

**Zeitschrift:** Colloquium Helveticum : cahiers suisses de littérature générale et comparée = Schweizer Hefte für allgemeine und vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft = quaderni svizzeri di letteratura generale e comparata

**Herausgeber:** Association suisse de littérature générale et comparée

**Band:** - (2003)

**Heft:** 34: Nach der Bibel = Après la Bible : approaches to the scriptures

**Artikel:** Satan and the adamitic gaze : enlightenment autonomy and the gift of creation : versions of the Genesis from Milton to Goethe

**Autor:** Schneider, Helmut J.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1006432>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 14.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## Satan and the Adamitic Gaze

### Enlightenment Autonomy and the Gift of Creation: Versions of the Genesis from Milton to Goethe

#### I

During one of many conversations about Shakespeare's Hamlet figure that occur in Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1796/97), the actress Aurelie observes that Wilhelm produces the most compelling insights regarding poetry, penetrating the "truth in the image" ("die Wahrheit im Bilde") without ever having observed the real objects ("die Gegenstände [...] in der Natur").

Denn wahrhaftig, fuhr sie fort, von außen kommt nichts in Sie hinein; ich habe nicht leicht jemanden gesehen, der die Menschen, mit denen er lebt, so wenig kennt, so von Grund aus verkennt, wie Sie. Erlauben Sie mir, es zu sagen: wenn man Sie Ihren Shakespear <sic> erklären hört, glaubt man, Sie kämen eben aus dem Rate der Götter, und hätten zugehört, wie man sich daselbst beredet, Menschen zu bilden; wenn Sie dagegen mit Leuten umgehen, seh ich in Ihnen gleichsam das erste, groß geborne Kind der Schöpfung, das mit sonderlicher Verwunderung und erbaulicher Gutmütigkeit Löwen und Affen, Schafe und Elephanten anstaunt, und sie treuherzig als seines gleichen anspricht, weil sie eben auch da sind und sich bewegen.<sup>1</sup>

Aurelie appears to say that, when it comes to poetical sensibility, Wilhelm is a God-Creator (or at least intimate of the Gods); but when it comes to observing his fellow human beings he is more like the oblivious biblical Adam, "das erste, groß geborne Kind der Schöpfung". Putting aside the distinction between genuine artistic creativity and dilettantism – of

<sup>1</sup> Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, ed. Friedmar Apel et al., Abt. I, vol. 9, Frankfurt/M., Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992, p. 621 (book IV, ch. 16).

crucial importance, of course, for Goethe and the protagonist of his *Bildungsroman* – Wilhelm’s first persona resonates with the Promethean figure of the poet as genius and “second maker” in the aesthetic tradition ranging from Shaftesbury through the German *Genieperiode* of the 1770’s to Romanticism; Aurelie’s reference to “shaping” human beings alludes directly to the Greek demi-god’s inauguration of worldly autonomy that the young Goethe had celebrated twenty years earlier (cf. his drama fragment *Prometheus* and the ode with the same title). Young Wilhelm Meister has deep insight into the secrets of creation, but is naïve in his appraisal of the *existing* conditions of people and human affairs, of anything *given to* and *received by* him: He merely marvels at the objects surrounding him, as did Adam in Paradise.

In the following I want to sketch a constellation significant for 18<sup>th</sup> century thought and literature in which humankind placed itself in the paradoxical position between the Promethean claim for autonomy and Adamitic humility, between, on the one hand, the will to produce world and self, which – taken in its most radical extreme – amounts to nothing less than the desire of self-production, self-engendering, and, on the other hand, the wish to receive the world passively, the childlike desire for the world as a *gift* gratuitously bestowed on us. The modern pursuit of human self-empowerment brought with it, as it were, an overextension, overexertion of the ‘autonomous subject’; the self-imposed demand to take oneself and the world into one’s own hands meant taking responsibility for the human condition, not the least for the forces of evil. If we for the sake of argument hypostasise “modern man” as a collective historical subject, we may say that this assumption of an all-inclusive responsibility represented a burden as well as a blessing: Man gained freedom and creative activity only through the loss of the metaphysical shelter provided by the pre-ordained place within God’s creation. The same metaphysical loss left in its place the need for reassurance of the world’s *Selbstverständlichkeit*, the wish to be welcome in a world made not *by* us but *for* us, the yearning for the bliss of *receiving* as opposed to the labor of *producing*.

Following Joachim Ritter's and Odo Marquard's thesis of the compensatory character of the aesthetic realm in modern society ('modernity', in a wide intellectual-historical understanding),<sup>2</sup> I propose that the idea of a totally man-made world also conjured up the spectre of a world losing, together with its pure *givenness*, its *perceptibility* and, more specifically, its *visibility*, and that it was an important function of the aesthetic (notably the aesthetic perception of external nature) to counter this threat. The 18<sup>th</sup> century discovered the mental constructedness of vision, thus subsuming this sense traditionally held to be the most essential for the perception of the objective world under the productionist paradigm, but it strove at the same time to restore to sight its assumed 'original' naiveté; i.e., the unquestioned belief that through the eye we receive the external world without any active effort on our part. Thus, while the primacy of the visual in Enlightenment and classicist aesthetics has to be seen within the context of a scientific, technological, ultimately economic domination and exploitation of nature, of which the visual appropriation of the world is part, by the same token, the 'aesthetic eye', as we may call it, instituted an *emphatic seeing* which was to compensate for the metaphysical loss of the world as creation, given to us independently from our own agency and received through originary sensory affection.

In his famous essay on the landscape, Ritter interpreted the aesthetic experience of nature as the crucial paradigm for the "function of the aesthetic in modern society".<sup>3</sup> According to this concept, the modern landscape experience, defined as the perception of nature as image, "Bild," compensated for the loss of the traditional cosmic "theoria"; i.e., the philo-

<sup>2</sup> Joachim Ritter, *Subjektivität. Sechs Aufsätze*, Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 1974. – Odo Marquard, *Abschied vom Prinzipiellen. Philosophische Studien*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1981 and *Apologie des Zufälligen. Philosophische Studien*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Joachim Ritter, "Landschaft. Zur Funktion des Ästhetischen in der modernen Gesellschaft", *Subjektivität. Sechs Aufsätze*, Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 1974, pp. 141-163.

sophical contemplation and conceptual articulatability (“Aus-sagbarkeit”) of the whole of the world in classic antiquity as well as in Christianity. On a more elemental, historical-anthropological or historical-psychological level, the aesthetic perception of nature as “landscape” bears out a dialectic within itself, the paradoxical dialectic of seeing as conquering and producing and seeing as receiving. It is the first, the activist factor of vision which ultimately threatens man with blindness – a world wholly produced by man is a world become invisible to him since nothing is given to him. This dialectic can be better understood if traced back to the biblical and theological roots and then anchored within the framework of the modern and 18<sup>th</sup> century secularization process.

## II

The bible and the theological background provided two opposite modes and concepts of seeing: the Adamitic gaze gratefully and joyfully receiving the wonders of the creations from the hands of God, contrasted with the gaze of greed and power staged by Satan when he tempted Jesus on the mountain top with the possession of the infinite worldly treasures spread out below him (Matthew 4, 8-11). The two modes still coexisted in German Baroque literature, where, for instance, the Protestant church songs of a Paul Gerhard celebrated the summer-time walk into God-given nature (“Geh aus mein Herz und suche Freud [...]”) and, on the other hand, the hero of Grimmelshausen’s novel *Simplicissimus* (1669) chastised himself for taking too much pleasure in viewing the landscape laid out before his high lookout point, diverting him from spiritual meditation.<sup>4</sup> But the 18<sup>th</sup> century developed a

<sup>4</sup> Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen, *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus. Vollständige Ausgabe. Nach den ersten Drucken des “Simplicissimus Teutsch” und der “Continuatio” von 1669*, ed. A. Kelletat, München s.t., pp. 486-488 (from the *Continuatio*).

complex and paradoxical intersection of the two modes, of seeing as humble receiving and seeing as producing and dominating. Aesthetic seeing, as it realized itself in the landscape, combined these oppositional modes; it provided a space for the humility of *receiving* the world (as the 'gift of creation'), yet *under the condition of modernity*, i.e., under the condition of the demand for autonomous *making*.

Adam, the first human, is human created directly by the hands of God. Anthropologically speaking, he is man *born*; aesthetically speaking, he is man springing to life with fully developed senses - in Goethe's words, "das erste, *groß geborne* Kind der Schöpfung". Adam's first awakening became a prominent theme within 18<sup>th</sup>-century literature; the theological myth of first man's Fall was replaced by the enlightenment myth of his first encounter with the world, an encounter redolent with originary freshness and future potential. However, this Enlightenment Adam was an Adam closely – dialectically – tied to his counterpart, Prometheus, for whom he was destined to 'compensate'; he was tied to the Promethean claim of producing the world (again: instead of receiving, gratefully accepting it) and, as I hope to demonstrate, infected by it.

If, for the secularized mind, God no longer held world and human in his hands, a defence was needed against the anxiety of a phantasmagorical world devoid of substance; the autonomous, 'absolute' subject confronted the desperate spectre of solipsism. For this reason, the Cartesian thought experiment of an ontological collapse which resulted in the discovery of the *ego cogito* as the ultimate unshakeable ground ("fundamentum inconcussum") of knowledge, had had to revert to the creator god in order to bridge the threatening abyss of nothingness (cf. the third of the *Meditationes*, 1641). Yet once the ontological ground of an unquestioned being had been put into radical doubt, it was never to be regained. In a radical sense, the world (as creation) remained suspended, just as, methodologically, God was only the second step after the *ego cogito* had emerged out of universal doubt.

Adam, as has been stated before, represented man born, the fact of human createdness (“Gebürtigkeit”, “Geschöpflichkeit”). And indeed, it was precisely in this *fact of birth* that Descartes found the creator: Within the *cogito* he posited an incontrovertible feeling of dependence; for the thinking subject, Descartes postulated, was not able to think of itself as the originator of its own existence. The *cogito* was marked by a constitutive deficiency referring it to a power superior to it – the deficiency of birth, the descent from something other than itself.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in the very origin of the modern claim to the autonomy of the subject, the fact of *Geschöpflichkeit*, and with it the dependence on the non-disposable factors of existence, asserted itself as an inherent counterclaim. This dependence could be neglected only if the notion of self-engendering were assumed – an absurd ideal if taken factually, but one which nevertheless represented the logical consequence of the concept of autonomy, and one that ultimately found its way into the horrific visions of Romanticism such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.

Already a few decades after Descartes, Milton’s Satan in *Paradise Lost* (1667) formulates this blasphemous arrogation of the power of self-birth. Who was present as witness at the moment of creation, Satan rhetorically asks his fellow angels, challenging God and his son in their claim to an all-originating might. Does any of them remember the act of their own creation? Satan continues in verses whose inflammatory

<sup>5</sup> “Et je demande, de qui aurais-je mon existence? Peut-être de moi-même, ou de mes parents, ou bien de quelques autres causes moins parfaites que Dieu; car on ne se peut rien imaginer de plus parfait, ni même d’égal à lui. Or si j’étais indépendant de tout autre, et que je fusse moi-même l’auteur de mon être, je ne douterais d’aucune chose, je ne concevrais point de désirs: et enfin il ne me manquerait aucune perfection; car je me serais donné moi-même toutes celles dont j’ai en moi quelque idée; et ainsi je serais Dieu.” René Descartes, *Méditations*, ed. Marc Soriano, Paris, Larousse (Classiques Larousse), p. 56 (French translation revised by Descartes, 1647).



thrust will be echoed as late as 1833 in Goethes *Faust Zweiter Teil*:

[...] Who saw  
 When this creation was? Remember'st thou  
 Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?  
 We know no time when we were not as now;  
 Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised  
 By our own quick'ning power, when fatal course  
 Had circled his full orb, the birth mature  
 Of this our native heav'n, ethereal sons.  
 Our puissance is our own; our own right hand  
 Shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try  
 Who is our equal. (V, 856 sq.)<sup>6</sup>

Satan protests the notion of his own creation because it would establish for him the duty of obedience; he counters the vertical order of hierarchy and authority with the horizontal figure of the ring. His rejection of the deficient condition of a being who is born (of bornness, *Gebürtigkeit*) reads like a direct parody of the Cartesian argument drawn from human dependence and imperfection for the existence of God. The pious answer to this utter heresy will be given a few cantos later by Adam, in jubilant verses that describe his first awakening and wonderment at God's creation:

For man to tell how human life began  
 Is hard; for who himself beginning knew?  
 [...]
 Straight toward heav'n my wond'ring eyes I turned,  
 And gazed a while the ample sky, till raised  
 By quick instinctive motion up I sprung,  
 As thitherward endeavoring, and upright  
 Stood on my feet. About me round I saw

<sup>6</sup> John Milton, *Poetical Works*, ed. Douglas Bush (Oxford Standard Authors), London, Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 318. – The connection between Descartes and Milton, with regard to English Romanticism, is made by Thomas Vogler, "Romantic Form Consciousness: The Desire of Discourse and the Discourse of Desire, *English and German Romanticism: Cross-currents and Controversies*, ed. James Pipkin, Heidelberg, C. Winter, 1985.



Hill, dale, and shady woods, and sunny plains,  
 [...] all things smiled;  
 With fragrance and with joy my heart o'erflowed.  
 Myself I then perused, and limb by limb  
 Surveyed [...]  
*But who I was, or where, or from what cause,  
 Knew not.* [...] 'Thou sun,' said I, 'fair light,  
 And thou enlightened earth, so fresh and gay,  
 Ye hills and dales, ye rivers, woods, and plains,  
 And ye that live and move, fair creatures, tell,  
 Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how there?  
*Not of myself; by some great Maker then,  
 In goodness and in power pre-eminent.* (VIII, 250 sq.)<sup>7</sup>

The function of the aesthetic landscape as it emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century under the influence of a secularized religion – and not least in the wake of Milton's description of paradise – can be circumscribed as a paradoxical affirmation of at once humility and autonomy. For the joyful acceptance of the divine gift of life and world no longer relegated the created human once and for all to a subjugated space, it referred him to his innate power to shape and create the world. Thus, for example, an archangel's aria in Joseph Haydn's popular *Schöpfung* oratorium (1798) can be read both as a tribute to the Creator as well as to human grandeur: "Mit Würd' und Hoheit angetan, / mit Schönheit, Stärk' und Mut begabt, / gen Himmel aufgerichtet steht der Mensch, / ein Mann und König der Natur" etc. (no 24).<sup>8</sup> Yet, as church dominion waned and the image of the biblical Creator God faded over the course of the century, man's Promethean potential was ever more emphasized. In the terms of the Miltonian epic one could speak of an intersecting of Adamitic-creaturely humility with satanic arrogation of divine power – theologically nonsensical, to be sure, but containing a psychological ("seelengeschichtliche") logic. Was it not, after all, through the eyes of Satan that Milton's reader encountered the most splendid representation

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 361-362.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Haydn [Gottfried van Swieten], *Die Schöpfung*, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1979, p. 19.

of God's paradisiacal creation? And were these eyes not filled with the envious admiration of a genius second only to the first maker? (Cf. IV, 131sq.)<sup>9</sup>

### III

In the literature of the age of sensibility, we find again and again this "originary gaze" ("Ursprungsblick") onto a blissful creation with its twofold emphasis on the receiving and the producing moment.<sup>10</sup> One function of this 'enlightened version' of God's gift to Adam can be described as the curtailing, by aesthetic means, of the destructive potential of the modern experiment of annihilation (a prominent feature, for instance, in the works of Jean Paul). Adam was called upon to reign in the Satanic temptation of modernity, to

<sup>9</sup> The enlightened, i.e., rationalized and aestheticized experience of the gift can in its part also be related to a biblical background, namely the second biblical gift of Christ's sacrifice, which, in the Lutheran and the Pietist tradition, was interpreted as the redemption of the first gift of the creation lost through man's fall and as proof of the continuation of God's grace under the postlapsarian condition. This second gift of grace was also something solely and exclusively to be received and accepted – "sola gratia" – and by no means something to be achieved through one's endeavor; but inasmuch as it recovered the originary paradisiacal gift on a 'higher', spiritual level (the Paulinian illumination by faith) it could serve as a theological prefiguration of enlightened intellectuality ("Geistigkeit"). In both instances a prior yet "unenlightened" (as it were "naïve") stage was *repeated* as well as *sublated*: the stage of an already fallen natural man and the naturalness of birth. The parallel is expounded in Herder's treatise *Über die älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts* (1774/76), arguably the most important analysis of this theological constellation; for Herder, the Adamitic act of originary seeing can still be repeated by the modern mind every morning, and moreover it is re-enacted through the interpretative act of reading the *Genesis* in a Paulinian spirit.

<sup>10</sup> For the hidden theatrical arrangement of this figure cf. my article "The Staging of the Gaze: Aesthetic Illusion and the Scene of Nature in the 18<sup>th</sup> century," *Reflecting Senses: Perception and Appearance in Literature, Culture and the Arts*, ed. Frederick Burwick and Walter Pape, Berlin, New York, de Gruyter, 1995, pp. 77-95.

provide ontological reassurance against the threat of the solipsistic void. The same secular constellation – once again: the devotion of man created as opposed to the human arrogation of a self-made creation and the aesthetic negotiation of this opposition – manifests itself in Goethe's *Faust*-Drama, where it is driven to a radical extreme. Already in *Faust I*'s "Easter Walk" scene, Faust, frustrated by his futile attempts to transcend the limits of human existence (including the decision to resort to suicide), leaves the confines of his study and the town and strolls towards the open landscape ("Vor dem Tor" is the title of the scene), thereby seeming to experience an 'Adamitic' and spiritual rebirth, fitting for the day commemorating Christ's resurrection. (Vv. 903 sq.)<sup>11</sup> However, Faust's eyes do not rest on the beautiful sights opening themselves before him. On the contrary, these sights draw him on in an ever intensifying, infinite movement of transcension. This transcending movement is scenically rendered as the climb up to a hilltop, a favourite motif of the period which here becomes an act of symbolic removal from the social world and, implicitly, from its moral bonds. The origin of this drive to reach the beyond lies in an insatiable gaze longing for ever more images not so much 'taken in' from the outside as produced by the self who through these images wishes to assert his own creativity. It is both the greed to see and the addiction to producing and projecting ever more images (and, of course, their elaborate articulation in language, which underlines the productionist urge) that drives Goethe's protagonist beyond the limits of the visible; once he has reached the hilltop he is not satisfied with the enjoyment of the wide landscape sprawling before him, but aspires to rise to the sky and imagines himself following the course of the sun in order to gain a divine gaze on the world. (Cf. esp. Vv. 1070 sq.) Faust wishes to *be* the sun instead of *receiving* its light; therefore it is no coincidence, but rather the natural consequence of his Satanic wish, that it is immediately

<sup>11</sup> Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke* (see note 1), Abt. I, vol. 7/1, 1994, p. 51 sq (verse numbering according to this edition).

followed by the first encounter with the devil. As dusk sets in and the world grows pale and dark, the deprivation of light serves as a reminder of human createdness. It is at this point that Mephisto establishes contact with Faust in order to fulfil his longing for the eternal light; Mephisto will seduce and lure him into the artificial brightness of his self-fabricated worlds.<sup>12</sup>

But just as the “eye of the landscape” is from its inception infected by Mephisto, and just as to perceive landscape aesthetically is to perceive it within the horizon of a potential produceability of the world (recall Milton’s Satan gazing with connoisseurship at God’s paradise), the inverse is true as well: Faust’s drive for the progressive conquest of the visible – and the world through vision – fails to quench; on the contrary, it exacerbates his Adamitic desire for a nature merely bestowed upon him. None of the virtual worlds conjured up by Mephisto and served up to Faust’s imagination satisfy him. In this perspective, the famous Faustian wish for the one moment of absolute fulfilment (the “Augenblick” he would want to halt forever) can be understood as the wish for a world offering itself to him on its own accord, giving itself to him as a gratuitous gift – the gratuity of the gift being the very mark of bliss and beauty.

Herein lies the meaning of the episode that begins the last act of *Faust Zweiter Teil*, Philemon and Baucis, which is structured as a clear counterpart to the Easter walk. The old Faust wishes to build a lookout at an idyllic spot upon a dune (a spot marked iconographically as the “place”, the *locus* both of the classical tradition and the faith in the “old God”), where he would tower high above the fruits of his colonization and oversee the land he has gained, with the assistance of Mephisto’s magic, by damming up the ocean: “Dort wollt ich,

<sup>12</sup> Cf. my article “Das Licht der Welt. Geburt und Bild in Goethes *Faust*,” *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 75, 2001, pp. 102-122.

weit umher zu schauen, / Von Ast zu Ast Gerüste bauen, /  
 Dem Blick eröffnen weite Bahn, / Zu sehn was alles ich ge-  
 tan, / Zu überschaun mit einem Blick / Des Menschengeistes  
 Meisterstück [...].” (Vv. 11243 sq.)

When Mephisto carries out this final wish of his protégé, his violent action kills the ancient couple and destroys their homestead. The “colonization” of the idyll of the old world in order to make room for the modern viewpoint eliminates everything the former stands for: humble devotion in the face of the creation, traditional piety, charity and care, neighbourliness and hospitality. In reading this episode, critics have often stressed the protagonist’s totalizing will to power and domination and Goethe’s critique of reckless capitalist expansion imposing itself even on the last enclave of the past. The question remains, however, why Faust picks the place of the archaic idyll for his *look-out* (or more precisely, why Goethe endows the site suitable for a lookout with the archaic qualities of a highly charged literary tradition; which is all the more remarkable since the hilltop is traditionally a rather anti-idyllic locus). The point most relevant for my argument is that Faust wishes to occupy, literally to colonize the symbolic place of the *past*, of his descent (*Herkunft*), ultimately the place of his birth in order to *receive* from here, gratuitously, the very “creation” of his own making. The “masterpiece of the human mind,” “des Menschengeistes Meisterstück”, is to present itself to his eyes voluntarily as a gift; the “paradiesisch Land” which he has wrested from the sea by his own (and Mephisto’s) endeavour is to appear to him as the first paradise given by God to the first human. That which has been produced by the autonomous subject is to become the object of a giving and “presenting”, a giving as present. In German, this paradoxical (or theatrical) figure in which Prometheus attempts to disguise himself as Adam might be called a “Selbstbescherung”.

This reading can be confirmed only when it is held against the symbolic structure of the plot and the physiognomy of the protagonist, for whom the polarity of godlike overreaching and Adamitic nostalgia is constitutive (beside the Easter walk,

one more significant example is Faust's awakening and observation of the sunrise at the beginning of Part II, a grandiose re-enactment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century theme of Adam's "first awakening", to which I alluded). The reading gains plausibility, however, if we recall the first scene of the episode in question in which a "wanderer" returns to the cottage of the old couple who rescued him years ago from the stormy sea. This past rescue is clearly a symbol of birth; Philemon and Baucis represent the symbolic parents whom the wanderer now wants to "thank" for their deed. Thus, the figure of the wanderer can be seen as the other, the Adamitic persona of Faust-Prometheus-Mephisto, as the incarnation of the latter's repressed consciousness of "Geschöpflichkeit". "Und nun laßt hervor mich treten, / Schaun das grenzenlose Meer; / Laßt mich knien, laßt mich beten, / Mich bedrängt die Brust so sehr." (Vv. 11075 sq.)

Yet this attempt by the Promethean Faust to project himself into an Adamitic alter ego<sup>13</sup> fails drastically. The catastrophe hitting the world of Philemon and Baucis (killing the wanderer as well) annihilates the pre-modern idyll; moreover, it extinguishes the visibility of the world. For the world is visible only as (divine) creation. A world owing its existence solely to a human maker withdraws from the human gaze. It no longer *offers*, or *presents* itself to man, as had God's creation. The hero who arrogated to himself the role of cosmic creator and who wanted, at the same time, to see what he produced, is blinded by the smoke wafting from the burning hut to his palace. Even now he defies the divine creation by calling up in his inner mind the vision of a future counter-creation, a "new earth" to replace the sight of God's earth which for him is forever blacked out: "Die Nacht scheint tiefer tief hereinzudringen / Allein im Innern leuchtet helles Licht: / Was ich gedacht ich eil es zu vollbringen [...]" (Vv. 11499 sq.). Prometheus' victory over the biblical Adam comes at a high

<sup>13</sup> It goes without saying that this is not a process on the psychological level of the dramatic character but on the symbolic level of the drama.

prize; shortly afterwards, as is well known, the blind Faust will mistake the noise of the workmen for proof that his order to have a new dyke built to provide room for the new world is being instantly carried out. But what reaches the blind man's ear is the sound of his own grave being dug.



## Abstract

Der Aufsatz skizziert eine geistes- und seelengeschichtliche Figur des 18. Jahrhunderts, der ein elementarer Widerspruch zugrundeliegt: der Widerspruch zwischen dem Anspruch des neuzeitlichen prometheischen Subjekts, sich selbst und die Welt nur der eigenen Leistung verdanken zu wollen, und dem Bedürfnis nach einem selbstverständlichen Empfangen, einem Beschenktwerden ohne das Verdienst eigener Anstrengung. Die These (im Anschluss an die Kompensationstheorie von J. Ritter und O. Marquard) lautet, dass das Ästhetische, so wie es im aufklärerischen und klassischen Diskurs konzipiert wurde, dieses Bedürfnis erfüllte. Sie wird illustriert an der neuartigen Landschaftswahrnehmung. Der ästhetische Blick in die äussere Natur ist aufgespannt zwischen aktiver Eroberung und einem passiven Hinnehmen, in dem psychologisch gesehen ein kindlicher Wunsch, in theologischer Perspektive die geschöpfliche (adamitische) Demut wirksam ist. Die Problemkonstellation eines sich absolut setzenden (vom Schöpfergott sich lösenden) Subjekts und des unabweisbaren Faktums menschlicher Gebürtigkeit lässt sich bereits bei Descartes und Milton (dort in der Opposition von Satan und Adam) erkennen; sie gelangt in Goethes *Faust*-Dichtung, insbesondere dem Schlussakt des zweiten Teils, zu einem Höhepunkt, wenn der Held, der mit satanischer Hilfe sich den Kosmos unterworfen glaubt, erblindet: Die nur noch gemachte und nicht mehr empfangene Welt kann auch nicht mehr geschaut werden.

