is displayed in the way Job is rewarded after undergoing all his sufferings. Not only is he granted the privilege to encounter God personally and have the Almighty speak to him, but he also regains all that he has lost: his wealth, his family, and his health and happiness. In other words, Job is compensated for all the sufferings that Satan afflicted upon him. The book of Job is an optimistic book of faith in the highest reason and justice. The Biblical God the Father is justified in the book of Job as a God of justice who cares for mankind. However, the story of Job does not explain the mystery of evil.

By comparison, God the Father in *Faust* displays the main characteristic of overall indifference to the destiny of man as well as the destiny of the “new Job” — Faust. This indifference of God can be easily overlooked when taking into consideration such quotes as: “Wenn er mir auch nur verworren dient, / So werd ich ihn bald in die
Klarheit führen / Weiβ doch der Gärtner, wenn das Bäumchen grünt, / Das Blüt und Frucht die künft'gen Jahre zieren (Goethe 308-312. 27).

Does God not have ultimate faith in his servant Faust? Does not God’s faith in Faust appear as enlightened and humanistic as the faith in the ever-striving man to possess the ability to find his light and to achieve for himself the solution of the riddle of life? „Und steh beschämt, wenn du bekennen mußt: /Ein guter Mensch, in seinem dunklen Drange, /Ist sich des rechten Weges wohl bewußt“ (Goethe 328-329. 28).

Yet, God the Father is no more than an all-knowing observer whose role is to simply state the fact of the knowledge of the final destiny of Faust without having any emotional investment or genuine concern for the sufferings Faust will undergo. Unlike the Biblical Job, who suffers alone and who does not commit any sin after being afflicted by Satan, Faust is going to inflict suffering on those who will happen to cross his path. God does not seem to take into consideration the cost to other people his wager with Satan is going to cause. He does not seem to have much compassion for the victims of his servant Faust and neither does he care about the hard lot of the people. In this regard even Mephisto seems to be presented in a better light than almighty God. Unlike Mephisto, God does not even seem to notice what is going in in his created world, which is clear from His reply to Mephisto’s long tirade regarding the plight of people: “Hast du mir weiter nichts zu sagen? / Kommst du nur immer anzuklagen? Ist auf der Erde ewig dir nichts recht?” (Goethe 294-295. 26).

This reply appears to indicate that the image of God the Father in Faust is not negative. God does not cause evil and, yet still, the concerns of the everyday life of men are of very little importance to him. His realm of concern is the mighty, magnificent world about which the Archangels Gabriel, Raphael and Michael sing their eternal songs of praise. Mephisto is closer to the people and his connection to the fate of man is more intimate than that of God and his Angels. Perhaps that is the reason why God
thinks and speaks of the Devil in such a humane manner ("menschlich") (Goethe 353. 28)?

Such an image of God the Father in Faust is undoubtedly not the image of God the Father of the Old and New Testaments in which God the Father takes a personal interest in the destiny of humanity and makes a covenant with men. Although Goethe uses Biblical symbolism in the Prologue in Heaven, it is little more than a poetical or literary device. Goethe’s God is closer to the ancient, pre-biblical understanding as well as to the antique understanding of the role of the Father who was a mysterious, unknown heavenly counterpart of the Eternal Mother, of cosmic Matter, or the fruitful Mother Earth. Therefore, it seems only logical that God the Father is almost like a Delphic Oracle simply formally proclaiming the final victory of Faust, but does not take any part in his salvation and does not appear in the concluding episode of the drama. The place of an indifferent, remote God the Father is taken by the Mother Gloriosa and the Eternal Feminine that “zieht uns hinan” (Goethe 1211. 489). Her role remains mysterious and yet she is the unlike the Masculine Principe or Biblical God the Father. She is a real, palpable force that governs the life of the universe and the destinies of men alike.

Any discussion of the role of the Masculine principle would be incomplete without mentioning the critical feminist and economical, as well as of the psychoanalytical perspective, of the role of the Father in Goethe’s work in relation to the Patriarchy and it’s relation to the Eternal Feminine. So far it has been demonstrated that the theme of social evil plays a big role in Goethe’s drama. No matter how symbolically one interprets the characters and the events of Faust, it is impossible to underplay the significance of social criticism within the drama. It represented Goethe’s critique of medieval European society and of the then newly emerging bourgeois capitalist society. Based on such view, the root of Western social and economic life has always been the institute/principle of “Patrimony”, the concept which needs a thorough reconstruction
in order to fight the negative sides of it (Adams 1-2). This view is congruent with the feminist perspective that criticizes the social construct of patriarchy which contains an element of solidarity among men in keeping women out of power on every level, beginning with the family and then including every aspect of the social, political, religious and cultural life. This critical view of patriarchy demonstrates an inherent injustice which becomes the root of social evil not only for the women in a society, but for the men as well. This patriarchal principle creates an unjust, competitive society wherein the strong takes advantage of the weak, the rich of the poor, the master of the servant, the free of the slave, and the majority of the minority. This merciless competition does not allow for any harmony in such a society. Society as presented in Faust is patriarchal and lacks harmony.

In his drama Goethe predated the socialists and feminists in his critique of the social evil of patriarchy. However, when looking at Faust from a symbolical perspective, it is possible to talk about patriarchy as the idealized state as well. Such perspective is used by Barbara Becker-Contarino who discusses Goethe as a proponent of the harmonized or enlightened patriarchy with man at the top of the hierarchy. She labeled such patriarchy the “enlightened (paternalistic and “humane”) Goethean construct” (138). From this perspective, the social evil of the opposition of the male and female, of the masculine and the feminine, in the society can be cured by a final reconciliation of the two opposites and their harmonization. The patriarchal marriage has been in a manner a barrier to this reconciliation and yet it has been the cornerstone, the most important institution of the Christian European society, presented by Goethe in Faust. Thus, Goethe possibly viewed the solution to the male/female disharmony by finding reconciliation in an androgynous ideal. Based on the aforementioned view, “Wilhelm Meister” is an example of such androgynous reconsolidation (Simpson, 101). In Faust Goethe also seems to search for the alternatives to the traditional patriarchal marriage, and this alternative type of union is referred to by such researchers as James Simpson.
the “patriarchal ideal” (102). The term “patriarchal” can be misleading since what is meant by the “patriarchal ideal” is exactly the opposite of what is meant by the traditional monogamous marriage.

According to Simpson, the “patriarchal ideal” is not a family relationship, but rather the ideal of a pristine sexual desire freed from the feeling of guilt caused by the constraints imposed on it by the society: “…a positive assertion of the innocence of a sexual love which the narrow world condemned as sinful” (101). Shifting the focus of his discourse from the literary-social aspects of the drama and looking at the destiny of its characters from a psychoanalytical and symbolical perspective allowed Simpson to interpret the Faust’s romance with Gretchen in a positive light: “Turning his back on the abstractions of metaphysics, Faust, like the ‘Naturforscher’ on his granite summit, sees a glorious new kingdom: nature, like a lover, lies all before him” (228).

I would argue that the events of the drama do not support this positive outlook on the destiny of Faust as a “Naturforscher” (Simpson 228). Faust’s life before he meets Gretchen is the life of a researcher fully engaged in intellectual and metaphysical strivings no matter, to his own mind, how meager and futile the results of those strivings were. While corporally confined to his dusty study, the restless spirit of Faust was still able to reach immeasurable heights and depths. Contrarily, after his romance with Gretchen, Faust becomes physically very active while his fettered and bargained away Devil owned soul gradually diminishes. His ever expanding corporeal appetites become insatiable and Faust tries to possess everything he desires. He travels, meets people, becomes involved in the affairs of the court and wars, and obtains the most desirable woman of his time, Helena. Nothing can prevent him from achieving his goals. Faust begins by seducing and betraying a young and naïve Gretchen and ends up so low as to kill and appropriate the property of a defenseless, elderly couple. Yet the final point of drama is precisely this: the Mother Gloriosa, the glorious Ewig Weibliche, the powerful and beautiful Eternal Feminine, that ‘zieht [Faust] hinan ‘or in some
translations ‘lures to perfection.’ (Goethe Faust. Trans. Kaufmann 12101. 503) The manner in which this transpires, how the Eternal Feminine affects the destiny of Faust and of the world will be discussed in the third chapter.

Conclusion

In the first chapter I defined the concept of the Eternal Feminine and its gradual development into spiritual, metaphysical and philosophical thought. In chapter two, I moved to the discussion of the Counterpart of the Eternal Feminine—the Eternal Masculine or the Father figure as represented in the Goethe’s famous drama Faust. A second important point of discussion of the second chapter was that of the concept of evil as represented in Faust. The reason for the discussion of evil was my initial statement that the meaning of the Eternal Feminine for Goethe has a strong redemptive quality to it and if something or someone is being saved, there is a need to define from what exactly and in what manner this salvation takes place.

Unless one were to assert that the concluding scene of the Faust’s salvation is to be interpreted as the happy delirium of a dying old man, the final scene can only be interpreted as Faust is saved and justified. The meaning of the drama Faust as the story of his salvation is proclaimed in the very beginning of the drama, in the Prologue in Heaven. Faust’s salvation is assured by God the Father. However, God does not appear to take any role in the further destiny of Faust. After the Prologue in Heaven, God the Father simply disappears from the drama.

Likewise Goethe’s representations of the role of God’s Son-Christ in the drama are non-traditional. Christ is briefly mentioned there but He is not the Savior. The true agent of Salvation is Goethe’s mysterious Eternal Feminine. In the Eternal Feminine lies the key to the seemingly contradictory conclusion of the Faustian dramatic life. Both the Prologue in Heaven and the Salvation episodes affirm a positive view of the destiny of
Faust. Goethe’s optimism and faith in the purpose of human strivings are evident throughout the entire drama. This optimism is present amidst the harsh criticism of the different types of evil in *Faust*. As has been demonstrated, the metaphysical evil does not concern Goethe (at least as it is evident from the drama). Goethe’s evil is also not found in the nature. Mephisto does not hold the key to the mystery of evil. He is in many respects no more than an alter-ego of man, Faust, or the darker side of any person (including such positive female character as Gretchen). Thus for Goethe, as for his literary creation, Faust, the world of the here and now and of nature is of more concern and value and interest than the “other world” of religion. Thus, the understanding of the evil in the drama is mostly personal and social. Even when looking at the destiny of the main characters from a symbolical, or the aforementioned psychoanalytical perspective, it is impossible to ignore the strong critique of the personal evil of man as the one who is endowed with reason and moral discernment and yet he lives like a beast. Likewise, it is impossible to disregard Goethe’s harsh critique of the unjust social order. The evils and injustices of the traditional Patriarchal society are being exposed by Goethe. In this sense, the Masculine principle in Faust can be looked at as the principle of the conservative stagnation in all elements of social and moral life as well as the hypocritical moralism that suppresses the beautiful experience of free love and creativity in other aspects of human life. In this sense, the creative and free Eternal Feminine is the antidote to this masculine conservative element.
CHAPTER THREE

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ETERNAL FEMININE AND THEIR INTERPRETATIONS AS SALVATION AGENTS IN

FAUST

In accordance with the main thesis of this work, as it has been represented in the first two chapters, the redemptive role of the Eternal Feminine can be understood as that of the force which counteracts on various levels the negative side of the Masculine element. As has been shown for Goethe, the metaphysical and theological representations of the masculine principe were not of the foremost importance. In Faust, the negative masculine element means a stagnant conservatism that works to suppress freedom and creativity in every aspect of human existence. Therefore, this patriarchal conservatism (and not a mystical Satan or Mephisto) is the real cause of evil, and particularly the social evil that is heavily criticized by Goethe in his drama. The negativity of this conservatism is counteracted by the Eternal Feminine: “A turn toward the mother can be a serious counterpart to patriarchal society that is oriented around the father. . .(Orr 129). Indeed the Eternal Feminine is the main protagonist of the drama. In this concluding chapter, I will explore Goethe’s various representations of the Eternal Feminine, while presenting the most common interpretations of the concept found in the field of literary criticism. I will follow with an attempt to answer the question: how does the Eternal Feminine save Faust and redeem the world?
Eternal Feminine as the Platonic World of the Perfect Forms and Indian Feminine Goddess: The Mothers in Faust

Plato believed that every material object or every living creature has its immaterial ideal representation, or perfect form, in the immaterial world. The ideal form in this sense is more real than its material counterpart, which for Plato were only shadows of the reality. Goethe developed the similar concept of the “Urphänomen” (Goethes Werke 13: 552). The “Urphänomen” can be the objects of observation and contemplation, they reveal themselves to be in the natural world, however they resist the human attempts to rationalize them: “Nach einer nicht erscheinenden, etwa gar mechanischen Wirklichkeit hinter ihnen zu fragen, wäre mißtraurische Neugir. . .” (Goethes Werke 13: 552). Similarly to Plato’s perfect ideals, The “Urphänomen” can be seen with the inner eye after the observation of their material manifestation with the physical eye. Thus every phenomenon points out to its “Urphänomen”, and in relation to its prototype, every material object is just a “shine” (appearance, phenomena, utter manifestation). The relationship between the real changeable object and its unchangeable “Urphänomen” can be perceived as an irreconcilable dichotomy. For Faust, this dichotomy, and his subsequent inability to grasp the essence of things (to understand the “Urphänomen”) causes a painful inner conflict that is apparent in such quotes as the following:

So fluch ich allem, was die Seele
Mit Lock- und Gaukelwerk umspannt,
Und sie in diese Trauerhöhle
Mit Blend- und Schmeichelkräften bannt!
Verflucht voraus die hohe Meinung
Womit der Geist sich selbst umfängt!
Verflucht das Blenden der Erscheinung,
Die sich an unsre Sinne drängt! (Goethe 1587-1594. 74).

In a truly Platonic fashion, Faust expresses this acute conflict between his more
down to Earth and matter-of-fact self and his ever-striving to the unearthly heights
spiritual self. He calls these two selves the two souls in his breast. The earthly bound,
mortal essence of Faust is related to the “shine” of the phenomenal world, and is in
perpetual conflict with the upward striving, spiritual essence of Faust, which belongs to
the world of the Urphänomen.

Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust,
Die eine will sich von der andern trennen;
Die eine hält, in derber Liebeslust,
Sich an die Welt mit klammernden Organen;
Die andre hebt gewaltsam sich vom Dust
Zu den Gefilden hoher Ahnen (Geothe 1112-1117. 57).

The perfect forms, or the Urphänomen, are the basis of all creativity, since
everything that will ever appear—be it the real flower that springs forth from the ground
in the spring towards the sun, or the picture of the flower, that sees the light thanks to
the creative act of an artist—are essentially the different types of the material
manifestations of their ideal. Goethe calls these prototypes of all creation the Mothers,
the mysterious goddesses which evoke almost a religious or sacred awe in Faust. Being
a non-material basis of all things, the Mothers do not exist in a material world of the
space and time, and thus their realm can be perceived as that of complete emptiness:

Göttinnen thronen hehr in Einsamkeit,
Um sie kein Ort, noch weniger eine Zeit;
Von ihnen sprechen ist Verlegenheit.
Die Mütter sind es!

Göttinnen, ungekannt
Euch Sterblichen, von uns nicht gern genannt. (6213-6219. 263).

Bei seinem Schein wirst du die Mütter sehn:
Die einen sitzen, andre stehn und gehn,
Wies eben kommt. Gestaltung, Umgestaltung
Des ewigen Sinnes ewige Unterhaltung,
Umschwebt von Bildern aller Kreatur,
Sie sehnt dich nicht, denn Schemen sehnt sie nur (Goethe 6284-6290. 266).

The Mothers represent the feminine creative principle in the drama. In this sense, the Eternal Feminine in Goethe’s drama cannot be thought of as something passive and opposing the active Man, Faust, but rather a basis of his activity and the endless potential of his or any one’s creativity: “The realm of the Mothers is exactly what its name suggests: the creative matrix of all things” (Jantz 175). By descending into the world of Mothers or ideal forms, Faust experiences what H.J. Schueler calls a “regeneration” (Schuler 108), a spiritual rebirth, a process which makes the meaning of the Mother’s scene acquire a religious connotation. The process leading to Faust’s “rebirth,” or the initiation into the new creative realm of things, is closer to that of pre-Christian mysteries. The Mother’s scene contains a hint on Faust final Salvation just as in Prologue in Heaven. However, there is a significant difference. If in the Prologue in Heaven the Faust salvation is proclaimed by the Biblical God the Father, in the Mothers scene the Christian imagery is completely absent and the Eternal Feminine dominates the scene in the form of primordial pagan goddesses. In this scene there is also an indirect promise of Faust final Salvation, but it is not a Christian God that assures it.
Faust’s salvation is assured by the Eternal Feminine, the mighty power that is always in process of creation, shaping, destroying and then again recreating and reshaping “Gestaltung, Umgestaltung” (Goethe 6286. 266).

It is a common interpretation among critics that the Mothers scene represents the antique philosophical ideas (as those of Plato), or the antique religious ideas (e.g. the Orphic mysteries), thus Goethe’s ideal is assumed to be connected to the classical Greece. Ekbert Faas suggests looking even further East in order to find the key to the meaning of the Mothers’ scene in India and Hinduism. In his comparative analysis of the Mothers’ scene and of the elements of the Indian drama Sacontalá Faas points out to the semantic similarities between Goethe’s and Kālidāsa’s work. Faas believed that the Indian poet had a significant influence on Goethe; Faas also suggests that the plot and the ideas contained in the Sacontalá did not directly serve Goethe as a model for the ideas expressed in the Mothers’ scene but certainly influenced Goethe’s thinking and his world view. In this way it may have influenced not only the Mothers’ scene but the entire drama Faust: “We have Goethe’s repeated testimony that Sacontalá overwhelmed him in an irresistible way, that it exerted “the greatest influence . . . on his entire life,” (See W. XI, 187 (Italienische Reise, March 1, 1787), that he came to know it more or less by heart, and that it determined a whole epoch in his development” (Faas 370-371).

Sacontalá is a typical Indian drama, that is different from the Western drama, in the way that it does not clearly juxtapose the right and the wrong (as the Western drama does) and is not trying to find a moral solution to the hero’s suffering; The Indian drama represents a non-western, Hindu world view, in which right and wrong and good and evil are not the diametrically opposing concepts or forces, but rather complimentary and necessary parts of the same life giving force. This force is neither good nor evil, right or wrong, or light or dark, but a complimentary union of all the opposites. The same god or goddess that creates life will in its due time destroy it in order to create it again. Thus goes the eternal cycle of existence. Therefore, the death of
the main hero of the drama is not the end but the beginning of the new life, and his sufferings are just as necessary for the fullness of his eternal cyclic existence as the pleasures and joys that he also experiences. By looking at the Mothers` scene from the non-Western perspective, Faas concludes that they represent the concept of the Mother Goddess as the bases of creation. The concept is problematic for Goethe`s contemporary reader, but self-explanatory for an Indian reader. Faas stresses the point that unlike Biblical Christian imagery, the elements of Hindu mythology could not be understood by his readers without a special introduction:

To an Indian poet and his audience, the Eternal-Feminine was a traditionally accepted concept. . .Lacking any such beliefs or mythologems in his immediate cultural heritage, Goethe would have met with little understanding if he had replaced Western with Indian mythology. Instead he causes Faust to undergo a long and painful process of reinitiation into the world of the Mothers (384).

In accordance with this view for Goethe, the Hindu “Universal Mother” (Faas 387) not the Biblical God the Father, is the real creator and sustainer of life and this Mother is the one which can save, or in other words regenerate, destroy, and give birth again to any creature including Goethe`s male protagonist Dr. Faust or his beloved Gretchen, which explains the complete absence of the God the Father in the final salvation scene and the conclusion of Goethe`s drama with the hymn to the Eternal Feminine that “zieht uns hinan” or “draws us to perfection” (Goethe 12111. 489).

The Mother Goddess or the Eternal Feminine can be thought of metaphysically as the aforementioned Platonic world of the perfect Ideas or in Goethe`s words as the world of the Urphänomen as well as in its earthly, revealed form, as Mother Nature. The material Nature as an awe-inspiring concept plays a great role in Goethe`s drama as
well as in many of his other works. The Eternal Feminine as manifested in the sky, trees, plants, flowers will be the next point of this discussion.

**Eternal Feminine as the Abundant Fruitful Mother Nature:**

Even without any previous knowledge of Goethe’s natural philosophy, his fascination and admiration for it become apparent when reading *Faust*. In this sense *Faust* is an ode to Nature, to its inexhaustible procreative power, to its breath taking beauty, and to its majestic greatness. This beauty and greatness stands in a sharp contrast to the ugliness and lowliness of human deeds, to the futility and smallness of their daily hustle and bustle, their miserable never-ending struggle for survival. The natural life-giving cycle is present everywhere. After beautiful colorful fall, nature seems to die, the leaves wither and are shed, the forests stand naked, the fertile earth of the fields cease to produce the life-sustaining crops. Before too long the winter comes, everything bringing frost and snow, which covers the earth under its white blanket. But with the first raise of the spring sun, the world that seemed so empty and dead begins to come to life again. The snow melts, the buds spring force, beautiful flowers appear everywhere, and forests regain their green foliage. People observed this miracle for centuries and came to the conclusion that in the process of the rebirth of nature lies the key to the immortality and they worshiped Nature’s life giving forces: “The eternal cycle of life and death was suggested by the image of creatures coming forth from her as from a womb and returning to her as to a grave.” (Jantz 455). For Goethe, the connection between nature and immortality seems to be important. The passages in the drama devoted to nature sound elevated and exalted, and one can hear the mixture of awe and joy in such lines that Goethe puts in the mouth of Faust:

\[
\text{Vom Eise befreit sind Strom und Bäche} \\
\text{Durch des Frühlings holden, belebenden Blick;}
\]
Im Tale grünet Hoffnungsglück;
Der alte Winter, in seiner Schwäche,
Zog sich in rauhe Berge zurück.
Von dorther sendet er, fliehend, nur
Ohnmächtige Schauer kornigen Eises
In Streifen über die grünende Flur;
Aber die Sonne duldet kein Weißes,
Überall regt sich Bildung und Streben,
Alles will sie mit Farben beleben; (903-913. 50).

Faust praises the Nature’s regenerating powers and compares this process to the
religious idea of resurrection. In the same passage, Faust talks about people who also
like everything alive, like any animal or plant are drawn to the gentle raises of the
spring’s son “Jeder sonnt sich heute so gern.” (Goethe 920. 50). Faust reads his ode of
praise to the nature while observing the people celebrating Easter. However, it would
be misleading to ascribe a Christian meaning to Faust’s words. Resurrection of the Lord
has little significance to Faust, just like in the Prologue in Heaven Goethe used Christian
imagery to convey his own world view. Though Faust mentions that people are
celebrating the Lord’s resurrection “Sie feiern die Auferstehung des Herrn” (Goethe
922. 50) and adds that they themselves got resurrected. What really caused that
“resurrection” are the warm life giving rays of the spring son and the magic
regenerating power of nature and not the Lord of Christianity. What is meant by the
Easter here is the pagan celebration of the spring common to many cultures. It is not
coincidental that this passage follows Faust’s unsuccessful suicide attempt. The bells of
the Church proclaiming Christ’s resurrection, the sound of which prevents Faust from
killing himself, are no more than a lucky coincidence, a natural occurrence rather than
Divine intervention in a Christian sense of this word. What saved Faust is the Eternal
Feminine, the nature that takes care of its creatures and which allowed Faust to keep his sweet childhood memories associated with the beautiful, enchanting sound of the church bells in the sweet, serene moments of late spring. To this Nature alone directes Faust his devotion, this is Nature with all her basic elements (the Ocean/ the Water, the Fire, the Air, the Earth) that is praised in a religious fashion and to which one should sing such hymns as the following:

So herrsche denn Eros, der alles begonnen!
Heil dem Meere! Heil den Wogen!
Von dem heiligen Feuer umzogen;
Heil dem Wasser! Heil dem Feuer!
Heil dem seltnen Abenteuer!
ALL ALLE! Heil den mildgewognen Lüften!
Heil geheimnisreichen Grüften!
Hochgefeiert seid allhier
Element ihr alle vier! (8479-8487. 348).

The praise to Nature plays the role of the constantly reoccurring leitmotif in the drama. After every ordeal, Faust finds peace and rejuvenation in nature’s bosom, to be drawn away from it by his restless spirit until his final hour strikes and Faust enters the realm of the Eternal Feminine to remain with her forever. Each time these meetings (rendezvous) with Nature bring the best in Faust turn his look inward into his contemplative self as well us upward to the spiritual and intellectual as well as aesthetical heights. If Faust could only remain there with Nature and faithful to nature to seek the best in himself instead of following Mephisto and bustling around with meaningless activity, which hurts and almost ruins Faust spiritually as well as brings ruin to others. Just like a prayer in which a believer converses with God, the following lines are in a sense his prayer to the spirit of Nature:
Erhabner Geist, du gabst mir, gabst mir alles,
Warum ich bat. Du hast mir nicht umsonst
Dein Angesicht im Feuer zugewendet.
Gabst mir die herrliche Natur zum Königreich,
Kraft, sie zu fühlen, zu genießen. Nicht
Kalt staunenden Besuch erlaubst du nur,
Vergönnest mir in ihre tiefe Brust
Wie in den Busen eines Freunds zu schauen.
Du führst die Reihe der Lebendigen
Vor mir vorbei, und lehrst mich meine Brüder
Im stillen Busch, in Luft und Wasser kennen (Goethe 3217-3227. 142-143).

One can even say that Faust has three lovers in the drama: the real woman Gretchen, the mythical Greek beauty Helena and the Eternal Feminine, or Nature, and the latter is his true love that brings out the best in Faust, while the women (no matter real or ideal), whom he relentlessly chases and eventually ruins, are no more than temporary obsession, that lead Faust astray. Through this relationship of Faust to Nature, Goethe demonstrates his believe that Nature communicates to humans’ spiritual powers that do not allow the soul to degenerate and make the spiritual renewal possible: “Es liegen in der menschlichen Natur wunderbare Kräfte, und eben, wenn wir es am wenigsten hoffen, hat sie etwas Gutes für uns in Bereitschaft.” (Loesche 303).

Nature is true to Faust throughout the drama, but the most tragic is the fact that Faust does not remain true to Nature. The real transgression with fatal consequences for the spiritual life of Faust is not a transgression against the Christian God but a transgression against Nature and that leads Faust to his doom. As Astrida Orle Tantillo puts it:
Faust’s relationship to nature changes drastically by the end of the play, and in this change one can begin to track him as a doomed man. He no longer cares about the enigmatic or even creative aspects of nature, nor does he have any desire to understand it. . . By act IV, his relationship to nature is about control and possession. He no longer judges nature according to its power or beauty, but what use it can have for him, and what power he can have over it (463).

Faust himself seems to be aware of his transgression against Nature. Not before the Christian God but before the Eternal Feminine, before Nature he has sinned. Nature is the measure of all things and not God’s word for which He has already lost His trust in the beginning of the tragedy. Faust concludes that only in relation to Nature it is worthwhile to strive to be a decent person, a real man, and laments the fact that in his case it has not been possible. In truly Rousseau-like fashion Faust laments his discord with Nature:

Stünd ich, Natur! vor dir ein Mann allein
Da wär’s der Mühe wert ein Mensch zu sein.
Das war ich sonst, eh ich’s im Düstern suchte,
Mit Frevelwort mich und die Welt verfluchte (Goethe 11406-11409. 464).

Faust’s transgression against nature is ruinous for his spirit, since it is people and their social organization, not Nature, that can be evil, and this thought is repeated by Goethe many times throughout the drama. The following passage demonstrates the contrast of the mighty yet peaceful rule of Nature (“die lieblichste Herrin”) that persist amidst constant wars and violent human struggles for power:

Weder Adler noch geflügelten Leuen,
Weder Kreuz noch Mond,
Wie es oben wohnt und thront,
Sich wechselnd wegt und regt,
Sich vertreibt und totschlägt,
Saaten und Städte niederlegt.
Wir, so fortan,
Bringentr die lieblichste Herrin heran (Goethe 8371-8379. 344).

Yet though Faust has betrayed Nature, it is good and remains true to Faust. That is the main point of the drama: Regardless of all the problems and negative things that are present in every aspect of the world’s existence, and especially in the human social and personal life, one can believe that Nature will bring everything back to order, correct the consequences of human mistakes and restore the lost harmony. It is evident in the surprisingly optimistic ending of Faust’s life as well as in the optimistic endings of other characters of the drama. Gretchen is justified and reunited with her beloved; Helena returns to the underground kingdom of Persephone (it is not a punishment, the regal Helena will find happiness in the company of the Goddess, who is her equal). Likewise the minor characters of the drama, for example Helena’s servants, will find their peace in the end of their ordeals. Wise Nature, or Ever-Living-Nature, will take care of them. All that is necessary is to put one’s complete trust in the Eternal Feminine’s good wisdom. No one and nothing ever perishes completely. What Nature offers her creatures here is a miracle, which can be understood as reincarnation:

Zurückgegeben sind wir dem Tageslicht,
Zwar Personen nicht mehr,
Das fühlen, das wissen wir,
Aber zum Hades kehren wir nimmer.
Ewig lebendige Natur
Macht auf uns Geister,
Wir auf sie vollgültigen Anspruch (Goethe 9985-9991. 406-407).
Eternal Feminine as Sublimated Sexual Energy

That Nature constantly changes and transforms its creatures shows it is capable of transforming human passions and drives and desires into a creative, productive energy. One of the strongest natural drives, which assures in the natural world ceaseless propagation of life, is the sexual energy, which is called by psychologists (Freud) libido. For many organisms it is true that life is sustained through sexual love. Every creature continues to exist in its posterity. For humans, erotic love is not limited exclusively to the source of the production of offspring (as it is the case by animals) but can be a source of bliss, a joyful state often compared to paradise. It is interesting to note that for human lovers propagation and romantic love are often mutually exclusive. Gretchen kills her child. Her pregnancy does not seem to be a natural product of love, but rather a hindrance. Romantic sexual love and the traditional institute of the family, which controls the propagation on the level of society, are in irreconcilable conflict which leads to the Gretchen’s tragic death. Even Helena’s fairytale marriage to Faust, which is sustained with the help of Mephisto’s magic, is threatened and finally destroyed because of their son, Euphorion. Goethe seems to stress the tragic conflict between erotic love and a happy family life, or even life itself (as in case with Gretchen). Erotic love is short-lived. The happiness of Helena and Faust is only temporary and can only be artificially sustained by magic. Faust is warned that he will have no rest after acquiring her for a wife: „Schmeichelnd wohl gewann er sich,/Was auf Erden das Höchste; /Aber ruhig besitzt er’s nicht“ (Goethe 9485-9487. 387).

And yet, the chorus refers to erotic love, which Helena and Faust can now enjoy “auf Erden das Höchste” the highest bliss. (Goethe 9485. 387). Likewise Gretchen will pay the high price of a shameful death and, in a sense, the sacrifice her child for the erotic passion to Faust. However, even at the moment of the highest despair when she can see the shameful end coming near, she still admits to herself that she has no regrets,
while what has happened was so “good and dear” (Doch alles, was dazu mich trieb,/ Gott! war so gut! ach war so lieb!” (Goethe 3585-3586. 157).

Regardless of the tragic consequences that it brings to lovers, the experience of Love-Eros has a value in itself. It is praised along with the four elements of nature: “So herrsche den Eros, der alles begonnen! (Goethe 8479. 348). The object of love may change (it can be Gretchen, Junone, Helena) what really matters is the up-lifting, inspiring, purifying effect that it has on the soul.

Doch will sich`s modeln. Ja! Das Auge trägt mich nicht! –
Auf sonnbeglänzten Pfühlen herrlich hingestreckt,
Zwar riesenhaft, ein göttergleiches Fraungebild,
Ich seh`s! Junonen ähnlich, Leda`n, Helenen,
Wie majestätisch lieblich mir`s im Auge schwankt. (10047-10051. 411).

In the aforementioned passage, Faust expresses in a more sublime way what has already been sarcastically (though truly) expressed by Mephisto: “Du siehst mit diesem Trank im Leibe. Bald Helenen in jedem Weibe” (Goethe 2603-2604. 115). The same sexual energy (what the modern psychoanalysts would call Libido) can lead Faust to the most base erotic attraction as well as to the more sublime and high love. The same sexual drive that makes Faust to heedlessly chase Gretchen and Helena also causes Faust to appreciate the high beauty in the world around him and aspires him to creativity. This is true not only for Faust but for any man. Love-Eros is the basis of every creative urge.

The Eternal Feminine, Mother Nature, The Eternal Beauty, Love, Eros, it seems that under such a multiplicity of appellations stands the mysterious and infinitely challenging concept. The concept, that seems to be hard for anyone who tried to grasp it (be that a poet a mystic or a philosopher). The purpose of this chapter was to investigate what this concept meant for Goethe. From the careful analysis of Goethe’s
Faust it becomes evident that the Eternal Feminine in its various forms assures not only the optimistic conclusion of the drama but is a basis of the overall optimistic mode of the entire drama. Against the drama’s overall negative background of the harsh social critic, the futility of the human efforts, the tragic destiny of Gretchen, and Faust’s moral decay shines the Eternal Feminine as the leitmotiv of eternal hope and optimism, as the faith in the existence of harmony and purpose.

Goethe’s pantheistic optimism need to be contrasted with the problem of Faust’s salvation from the Christian perspective. Where did Faust arrive after going through his life with his new worldview, new goals, after deciding to leave his dusty study and live life to the fullest? Has he arrived at any point which can lead him to salvation? Have his strivings led him to grow intellectually, spiritually or do any real good to others? When looking at the drama’s storyline, the answer is negative. Everything Faust has attempted was either outright egotistic, immoral or idle and ineffective. Even his utopic schemas and plans which were meant to bring good to society, to make people’s life easier all proved futile. His passionate love for Gretchen turns into the lowly, animal desire, which leads to seduction of the innocent young girl and results eventually in a tragic chain: the deaths of their baby, Gretchen’s death, the death of her mother and her brother. Faust does not seem to learn any moral lessons from this experience, his qualms of conscience are short-lived, and after an unsuccessful attempt to save Gretchen when it was actually already too late, he simply forgets about her and continues his search for the meaning of life.

Faust’s next big passion for the mythical heroin Helena, and subsequent marriage to her, seems to give him for a moment what he was seeking. Possessing the most beautiful of women seems to quench his strivings for higher meaning, but this satisfaction also proves to be fleeting. The magical castle in which he had hoped to find happiness, while contemplating the perfect beauty embodied in the classical heroine Helena, is doomed to burst like a soap bubble and disappear. The closed castle of
esthetical contemplation, the escape from a grim mundane reality into the magic castle of love and beauty, could not bring Faust happiness. He remains restless and continues his search. Pure beauty cannot save the world (as Dostoevsky once hoped for), nor can the beauty save Faust, for beauty itself needs a savior.

After his unsuccessful marriage to Helena, Faust returns to the life of a man of action, a life that he longed for in the first part of the tragedy when he proclaimed it the basis of everything there is.

His first social action is getting involved into a war between two emperors. One of the emperors wins the battle with the help of Faust but this victory does not have any social meaning and it does not bring the emperor’s subordinates, the simple people, any happiness. The people continue to suffer under the yoke of the emperor and a church that makes them pay taxes, growing richer while the simple people remain just as suppressed and unhappy as they were before. However, Faust does not worry about the people any longer. This indifference stands in sharp contrast to his sincere prior compassion for the sufferings of the people. In the first part of the tragedy Faust confessed he was still able to fervently, with tears and sighs, fast and pray, hoping for the killer plague to end:

Und quälte mich mit Beten und mit Fasten.

An Hoffnung reich, im Glauben fest,

Mit Tränen, Seufzen, Händeringen

Dacht’ ich das Ende jener Pest

Vom Herrn des Himmels zu erzwingen (Goethe 1025-1029. 54).

There in his home town Faust strived to be with the people. He wanted to be human: “Hier bin ich Mensch, hier darf ich’s sein” (Goethe 939. 50). Then he still desired to partake in the pain and suffering of the entire mankind and to “pile on . . . [his] breast their agony and bliss. . . “ (1772. 189). Closer to the end of his life journey
with Mephisto, he desires something quite different. He does not want to suffer with
the people. He wants to rule over them and use them for this purposes: “Herrschaft
gewinn ich, Eigentum!/Die Tat ist alles, nichts der Ruhm” (Goethe 10187-10188. 416).
Faust’s purported trade with the elderly couple Philemon and Baucis turned out to be
blatant robbery and murder. The seventh murder or killing Faust had been indirectly,
and in some cases unintentionally, involved in after that of Gretchen, Grechtchen’s baby,
Gretchen’s Mother, and her brother Valentine.

And finally Faust’s well-intended end-of-life philanthropic project which made
him feel that he has experienced blessed moment where there is nothing left to wish for
“Zum Augenblicke dürf ich sagen : Verweile doch, du bist so schön!” turns out to be no
more than another utopic dream (Goethe 11582, 470). Even if his plan to build the dam
and dry out the moors to benefit of the people had worked out, it would not benefit
Faust’s confused soul since by becoming a beneficiary of the people he would also turn
out to be an abuser of nature. As Nikolai Berdiaev puts it: “And draining the swamp is
but a symbol of the spiritual path of Faust, merely a sign of spiritual activity. Upon his
path, Faust passes from a religious culture over to an irreligious civilisation. And in this
irreligious civilisation the creative energy of Faust becomes drained, his endless
aspirations die” (55-72).

It is important to note here that though Goethe shows the futility of Faust’s
efforts to make peoples’ lives better, he does not exclude the possibility of a positive
social change. By showing that evil is mostly man-made, Goethe stresses the importance
of the proactive social action. The following monologue is an expression of a socialistic
ideal according to which that happiness on Earth can be achieved by giving people the
opportunity to work as free people on free land, by getting rid of the exploitation of the
weak by the strong:

Das ist der Weisheit letzter Schluß

Nur der verdient sich Freiheit wie das Leben,
Der täglich sie erobern muß.
Und so verbringt, umrungen von Gefahr,
Hier Kindheit, Mann und Greis sein tüchtig Jahr.
Solch ein Gewimmel möchte ich sehn,
Auf freiem Grund mit freiem Volke stehen (Goethe 11575-11580. 470).

Faust’s social ideal sounds similar to that of Plato, who taught that the perfect order of things in the world is situated beyond the material world and can be reflected and should be realized in the perfect and harmonious social order. Likewise the social condition of people seems to be very important for Goethe, though he did not have a well-developed plan of a perfect society. No matter how allegorically one interprets the Faust, it is impossible to ignore the obvious—the drama presents a strong critique of the society and suggests the necessity of social change. The salvation of an individual cannot be separated from the salvation of all. Thus, Faust’s salvation is defined by his final realization that the object of his never-ending strivings cannot be only his own personal egoistic goals and passions, but should include all of those around him. In other words, at the end of his life, Faust returned to the desire of his youth to be with others to experience their joys and sorrows and to not only experience but to help to bring about social change.

In the field of literary criticism there exist many other interpretations of the meaning of Goethe’s concept of the Eternal Feminine. However, the different variations of the Platonic and neo-Platonic view seem to be especially popular. One example of such an interpretation is that of Albrecht Schöne, who in his commentaries of Faust juxtaposes the Eternal Feminine to the Eternal Masculine. Whereas the Eternal Masculine (‘Ewig-Männliches’) is the false striving, pointless activity and senseless violence, the Eternal Feminine is the merciful, all-forgiving savior of love in all its various forms and manifestations: “Während im Binnenspiel der Tragödie das irrend
In my analysis of *Faust*, I have also shown how the pointless activity of Faust proves to be ruinous and destructive to his inner world. My analysis showed how his activity in the Platonic sense, positive social change, is an important salvation aspect of the Eternal Feminine. Schöne also points out to the similarities between the idea of Goethe and those of Böhme. Just like Böhme, Goethe believed this world to be the symbol of divine reality, a reality that cannot be completely analyzed by limited human reason or precisely described by the limitations of human language. It can only be represented symbolically and perceived intuitively and poetically: “Das Wahre mit dem Göttlichen identisch, läßt sich niemals von uns direkt erkennen, wir schauen es nur im Abglanz, im Beispiel, Symbol, in einzelnen und verwandten Erscheinungen; wir werden es gewahr als unbegreifliches Leben und können dem Wunsch nicht entsagen, es dennoch zu begreifen. Dieses gilt von allen Phänomenen der faßlichen Welt. . .” (FA I 25, 274) (quoted by Schöne, 814).

Another example of the current Platonic interpretation of the meaning of the Eternal Feminine is that of Ulrich Gaier. He analyses the different ways of interpreting the idea of the Eternal Feminine as poetic images of beauty. For Gaier there are different ways in which beauty can be understood as presented in Goethe’s drama. However, all these interpretations represent the Platonic way of looking at the concept. For Plato beauty was in its essence a spiritual, non-material ideal. One grows to appreciate this ideal in stages and not everyone is capable to reach the highest stage of beauty appreciation. One first perceives beauty sensually in such a manner as attractive people and beautiful scenes of nature. For some, the ability to appreciate the beautiful sensually remains the only way, but for those who grow in wisdom, the beautiful becomes the object of inner contemplation. Thus, the philosopher recognizes beauty as
virtue and truth and sees it not as an external element but rather as an internal spiritual element. Faust’s fascination with beauty manifested itself in his obsession with the mythical Helena, which was preceded by his love for the young and beautiful Gretchen. This was just a first step and in many ways a misstep in his search for the spiritual beauty. In his search for the inner ideal, Faust turns to the idealization of female beauty:

“Die Schönheit, die Faust gesehen hat die der Welt, die der Natur, die des Triebes-sind sämtlich Projektionen seines “magisch idealistischen” Blicks: vom Zauberspiegel ist bekannt, daß er dem Hineinblickenden sein Wunschbild zeigt, Margarete wird zu Engel und Puppe idealisiert. . .” (Gaier II, page 474) For Gaier even the relentless activities and endless striving of Faust are grounded in his complete devotion to the Eros in the Platonic sense: “Die Verpflichtung zum Streben ist nicht mehr allbestimmend für Fausts Tun, sie hat jetzt ihren Grund und ihre Richtung erhalten durch die vollständige Hingabe Fausts an den Eros (Gaier Kommentar II, 479). Here lies the meaning of the Faust’s salvation as someone who is always striving, “Wer immer strebend sich bemüht/ Den können wir erlösen” (Gaier Kommentar II, 500). By striving towards the beautiful, Faust is on the right way toward the highest degree of the appreciation of beauty which is that of an inner, spiritual beauty.

Like Schöne, Gaier in his commentary 1 to Faust also points out the important connection of the Böhme’s experience of the Divine and that of Goethe. Gaier quotes Oetinger, who also pointed out the similarities between Goethe’s Eternal Feminine and Böhme’s Sophia. In accordance with such an interpretation, the world of the Divine “draws as near” in a sense that everything that exists originates in the Divine and is part of the Divine and therefore has to return to the Divine: “Weil aber Gott die Liebe ist, die Liebe aber sich mittheilt, und wieder alles in sich zieht, so kann sie nicht ohne ein solch zweites, von Gott zwar unterschiedenes, aber unabtrennliches Wesen sein, welches Herrlichkeit Gottes heißt [vgl. V.11993]. (Böhme/Oetingen quoted in Garier p.1161) Gaier references another thinker, Johann Gottfried von Herder, a German
philosopher and theologian, who taught about the World Soul as a basis of all natural phenomena and a center of the created universe. Being the metaphysical center of all creation, the World Soul draws everything and everyone to itself, just as the cosmic law of gravity draws the planets to the sun: “es ist dieser unsichtbare himmlische Licht-und Feuergeist, der alles Lebendige durchfließt und alle Kräfte der Natur vereinigt” (Gaier I, 1162).

In this work, I have also shown that the Platonic and Post-Platonic ideas undoubtedly influenced Goethe’s concept of the Eternal Feminine. However, my main goal was to show that Goethe`s drama can be interpreted as Goethe’s dialogue with his contemporaries. The focus of that dialogue was the critical social and spiritual condition of Goethe’s contemporary Western society, a society rooted in Christianity that practically failed to live up to even the basic Christian ideals of love and compassion. In order to find the way out of this crisis, Goethe explored alternative ways of creating meaning for the Western man as represented by Goethe`s main character Faust.

Conclusion

One possible way of interpreting Goethe`s concept of the Eternal Feminine is considering it a redemptive agent that replaces the for Goethe non-relevant Christian way of salvation. As such, the Eternal Feminine is mainly represented in Faust in the following ways: as the perfect beauty, fruitful Nature, sublimated sexual energy and perfect social ideal. As has been already stated, the abundant Christian Imagery in the drama bares no theological or metaphysical significance. In other words, such figures as God the Father and the Archangels are no more than literary devices which are used by Goethe to convey his own rather polytheistic or pagan world view. Even the Mother Gloriosa cannot be directly identified with the Mary of Catholicism or the Theotocos of Easter Orthodoxy. The Eternal Feminine in the drama is closer to the Feminine
representation of divinity in Buddhism. Thus, Goethe’s Eternal Feminine has a dark side to it and therefore the world—her creation, also has a darker side. Unlike in Christianity, the dark side of the creation is not necessarily evil and as such the imperfection in creation also has a right to existence. Likewise Mephisto, the devil, does not have to be illuminated since without shadows there would be no light to be seen. Mephisto is also part of the integral cosmic whole. Even death, which is labeled in the Bible as the greatest enemy of God, is no more than a necessary phase in the eternal creative, life-giving cycle. The Eternal Feminine, or Nature, destroys her creatures to make them into something new. Thus, the eternal cycle of creation inevitably has two sides: creation and destruction, life and death, molding and remolding. If death is neither inevitable nor natural then Salvation cannot be understood in the sense of a Christian promise of resurrection. Thus, Salvation is found not in the detraction of the darker side of creation, but in their eternal equilibrium, the harmony of the opposites. This harmony can be perceived by the curious eye as a beauty which is self-evident in all nature as well as in the man-made beauty found in art.

This beauty, however, does not have to be idly contemplated. The Eternal Feminine "zieht uns hinan", draws us to perfection and therefore drives a person to be creative (Goethe 12111). This drive is experienced by an artist as a rush of inspiration which urges one to create the beautiful products of art. This urge to perfection can also be a source of inspiration for a scientist to observe and learn from nature about her mysterious ways. At the basis of every creative urge there lies another powerful drive, the sexual drive, the Love-Eros aspect of the Eternal Feminine. This drive manifests itself in the animal and the human world alike. It’s most apparent function is procreation, the sustaining of the biological life in the universe. The freed sexual desire can, and for Goethe should be, a source of bliss in the peoples’ life. However, even when sublimated, sexual drive can turn into a creative urge. Thus, the product of erotic
love must not necessarily be a biological offspring (a child) but possibly a creative endeavor, a musical composition, a book, a poem, a painting, or a scientific theory.

For Goethe the meaning of salvation for Faust (unlike Christian Salvation as Goethe understood it) was not in avoidance of eternal damnation and getting to Heaven in a life thereafter, but in attaining something in the world of the here and now. The message of the possibility of a positive social change plays an important role in the drama. The Eternal Feminine, or Nature, cannot be entirely good or evil. It has its positive and negative sides. The true cause of evil is the wrong choices of people, personal and social. Therefore, people need to fight social injustice as well as the evil inside of themselves. Only in this perspective can the following lines be understood: "Whoever strives with all his power, We are allowed to save" (Goethe 11935. 493). Even if the results of human efforts are futile (as was the case with Faust), the Eternal Feminine possesses its wisdom. One can intuitively rely on it and it will help Faust to find the way. After all, the ever-striving active Faust, in his final salvation scene, is a completely inactive, helpless and dependent baby, and yet his salvation is assured.

Finally, there is one more way of interpreting Faust’s salvation and that is by looking at Goethe’s drama as the “the drama of the human race” as has been proposed by Luckacs, who argues that Goethe’s creative evolution proceeds from a recognition of the insoluble conflicts and contradictions of human life to their (dialectical!) resolution at the level of humankind. (Boldyrev 70). Based on a similar perspective, one can view Faust and his life not exclusively as that of an individual character, but as a life representative of the entirety of Western civilization, a civilization rooted in Christianity. That is one manner in which Goethe’s contemporaries, as well as modern scholars, have interpreted the drama. Already Nicolaj Berdiaev noticed that: “the destiny of Faust is the destiny of the entire Western Civilization”. (Berdiaev, tr. Janos 55-72) Therefore, it is possible to assume that if Faust could not be saved, Western Christian civilization is likewise doomed. Either Goethe does not care for the destiny of
Europe and takes a cosmopolitan point of view (as long as some cultures will exist than who cares about the European culture) or he believes in the possibility of enrichment and transformation of European Christian civilization.

However, at the end of the drama the main character Faust is saved. Therefore, Faust’s salvation by the Eternal Feminine can be also perceived as a validation of Goethe’s belief in the possibility of the salvation of the European civilization. In accordance with the main thesis of this paper, this salvation will not necessarily be a salvation in a Christian sense. Throughout his entire drama Goethe demonstrates the ways in which this salvation can take place: in returning back to nature (instead of using and abusing it), in overcoming social injustice (with stagnating Patriarchal world view in its roots), in freeing people from inner slavery and turning them into free creative agents (in freeing the individual’s innate creative nature.)

Goethe’s concerns, as well as his hopes regarding the fate of the Western civilization and the direction it was heading, penetrated Western culture as well as Christian thought. Similar views have been expressed by other authors and thinkers. Here comes to mind the pragmatic matter-of-fact negativism apparent in the works of Spengler (the Untergang des Abendlandes) as well as the desperate cry of Nietzsche (God is dead!).

I believe that Goethe was prescient in his genius intuition regarding the future fate of Western Civilization. There are concrete indications that almost 200 years after the publication of Faust the Catholic Church has seen the light of Goethe’s message. Church leaders, including the current Pope (who is unofficially referred to as a green Pope), have recently officially condemned environmental pollution as sinful. (Financial Times Information Limited). Catholicism now views it a man’s Christian duty to be a dependable steward of the planet. Thus, essentially, the assault on the Eternal Feminine is in a sense on the Church’s list of mortal sins.
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Elena O’Brien first became interested in the teaching of foreign languages in 1996 when, after graduating from a high school, she has entered into a program at the Moscow Linguistic School in Russia. There she achieved a Certificate in Teaching Primary School English. During the following two years Elena attended the Russian – American University in Moscow as freshman and sophomore studying social work. In 1998 she took advantage of a scholarship offer to go to Canada to study at Redeemer University. During her studies at Redeemer University, Elena was a Dean’s List student (1998-2001) and was awarded the Board of Governors’ Scholarship (1998-1999) and the Presidential Scholarship (2000-2001). She graduated from Redeemer University in May 2001 with a BA Degree with Distinction in Sociology/Social Work. After a period of working as an ESL teacher and a freelance translator in Moscow, Elena returned to her studies in the field of linguistics with a focus on the German language. In 2007 Elena entered the Master’s in German Studies program at the Florida State University. In 2009-2010 Elena received the Outstanding Graduate Student in German Language award. Expanding upon her interest in working in the field of foreign language teaching, in 2010 Elena entered into a second Master’s program at F.S.U. in Foreign Language Education. In November 2011 Elena passed her Florida Teaching Certification exams and obtained her certification for the teaching of the German Language. Upon the completion of her Master’s degrees in German studies and in Foreign Language Education, Elena plans on becoming a teacher of German as a foreign language.