

STEFAN HEYM'S "DAS WACHSMUTH-SYNDROM":

A TEXT-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

AND

A RE-ANALYSIS OF GRETCHEN'S ROLE

IN FAUST I

APPROVED:

Janet K. Swaffar

B. Becker - Coeditor



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BY

RACHEL JANE HALVERSON, B.A.

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To Katherine Arens

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Stefan Heym's "Das Wachsmuth-Syndrom":

A Text-Linguistic Analysis

In a recent New York Times interview, Stefan Heym described his current position as a controversial, non grata author in East Germany explaining that, "The situation is hard, but it is bearable, . . . I am not an opponent of the East German system, . . . , I am critical. I stay here because it is a fascinating place to be for a writer, . . . There are a lot of contradictions."<sup>1</sup> His critical stance towards East German society and its inner contradictions whether framed in a historical context or located in the contemporary scene is woven into the very fiber of his literary works. In one of Heym's short stories situated in post-war East Germany, "Das Wachsmuth-Syndrom",<sup>2</sup> an initial reading yields a superficially unambiguous plot sequence centered around a man who awakens to discover that he has become a woman during the night. At first glance, this scenario would seem to have little enough to do with either contradictions or criticism of the East German system. However, a text-linguistic examination of the narrative reveals a progression of intratextual structures, patterns of grammar and discourse markers beneath the surface of the story. By creating an escalating series of verbal dichotomies, Heym restructures a tale of sexual transformation into a social statement. Through systematic

reorganization of the linguistic patterns of the story, Heym covertly as well as overtly suggests that the protagonist's personal crisis is not confined to the individual, but is, rather, symptomatic of a social identity crisis of men and women in the DDR in relationship to the world at large.

In order to uncover the textual propositions conveyed by significant shifts in the grammar and discourse markers of the story, the locations of these shifts will be examined with respect to the following narrative structures: first, the relationship between episodes revealed in variation in their external format, second, the contrasting discourse markers of individual episodes, and third, shifts in semantic categories within and between episodes.

With respect to the relationship between episodes several variations in narrative format strike even the casual reader as contrasts with the otherwise conventional physical appearance of the text. In "Das Wachsmuth-Syndrom", these variations consist of the division of the text into eleven episodes, seven of which are first person narratives, one is a monologue and three are dialogues. Additionally, the opening and closing statements in each episode distinguish themselves from the body of the episode through the absence of indentation, length and style, and two breaks in the continuity of the text (a poem and a newspaper report) which occur in the final episode. The external format, then, establishes well marked subsets of the story as a whole.

The second category, internal discourse markers, consists of

the grammatical and syntactical structures within these externally defined eleven episodes. Each segment is analyzed with respect to pronoun frequency and distribution, in order to assess possible discrepancies between expected and actual incidence of such features in monologue, dialogue or narrated episodes. Expected or unexpected patterns (i.e. the relative infrequency of third person pronouns in the narrated episodes) in these features suggest how consistent usage and consistent deviations redirect reader expectation within and between episodes.

The semantic category consists of expressions of time and location, which are classified, like the foregoing grammar structures, according to frequency of occurrence within a given textual segment. By addressing the text as a sequence of carefully differentiated linguistic patterns on both the syntactic and the semantic level, the implications of the inner contradictions of Heym's narrative can be assessed in terms of the correspondence between propositional message and textual language.

### 1.1 Three Discourse Features

Despite extensive new critical work focussing on the structural elements of prose fiction, a consensus has yet to be reached on a cohesive set of criteria for what Wayne C. Booth calls the "rhetoric of fiction". Nonetheless, particular structural components emerge as key aspects of any investigation of aesthetic features. For example, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren in their Theory of Literature



stress the structuring of time and sequence of events in time stating that, "Literature is generally to be classed as a time-art . . ." <sup>3</sup> Northrop Frye emphasizes narrational structure in The Well-Tempered Critic classifying prose as something that appears, ". . . like a dictatorial form, in which there is a one-sided and undisturbed monologue proceeding from the author." <sup>4</sup> Yet another variant on narrational structure is found in the work of Wayne C. Booth, who sees less a dictator than a intermediary or manipulative role for the "teller" or narrator. Thus he concludes, "In fiction, as soon as we encounter an "I" or a "he", we are conscious of an experiencing mind whose views of the experience will come between us and the event." <sup>5</sup> Critics such as Frye and Booth have anchored their analysis in the structural features of individual works of literature. It is, however, also possible to consider these same factors solely by isolating the anaphoric functions of textual language. Whereas structurally oriented methods focus on the respective relationships of time sequencing, narrational voice and narrational implications to critical standards of execution, text linguistic analyses frame these same features in a binary matrix to establish the basis for reader concretization of perception. For example, reader perception of time sequencing will occur as a result of the presence or absence of adverbial or other syntactic markers of chronology. Similarly, apprehension of narrative point of view is a function of the incidence and types of coherence and cohesion markers such as impersonal versus personal pronoun occurrence or frequency of vague versus specified and related time references, i.e.

the language of explicit and implicit connections. Thus, the procedure of this paper will be to analyze the role of text linguistic features in narrational structuring of Stefan Heym's short story to assess the probable impact of that structuring on reader perception.

The basis for establishing the correlation between formal narrational structures and consistent patterns of language use is presented in Robert-Alain de Beaugrande and Wolfgang Ulrich Dressler's Introduction to Text Linguistics, which delineates the standards of textuality applied by text linguists to analyze the structure of a text.<sup>6</sup> In order to specify the parameters of the analysis Beaugrande and Dressler's definitions of key text linguistic functions will be compared with this paper's applications of these functions to the structure of Heym's story. The first standard which Beaugrande and Dressler describe is cohesion, a feature which they say:

. . . concerns the ways in which the components of the surface text, i.e. the actual words we hear or see, are mutually connected within a sequence. The surface components depend upon each other according to grammatical forms and conventions, such that cohesion rests upon grammatical dependencies. (Beaugrande, 3)

In other words, explicit authorial statements are identifiable as patterns of explicit grammatically specified relationships. In the Heym text such relationships or "grammatical dependencies" are revealed in the grammatical structure and format of the text: the unindented statements, indentation of episodes, and regularities in pronoun frequency and distribution which reflect regularities or patterns. By establishing a connected sequence running through the text, regularities or patterns in these features suggest the way in to which cohesion, the explicit authorial voice, is operating within Heym's short story.

The second standard relevant to the analysis is that of coherence. Unlike cohesion, which is verifiable in the surface language of the text, coherence exists in the relationship between the text user and the text. (Beaugrande, 6) Beaugrande and Dressler conclude that:

Coherence is clearly not a mere feature of texts, but rather the outcome of cognitive processes among text users. The simple juxtaposition of events and situations in a text will activate operations. . . . The adding of one's own knowledge to bring a textual world together . . . (Beaugrande, 6)

In other words, the meaning attributed to the text results from reader conscious or unconscious apprehension of a consistent pattern of implied relationships between narrative statements, events, and situations. An examination of the division of Heym's story into eleven episodes, and the frequency and distribution of time and location expressions, addresses the issue of coherence by rendering explicit the respective contrast and frequency factors which covertly condition reader perception. By examining the short story at the episode, paragraph and sentence level shifts, structures are identified which direct and delimit reader perception. From a text-linguistic standpoint it is precisely such variable occurrences which constitute the textual standard of informativity, because they disrupt the text-user's expectations, thereby confronting the reader with an unanticipated perspective.

One feature of the text that does not conform to the text user's genre expectations is the subdivision of "Das Wachsmuth-Syndrom", a twenty page short story, into eleven episodes. Normally short stories of that length have, if any, at most two or three breaks or

interruptions in their narrative flow.<sup>7</sup> Not only are multiple episodes in a short story contrary to normal reader expectations, however. In addition, Heym introduces three classes of episodes: monologues, dialogues, and narrational descriptions. From the standpoint of reader expectation these variations structure a particular impact. In switching narrational modes, Heym has created episodes, which cohere, but are not cohesive. In other words, the episodes are connected by a plot line, but are disjointed in terms of inconsistent narrational discourse. As a consequence, the narrator recharacterizes the flow of a continuous story or propositional development by introducing surface discontinuities between individual episodes.

The first episode is a monologue by the narrator just as he awakens to discover his transformation to a woman. The second and third episodes consist of dialogues between Dr. Tauber, Dr. Wachsmuth, and the narrator, discussing the effects of the disease and its probable causes. Episodes four through eight are first person narratives describing the reaction of various social organizations, such as the media, medicine, government, science and various individuals in society, when they first come in contact with the "Wachsmuth-Syndrom". Returning again to the dialogue format, the ninth episode contains a dialogue between Dr. Wachsmuth and the narrator just after Dr. Wachsmuth discovers that he himself is a victim of the "Wachsmuth-Syndrom". The tenth and eleventh episodes are narrative descriptions which focus first on the significance of the epidemic proportions of the disease and then on the apparent resolution of the crisis.

This alteration in narrational focus and composition colors the perception of the textual information precisely because the narrational approach has shifted in relation to the information being conveyed. Due to the initial monologue and dialogue modes at the onset of the story, the reader perceives the "Wachsmuth-Syndrom" as a personal crisis for the narrator. The beginning episodes provide narrow focus on the individual and his personal crisis in monologue and dialogue form. As the crisis develops and expands in focus to the universal implications of the crisis, the reader perceives this propositional shift through a concomitant shift to the first person narrative mode. Reader perception is redirected and reinforced because the composition of the textual format mirrors a corresponding propositional development and expansion of textual focus.

Although the episodes fall into three discrete categories of discourse (monologue, dialogue, and 3rd person narration), there is a discourse feature, which creates cohesion between the episodes, namely, a consistent pattern in the opening statements of each episode. Physically defined by a large space between each of them, the opening and closing statements of each episode are characterized by an absence of indentation, length of the indicative statement and/or question. Reflecting only coherency features with respect to the text which follows ("Plötzlich änderte sich meine Lage" and "Dann ging es schlag auf schlag") these introductory statements are separated from the body of each episode. Moreover, not all episodes display this feature. Only one through five and seven through nine begin with one or two such

concise statements. In contrast to this pattern, the sixth episode opens with a rhetorical question followed by a short statement which cohesively qualify and further define the question. At the end of the short story, the tenth and eleventh episodes both open with unindented longer paragraphs composed of three sentences which explicitly connect the propositions of the text with cohesive discourses structures. The demarcation of the short story into eleven distinct episodes illustrates the feature of time sequencing by marking successive events and establishing the chronology of the story. These variations in the opening statements of each episode play a role in directing the flow of the story. The pattern of opening with one or two concise statements establishes a rhythm which the reader perceives as the consistent passage of time. This pattern is interrupted twice: first, by an episode opening with a rhetorical question followed by a qualifying statement and second, the two final episodes opening with unindented paragraphs. These interruptions shift the formatting of the episodes and thus, reader perception; the reader expects something different in an episode opened in a different manner. In this case, the rhetorical question is addressed by the narrator (1st person, monologue) in the episode which follows. It is the first time the narrator examines his psyche for a psychological change corresponding to his physical change in sexual identity. This propositional relocation of self-analysis contrasts with the monologue in the first episode, in which the narrator is concerned only with the physical manifestations of the disease. As a further level of implied considerations, the unindented paragraphs

initiate narrative descriptions of the international crisis situation and its eventual resolution. Thus the initial physical focus shifting to an explicit psychological concern has an implied connection to the social psychology which now frames this no longer unique personal experience. The individual has become representative. By interrupting the flow established by the pattern of opening statements, Heym has affected the cohesion of the text and thus alerted the reader to the change of focus in the following episode.

Heym does not limit his manipulations of the normal textual format to the opening and closing statements of the episodes however. Another feature of the external format that does not coincide with reader expectations is the interruption of the continuous text of the episodes themselves. Disrupting the internal grammatical structure of the text, these interruptions affect the coherence of the text by shifting reader attention from the course of events to the impact of events. Both interruptions occur in the eleventh and final episode. In the first instance, the following short five line set of song lyrics has been inserted into the text:

Wir zwei  
Liebste  
Werden die letzten sein  
Drum laß uns zusammen  
Dahi-i-ingehn. (Heym, 239)

In the second interruption, the title of an newspaper article (MENSCHHEIT GERETTET, Heym, 240) interrupts the continuity of the text through spatial separation and capitalization. These alterations and interruptions of the formerly continuous prose format shift the reader's

attention towards the message of the highlighted information, thus reframing the events in a new dimension. In the first instance, the parody love lyric introduces an ironic antinomy to the normally assumed procreative options in love relationships. This ironic resignation at the prospect of mankind's extinction contrasts with the newspaper headlines which announce the second possibility suggested at the end of the episode: the salvation of humanity as the result of the birth of a normal, healthy male child in the DDR.

By manipulating and altering the continuous flow of the surface text within the episode, the author directs reader focus to this contrast of potential futures. Thus, to some extent user perception is directed to a central contrast in textual message by means of key contrasts in narrational mode. This shift in discourse parallels the reader's processing of the changing course of events presented in the episode, and therefore, influences reader perception of the implications of that contrast. Although chronological development of events follow in a predictable sequence on the story level, shifts in format coherence on the episode level introduce new dimensions and juxtapositions in reader perception of those events. The initial monologue in the first person singular focuses on the individual; the dialogue alters the focus by introducing the interpersonal aspect of human interaction: and, finally, the narrational description expands the textual focus to encompass societal implications, a coherency further emphasized in the final episode by the interjection of two new modalities (lyrics and newspaper headlines) in the textual format, each of which present



contrasting alternatives to the crisis at the propositional level: the extinction of humanity versus the "new" male.

In order to determine whether these contrasts and juxtapositions find resonance and support in other textual patterns, pronoun usage will be examined to determine whether or not its occurrences conform to normal reader expectation. Since, at the episode level, Heym utilizes alterations in textual patterns and interruptions in continuous prose to alter the flow of the text and, consequently, the reader's apprehension of the developments presented, surface alterations within the episodes may enhance or alter these propositional coherencies. An examination of the episode specific discourse markers' structure reveals consistent episode specific variance in their occurrence, suggesting that this feature may serve a narrative intent. The distribution and frequency of pronouns in each of the eleven episodes reveals internal surface emphases which impinge on the story's propositional focus.

EPISODE #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
ich	24	19	42	0	6	13	7	1	21	0	6
du	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
er	0	4	12	3	3	2	3	0	4	0	2
sie(sing.)	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	7
es	2	5	6	2	4	2	7	3	8	2	3
wir	0	0	13	0	4	0	1	0	0	1	2
ihr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
sie(pl.)	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	3	1	4	2
Sie	0	4	24	0	4	0	0	0	7	1	0
man	0	1	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	1	2

Initially, the most striking feature of the data is that the second person singular ("du") and the second person plural ("ihr") do not appear once in the text. In contrast to this phenomena, the high frequency of the first person singular ("ich") and the formal singular pronoun ("Sie") is significant. Moreover although they occur throughout the text, the third person singular pronoun ("sie"), the third person plural ("sie"), and the indefinite pronoun ("man") have relatively low frequency and occur throughout the entire narrative. The first person plural ("wir") and the third person singular ("er"), though not notable in their frequency in the text (21 and 33 occurrences, respectively), are concentrated predominately in the third episode coinciding with the largest concentration of the first person singular ("ich", 42 occurrences). The third person singular neuter ("es") also occurs

frequently in the text (44 occurrences). However, its even distribution renders it, of itself, a neutral discourse feature. This analysis of the frequency and distribution of pronouns within the text reveals that the key pronouns are "ich", "Sie", "wir", and "er", thereby reinforcing the established interepisode coherences, i.e. an implied shift from focus on the individual to the interpersonal and, finally, society as a whole. A matrix further illuminates this conclusion by showing the relative weighting of pronoun types within individual episodes.

If one further reduces this chart to the three implied categories of pronouns, the "ich" or personal psychological, the "Sie and wir" or interpersonal and the third person singular and plural or societally anchored pronominal referents, this pattern emerges even more forcefully.

EPISODE#	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
ich	24	19	42	0	6	13	7	1	21	0	6
Sie & wir	0	4	37	0	8	0	1	0	7	2	2
sie (3rd person sing. and plural)	1	0	1	0	2	3	1	4	1	4	9

By contradicting the reader's expectations for equal representation and distribution of pronouns throughout the text, these key pronouns impact reader consciousness. Their concentration in the third episode where the narrator confronts Dr. Wachsmuth with his illness and learns that the medical world also is unable to diagnose his problem communicates the growing implications of the incident for society to the reader.

Just as all key pronouns are present in the third episode, the crisis is now being addressed by more societal institutions: the crisis is evolving from an issue for the individual into an issue for society and mankind.

An analysis of the frequency and distribution of time expressions also reveals a sequencing pattern, which subtly underscores the propositional coherency developed in the format of the eleven episodes by providing a changing enunciation of the role time plays as the story develops.

EPISODE#	1	2	3	4
	vergangenen Montag, in der Nacht (2 occurrences)	anfangs (1 occurrence)	während der letzten Monate, sobald (2 occurrences)	wenige Tage später, ein Ende (2 occurrences)
EPISODE#	5	6	7	8
	keine zehn Minuten, seit Jahren, früher, Tag und Nacht, Vergangen- heit, an dem Tag (6 occurrences)	vorbei, die längste Zeit (2 occurrences)	plötzlich, wenige Stunden, nicht länger, am Montag, Tags, mit der Wiederkehr des Sommers, am nächsten Morgen, zu spät, in den 60. Jahren des vorigen Jahrhunderts, nach seiner Rückkehr (10 occurrences)	jenes Frühling, täglich (2x) (3 occurrences)
EPISODE#	9	10	11	
	jetzt, gerade, an dem Tag, vergangene Nacht, längst, letzte Nacht, zu spät, längst, die ganze Zeit, an dem Tag, zum erstermal, zu spät (12 occurrences)	früher, Vergang- enheit, weiter, vor dem Auf- treten, an dem Tag, täglich (6 occurrences)	das Ende, im natür- lichen Ablauf, noch spätestens zehn Tagen, einst, im letzten Moment, Zukunft, zukünftig, täglich (8 occurrences)	

Initially, in episodes one through four, time expressions occur relatively infrequently, ranging anywhere from one to three times. However, there is a marked increase in the number of time expressions in the fifth episode (6 occurrences). This point represents a change in the frequency of time expressions throughout the rest of the short story. Although the sixth and eighth episodes contain only two time expressions, the seventh, ninth, tenth and eleventh episodes all contain a large number of time expressions (10 in the seventh, 12 in the ninth, 6 in the tenth, and 8 in the eleventh). The low incidence of time expressions in the initial episodes suggests the relative insignificance of time as a factor at the onset of a crisis which is purely personal. By the fifth episode however, the societal ramifications of the "Wachsmuth-Syndrom's" epidemic proportions correspond with the

consistent increase thereafter in the occurrence of time expressions in the later episodes. From the standpoint of reader perception, such correspondences covertly suggest the speed and severity of the developments.

Examination of the time reference type further substantiates the general impression established in a pure frequency measure. Whereas in the episodes 1 - 4 the less frequent usage corresponds with references to general past occurrences ("anfangs", "während der letzten Monate"), episode 5 introduces time expressions which refer to current or more immediate relationships ("keine zehn Minuten", "an dem Tag"), a feature which becomes even more characteristic of episodes 7, 9, and 10. Another feature these episodes share is multiple references to a more distant past ("Vergangenheit", "seit Jahren"), references which are supplanted in episode 11 with the first occurrence (4x) of time expressions which refer to the future ("zukünftig", "im natürlichen Ablauf"). These usages expand the propositional topics "individual", "interpersonal" and "societal" by delimiting for the reader the referential scope of the individual perspective (the immediate past), the interpersonal perspective for which specification of precise time relationships are conditions of interaction and the societal perspective which exists in a broader historical frame than either of the foregoing.

The second type of specific textual information to be considered is the frequency and distribution of location expressions. The inclusion of location expressions in the text is in agreement with the reader's expectations. However, alterations in their distribution

confront the reader and draw attention to the significance of location at that particular point in the story.

EPISODE#	1	2	3	4
	Zimmer (1 occurrence)	bei Dr. Tauber (1 occurrence)	in der Armes, bei Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Anatol Wachsmuth (2 occurrences)	(0 occurrences)
EPISODE#	5	6	7	8
	Eingangshalles meines Apparte- menthauses, ins Ausland (2 occurrences)	das große Kolloquium (1 occurrence)	in Liverpool, Istanbul, aus Lima in Peru, Bungalow in Südindien, nach Liverpool, nach Istanbul, aus Peru und Südindien, in Norwegen und Italien, aus dem Osten, in den sozialistischen Länder (10 occurrences)	über dem ganzen Globus, auf den Straßen, die Städte, in den Theatern, auf Bussen, Zügen, Flugzeugen, in Dachstübchen, in Höhlen, in einsamen Gebirgshüttern (10 occurrences)
EPISODE#	9	10	11	
	bei ihm, ins Sprechzimmer, irgendwo auf dieser Erde, auf der Welt (4 occurrences)	im Dechangel des täglichen Lebens, in China, in den USA (3 occurrences)	Kirchen, Moscheen, Tempel, Tabernakel, in jeder Diskothek, Stadt Koetzchenbroda in der DDR, die Welt (7 occurrences)	

In episodes one through six, the frequency of location expressions is minimal, usually only one time in each grouping ("bei Dr. Tauber", "ins Ausland"). This pattern in the frequency and distribution of location expressions parallels that already established by the time expressions: a relative infrequency of expressions in the first half of the short story followed by a marked increase in the second half, which is maintained until the end of the text, thereby implying to the reader that a relationship exists between specific locations and the resolution of the crisis resulting from the "Wachsmuth-Syndrom". In sum, the specific time and location references at the onset of the crisis are relatively few. However, as the crisis develops into epidemic

proportions, frequency and increasing specificity of adverbial expressions focuses reader apprehension on the urgency and social impact of the developments. The increase in frequency and concentration of these expressions in the second half of the text underscores the developing proposition that the individual problem has become a representative problem of society as a whole. Utilizing location expressions, Heym is able to focus the reader's attention on the concrete, reality-based facets of the crisis and thereby fosters a process of message internalization which is based on increasing documentation which parallels the reader's own experience in apprehending the text.

## 1.2 Conclusion

Although a superficial reading of "Das Wachsmuth-Syndrom" reveals an unambiguous plot sequence, Stefan Heym has systematically reorganized the anticipated linguistic patterns of fictional prose in order to explicitly and implicitly dictate the reader's internalization and understanding of the text. Explicitly, the structuring of the text communicates to the reader the multi-faceted nature of the conflict; the fact that it affects mankind on the level of the individual as well as on the level of society as a whole.

In the area of the external format, the text is divided into eleven spatially distinct episodes, linked by the pattern established by the opening statements of each episode. This is interrupted by a question and qualifying statement in the sixth episode signalling to the



reader a change or readjustment in the focus of the text. In this case, the narrator's reexamination of the implications of his sex change for his psychological identity. The demarcation of the text into eleven episodes conveys to the reader the step by step progression as the "Wachsmuth-Syndrom" develops into a world-scale crisis endangering the continuance of mankind. Therefore, by subdividing the short story into eleven episodes, Heym has influenced the cohesion of the text in order to dictate the time sequencing of the events portrayed in the short story.

The second area, that of discourse markers of individual episodes, reveals patterns in pronoun frequency and distribution, the opening and closing statements of each episode, and the characterization of each episode as a monologue, dialogue, or narrational description. The sequence and patterns of these discourse features also contribute to the cohesion of the text. Deviation in the patterns covertly signals to the reader a change in the focus of the text. For example, the shifting of episodes between monologues, dialogues, and narrational descriptions subliminally communicates to the reader the multi-faceted nature of the conflict, as well as the fact that it affects mankind on the level of the individual and also on the level of society as a whole. In this manner, Heym is able to control the reader's perception of the text.

In the third area of specific textual information, the inclusion, exclusion or concentration of expressions of time and location convey to the reader the time sequencing important to the comprehension of the textual message. In the case of both time and

location expressions, they are concentrated predominately in the second half of the short story, indicating that the time and location of the onset of the "Wachsmuth-Syndrom" are not of great significance. As the crisis develops, however, time and location of the various outbreaks of the disease are of the utmost importance in order to convey to the reader the speed and severity of the growing crisis. Therefore, "Das Wachsmuth-Syndrom" is implicitly dealing with more than a hypothetical disease affecting one's sexual identity, both physically and psychologically. On the contrary, Heym is addressing the current crusade for a new sexual identity and equality between men and women. As in the short story where the narrator initially is so consumed by his own lack of sexual identity he does not consider the social implications of what has happened, men and women today are so concerned with their individual sexual identity that we too have lost focus on overall societal concerns and goals. Following the shift from the individual to epidemic societal proportions presented in the story, our present "sexual revolution" has now spread beyond the individual and reached international epidemic proportions. However, in our striving towards sexual equality, we too are dissolving distinct sexual identities and roles in society and moving towards a society floundering without direction, a society of individuals focussing on their personal lack of identity. As foreshadowed in "Das Wachsmuth-Syndrom", this society of identity-less individuals is destined for extinction.

## 1.3 Notes

<sup>1</sup>"An East German Writer and the Wall of Silence," New York Times, 7 Sept. 1983.

<sup>2</sup>Stefan Heym, "Das Wachsmuth-Syndrom," in Die richtige Einstellung und andere Erzählungen (München: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1976), pp. 221-240 (= Heym in text).

<sup>3</sup>Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.: New York, 1956) p. 215.

<sup>4</sup>Northrop Frye, The Well-Tempered Critic (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and London, 1967) p. 86.

<sup>5</sup>Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 1961) pp. 151-152.

<sup>6</sup>Robert-Alain de Beaugrande and Wolfgang Ulrich Dressler, Introduction to Text Linguistics (New York: Longman, 1981) p. 1 (=Beaugrande in text).

<sup>7</sup>The avid Heym reader, however, will be prepared for this feature, which is characteristic of his shorter prose, see the anthology in which "Das Wachsmuth-Syndrom" appears. (See footnote £2)

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A Re-Analysis of Gretchen's Role  
in Faust I

The central female figure in Goethe's Faust I is frequently considered a virtual nonentity, a totally passive figure who serves to do no more than function as a foil for revealing Faust's spiritual growth.<sup>8</sup> Such perspectives overlook a fundamental feature of her character development from the passive tool of Mephistopheles to an autonomous, self-reliant individual. To assess this development as a salient structural component of the play, I will examine the following three factors: first, the extent of Mephistopheles' power over and control of Gretchen; second, the historical factors which stimulated Goethe's conception of Gretchen's character; and third, the name Gretchen and its implications in European witchcraft.

The historical prefigurations of the so-called "Gretchen Tragedy" are found in the common plight of unattached women who were vulnerable to persecution by the social forces of the 16th and 17th centuries. Europeans of Goethe's time were aware of the frequency of witch hunts and persecutions of single women in the late 16th to the early 17th centuries.<sup>9</sup> Although large witch trials no longer took place, the population still held superstitious beliefs about women associated with the devil: the belief in witches existed after the

cessation of the formal witch trials. In her book Die Hexen der Neuzeit, Claudia Honegger describes the decline in witch hunts in the 17th century and its corresponding popular reevaluation of what constituted a witch:

Ab der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts wurde die satanische Macht spiritueller, innerlicher, begann der 'Niedergang der Hölle', auf jeden Fall aber die Verbannung des Teufels in sein infernalisches Reich, was den Pakt ausschloß und zur metaphorischen Interpretation der dämonischen Besessenheit im Neuen Testament anhielt. (Honegger, 130)

Because the devil was granted only a limited power over the earth, and was confined to metaphoric action or possession as a direct influence, his representatives, witches, were no longer as threatening. Along with a decline in formal witch trials, there was a corresponding shift in whom society viewed as a witch. No longer was the witch required to sign a pact with the devil. On the contrary, it was now believed that the devil possessed humans, manipulating their thoughts and actions to perform his will.

This concept of witches was firmly established by the time Goethe wrote Faust. In the 18th century, the notion that a woman such as Gretchen could be possessed by the devil was common place. Goethe, in framing this 18th-century girl in the context of witch lore, could create in Gretchen a vehicle or tool of Mephistopheles used to bring about Faust's demise, an integral part of Mephistopheles' strategy of entrapment. Scenes such as the "Hexenküche Szene" and the "Walpurgisnacht Szene" are consistent with popular notions of Goethe's day that witches were active in the world, and were, in fact, functional

appendages of Mephistopheles. Seen from this perspective, Mephistopheles' strategy consistently utilizes women as his tools to entangle Faust in the net of his power. If, indeed, Gretchen is a tool of Mephistopheles and not a positive factor for Faust, his salvation would not be perceived as a result of the divine intervention of Gretchen and "das Ewig-Weibliche", but, on the contrary, only by the intervention of his own humanity standing up in the face of the devil's illegitimate control over the world. In this case, Gretchen's role, initially a negative force in Faust's quest for universal experience, is altered in the course of the play to an autonomous search for her own salvation.

#### Mephistopheles and His Tools: Earth and Witches

To what extent does Mephistopheles exert his influence over Gretchen? Does he gain control over her soul while using her to reach Faust or earlier? How can a being whom God redeems be under Mephistopheles' power? Does she consent to being a witch? Before Gretchen can be discussed directly, Mephistopheles' relation to and control over the world must be discussed in detail. For in this, the possibility of Gretchen being viewed as his tool instead of God's is justified. In the "Prolog im Himmel", Mephistopheles makes his initial entrance in the Faust drama with his conversation with "der Herr". This conversation illustrates Mephistopheles' attitudes towards humanity and God's usage of these inclinations in His overall plan. The following excerpt from the text exemplifies this situation:

Der Herr. Solang' er auf der Erde lebt,  
So lange sei dir's nicht verboten.

Es irrt der Mensch, solang' er strebt.

Mephistopheles. Da dank' ich Euch; denn mit den Toten  
Hab' ich mich niemals gern befangen.  
Am meisten lieb' ich mir die vollen, frischen Wangen;  
Für einen Leichnam bin ich nicht zu Haus;  
Mir geht es wie der Katze mit der Maus.<sup>10</sup>

Only with God's permission (as indicated above), can Mephistopheles claim as his realm of influence and enjoyment the world of living men. This sphere of humanity affords him the opportunity to practice evil and the enjoyment of interfering in the lives of men in the hope of capturing their souls.

This stance is not unique: it has found resonance even in the modern critical literature. In Emil Staiger's interpretation of Mephistopheles' entrance in Faust, for example, the accent is also placed on the limitations of Mephistopheles' powers. Staiger states his evaluation as follows:

Nach diesem himmlischen Beginn tritt Mephistopheles auf den Plan, die für die zeitgenössischen Leser schon aus dem Fragment bekannte Gestalt, zuerst mit etwas gehobener Rede, wie von den Engeln angesteckt, dann wieder sich seiner selbst versichernd, wenn auch noch immer ein wenig verlegen, verdrossen, hämisch inmitten des Glanzes, eine komische Figur, die aus den Rahmen fällt, . . . von "Sonn' und Welten" weiß er nichts zu sagen; denn da in der Natur, ist alles, selbst für ihn in Ordnung. Er hält sich an das einzige fragwürdige Wesen, an den Menschen, der höher angelegt und eben deshalb unvollendet ist, ein Zwischending von Vieh und Engel, . . .  
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Staiger stresses again that the world of living men is fully within Mephistopheles' reach and that only there is he able to exercise the most influence and power. The world of living men is exactly where Gretchen resides. Therefore, she is fully within Mephistopheles' circle



of influence and possesses the potential to be exploited by him: Gretchen has passed the first hurdle to be identified as a tool of Mephistopheles.

Armed with God's permission, Mephistopheles descends to the world and begins his plan for entrapping Faust in the maze of his wiles. Shortly after sealing the pact with Faust, the powers he intends to invoke become apparent in the "Hexenküche Szene". In this scene, he obtains the rejuvenation potion for Faust, which insures the feasibility of a relationship with a young woman such as Gretchen: establishing that one of his main weapons against Faust will be one of the young women under his control. This woman would only need to be possessed for the audience to recognize her role as a tool of evil. Goethe allows Mephistopheles to articulate the productive, reciprocal relationship between the devil and his witches to Faust in the following quotation:

Mephistopheles Das wär' ein schöner Zeitvertreib!  
 Ich wollt' indes wohl tausend Brücken bauen.  
 Nicht Kunst und Wissenschaft allein,  
 Geduld will bei dem Werke sein.  
 Ein stiller Geist ist Jahre lang geschäftig,  
 Die Zeit nur macht die feine Gärung kräftig.  
 Und alles, was dazu gehört,  
 Es sind gar wunderbare Sachen!  
 Der Teufel hat sie's zwar gelehrt;  
 Allein der Teufel kann's nicht machen. (Goethe, 76-77)

Mephistopheles possesses the knowledge to execute this machination against a human like Faust, but he needs help to carry out his plotting. Mephistopheles does not employ helpers such as witches to compensate for a weakness or inadequacy in his sphere of power. (He wants to build a "thousand bridges".) On the contrary, they serve to augment his strength and enable him to operate more efficiently in the earthly environment.

This situation is not unique to Goethe's Faust. Rather, it was an acknowledged component of witch lore that the devil used witches for his purposes, part of the folk-knowledge which his audience would have possessed. H.C. Erik Midelfort in his book Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany, for example, describes the witches' function, as viewed by the sixteenth-century witch hunters:

. . . the sixteenth-century defenders of witch hunting no longer held that the devil required the help of witches to produce harmful effects, but simply maintained that it was to his advantage to use it. Only in this way could the devil be sure of the allegiance of his followers, and only by enticing witches into sinful abominations could he confirm them in their guilt and secure them for his kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly through enticement, Mephistopheles uses witches to his advantage and hopes to gain control of their souls, as he has gained control of their powers. This information reinforces the notion that Mephistopheles used witches in an auxiliary manner to augment his power and allow him to extend his influence. However, Midelfort also stresses that the relationship between the devil and witches reflects the control that the devil exerts over the witches in his service (Midelfort, 13-14). In obedience to the devil's commands, the witch subordinates herself/himself to him and enters his control. This information is essential to an assessment of Mephistopheles' power in Faust, for even Gretchen will submit to him, when she accepts his jewels and follows Frau Marthe's advice, as he knows she will. Mephistopheles uses witches not only to allow him to achieve his goal of capturing Faust's soul, but  
 ans into his service  
 also to enlarge his following by bringing more hum  
 in the hope of capturing their souls also. He builds his "thousand

bridges" with their ability to enlarge his scheme, and use his influence to win them all. Mephistopheles' followers could have been viewed as an ever-enlarging group possessed by the evil he represents.

The possibility has been firmly established that Gretchen as a human being is fully within the reaches of Mephistopheles' power. It has also been made clear that Gretchen by her very innocent nature affords Mephistopheles the ideal opportunity to entrap Faust and gain control over his soul.<sup>13</sup> An examination of witchcraft theory as it developed in the 18th century and the devil's role in the witch cult illuminates how Gretchen actually functions at the hands of Mephistopheles, and how the mysteries about Gretchen's past life and susceptibility to evil can be interpreted

Although European witchcraft has a varied history, two tenets appear repeatedly in the organization of Northern European witchcraft theory, as it would have been preserved in the distorted popularized version. The first tenet is the repeated accusation that witches participated in every conceivable sexual crime against men.<sup>14</sup> In other words, sexual conduct beyond the boundaries of culturally approved activity was considered to have been a component of witchcraft. This unsanctioned sexual behavior, as viewed by society members, was provoked by association with the devil. Also, such sexual activity was not affiliated with their essential souls or character but was considered to be a product of their possession, of their association with the devil. Applying this first tenet of historical witchcraft to of Gretchen's role in Faust uncovers a new dimension in the triangular relationship between

Faust, Mephistopheles and Gretchen. The core of this relationship is Mephistopheles' exploitation of Gretchen's female sexuality to entrap Faust in his power and gain possession of his soul. An indication of the importance of this exploitation is present in the following exchange between Faust and Mephistopheles at the end of the "Hexenküche Szene":

Mephistopheles. Komm nur geschwind und laß dich führen;  
 Du mußt notwendig transpirieren,  
 Damit die Kraft durch Inn- und Äußres dringt.  
 Den edlen Müßiggang lehr' ich hernach dich schätzen,  
 Und bald empfindest du mit innigem Ergötzen,  
 Wie sich Cupido regt und hin und wider springt.

Faust. Laß mich nur schnell noch in den Spiegel schauen!  
 Das Frauenbild war gar zu schön!

Mephistopheles. Nein! Nein! Du sollst das Muster aller  
 Frauen  
 Nun bald leibhaftig vor dir sehn.  
Leise. Du siehst, mit diesem Trank im Leibe,  
 Bald Helenen in jedem Weibe. (Goethe, 83-84)

Occurring immediately prior to Faust's first contact with Gretchen, this exchange illustrates the key role that female sexuality plays in Mephistopheles' strategy for Faust's entrapment, extending even to enhancing her role via potions. Mephistopheles' exploitation of Gretchen's sexuality causes her to step outside the boundaries of socially and culturally approved sexual behavior: she has sexual intercourse prior to marriage which results in the conception of an illegitimate child and then in infanticide. Therefore, the sexually exploitive nature of Gretchen's relationship to both Mephistopheles and Faust reinforces that Gretchen functions as a tool in Mephistopheles' strategy. He involves her in a relationship leading to the occurrence of

a sexual crime, a component of witchcraft theory. Her culpability is not an issue here, but only the fact that Mephistopheles' is a source of her transgression. By the shift of emphasis in the 18th century onto witchcraft as possession, her character in this situation where she is manipulated cannot be questioned, nor is her salvation unduly amazing.

The second tenet in European witchcraft represented in the play for the audience deals with the accusation that witches possessed magical powers affecting health. Some of these powers were of a harmful nature, but there were others that healed.<sup>15</sup> In the consideration of this tenet with respect to Gretchen's role in Faust, not only Mephistopheles but also Gretchen uses a magical potion: the magical sleeping potion administered to her mother, which enables the sexual union of Gretchen and Faust to take place. Even though she got it from Faust (who in turn procured it from Mephistopheles), Gretchen's use of such an illicit potion constitutes her assent to evil -- her consent to working with the powers of the devil. Gretchen's use of a magical potion has a harmful effect, appropriate to her switch to evil: her mother dies from its ingestion.

Thus the collaborative efforts of this unholy trio (Gretchen, Faust, and Mephistopheles) resembles the work of a small-scale coven, causing the death of Gretchen's mother. Gretchen's behavior in administering a magical potion is fully in accord with European witchcraft theory, and reinforces that Gretchen functions as a tool in Mephistopheles' strategy to entrap Faust.

Aside from her covert association with these two tenets of

witchcraft, Gretchen's attitude towards the Church reflects a stance appropriate to a witch. A dominant element of Gretchen's personality and character, her apparently fervent Christian beliefs and devotions to the Church, is also in accord with European witchcraft theory. The relationship between Christianity and witchcraft is explained by H.C. Erik Midelfort:

. . . witchcraft was a heresy, and therefore one had to be a Christian to become a witch. That made good theological sense, and Christian Thomasius emphasized the point while attacking the witch hunt. (Midelfort, 189)

Although Gretchen appears to be a devout Christian, she trespasses against the Church's doctrine of behavior in thought, word, and deed. For example, in the scene "Ein Gartenhäuschen", Gretchen admits to herself after Faust's departure:

Margarete. Du lieber Gott! Was so ein Mann  
Nicht alles, alles denken kann!  
Beschämt nur steh' ich vor ihm da  
Und sag' zu allen Sachen ja.  
Bin doch ein arm, unwissend Kind,  
Begriffe nicht, was er an mir find't. (Goethe, 103)

At this point, Gretchen realizes that she is not in control of her actions, even if they should conflict with her Christian sense of morality and obedience to the Church. Her "intuition" signals to her that she is losing control over her very own thoughts, emotions and actions. Because she abdicates this responsibility over her own control, her fate will be no surprise to her.

In the scene "Marthens Garten", Gretchen's words to Faust illustrate another case of her disobedience to the Church:

Ach, wenn ich nur alleine schlief!  
Ich ließ' dir gern heut nacht den Riegel offen;  
Doch meine Mutter schläft nicht tief,  
Und würden wir von ihr betroffen,  
Ich wär' gleich auf der Stelle tot! (Goethe, 111)

At this point, Gretchen has agreed to intercourse with Faust, an act not only in discord with the doctrine of the Church, but also in disobedience to her mother. As a result of this illicit sexual act, Gretchen becomes involved in three other transgressions against Christian beliefs: first, she kills her mother with the magical sleeping potion; second, she gives birth to a child out of wedlock; and third, she commits infanticide. The degree of her consciousness of the implications of these actions was not an active issue for the dramatic development of the play, since her character is subordinated to Faust's by Goethe. Yet , it is apparent that she was a professed Christian before her contact with Mephistopheles and Faust, but subsequent to this contact rejected the major tenets of her faith and proceeded to trespass against them. Clearly, Gretchen did not commit these acts of her own free will: her lack of expressed conscious intent reinforces that Gretchen functions as a tool in Mephistopheles' strategy, which is based on Gretchen's performance of the heretical acts noted above. Again, Gretchen's behavior and her conflict with Christian beliefs is in accordance with European witchcraft theory, manifesting the anticipated, irresponsible behaviors of witches.

The Church's handling of witch trials highlights Gretchen's role as a woman manipulated by the devil. Margaret Alice Murray states:

. . . the sexual ritual has been given an overwhelming and quite

unwarranted importance in the trials, for it became an obsession with the Christian judges and recorders to investigate the smallest and most minute details of the rite. (Murray, 14)

The Church's preoccupation with sexual rituals indicates that it felt that the main source of a witch's power originated in her sexuality — precisely the source which Mephistopheles uses to exploit Gretchen's power over Faust. In the scene "Straße", Mephistopheles reacts to the impassioned Faust in the following manner:

Faust. Wie ist's? Will's fördern? Will's bald gehn?

Mephistopheles. Ah bravo! Find' ich Euch in Feuer?  
In kurzer Zeit ist Gretchen Euer!  
Heut' abend sollt Ihr sie bei Nachbar' Marthen sehn:  
Das ist ein Weib wie auserlesen  
Zum Kuppler- und Zigeunerwesen! (Goethe, 97)

Mephistopheles encourages Faust's attraction to Gretchen's innocent sexuality to entice him further and further into his control. Again, her role in Mephistopheles' plan is fully in accordance with European witchcraft from the Church's point of view.

The "Walpurgisnacht Szene" also contains elements which allude to Gretchen's role as a tool in Mephistopheles' plan. In this scene, Mephistopheles leads Faust to one of his witches' largest celebrations, hoping to drag Faust even further into his control. Here we again find connections between Gretchen and evil. As Faust and Mephistopheles meet the Trödelhexe, she describes her wares as follows:

Trödelhexe. Ihr Herren, geht nicht so vorbei!  
Laßt die Gelegenheit nicht fahren!  
Aufmerksam blickt nach meinen Waren,  
Es steht dahier gar mancherlei.  
Und doch ist nichts in meinem Laden,  
Dem keiner auf der Erde gleicht,



Das nicht einmal zum tücht'gen Schaden  
 Der Menschen und der Welt gereicht.  
 Kein Dolch ist hier, von dem nicht Blut geflossen,  
 Kein Kelch, aus dem sich nicht, in ganz gesunden Leib,  
 Verzehrend heißes Gift ergossen,  
 Kein Schmuck, der nicht ein liebenswürdig Weib  
 Verführt, kein Schwert, das nicht den Bund gebrochen,  
 Nicht etwa hinterrücks den Gegenmann durchstoßen. (Goethe,  
 129)

All of her wares represent crimes that either Gretchen herself has committed, such as the poisoning of her mother, or have occurred as a result of her relationship with Faust, such as the death of her brother, Valentin. This recitation of crimes illustrates that Gretchen as a tool of Mephistopheles has herself become entwined in a life of evil.

The implications of this entanglement become apparent at the end of the "Walpurgisnacht Szene". A premonition of Gretchen's demise is revealed as Faust describes an apparition that he sees as:

Faust. Mephisto, siehst du dort  
 Ein blasses, schönes Kind allein und ferne stehen?  
 Sie schiebt sich langsam nur vom Ort,  
 Sie scheint mit geschlossnen Füßen zu gehen.  
 Ich muß bekennen, daß mir deucht,  
 Daß sie dem guten Gretchen gleicht. (Goethe, 131)

Although what Faust sees is only an illusion, this figment mirrors the fate that Gretchen will soon suffer at the hands of her earthly judges.<sup>16</sup> Concluding his description of the illusion, Faust exclaims:

Faust. Welch eine Wonne! welch ein Leiden!  
 Ich kann von diesem Blick nicht scheiden.  
 Wie sonderbar muß diesen schönen Hals  
 Ein einzig rotes Schnürchen schmücken,  
 Nicht breiter als ein Messerrücken! (Goethe, 131)

In his work Götterzeichen, Liebeszauber, Satanskult, Albrecht Schöne accounts for the significance of this red band:

Doch blieb unbemerkt oder nicht bedacht, daß den Blutstreif, der um Gretchens Hals sich zieht, schon durch Goethes Gewährsmann ausdrücklich zum Teufelszeichen erklärt und in unmittelbaren Zusammenhang gebracht wird mit dem Hexenwesen. Das aber ist von ganz erheblicher Bedeutung. Denn andere Indizien weisen in gleiche Richtung: Gretchen selber, die Rettende, scheint zugleich doch viel tiefer verstrickt in den Hexensabbat and Satanskult, als die Oberfläche des kanonisierten Dramentextes (noch) erkennen läßt. (Schöne, 177)

This reinforces that Gretchen in her contact with Mephistopheles and Faust has become involved in the world of evil and can no longer be attributed with the qualities of purity and goodness which she possessed earlier in the play. Her connection with evil and its implications are mirrored clearly in Faust's vision and again her role in Mephistopheles' plan possesses qualities which find resonance in European witchcraft.

Another event in the drama is also typical of European witchcraft, as it would have been familiar in the 18th century. First of all, the historical incidence of infanticide often occurred in conjunction with the practice of witchcraft, probably in close association with their sexual practices (Murray, 158); Gretchen kills her own child shortly after its birth. Gretchen is to be hanged as punishment for her crimes of promiscuity and infanticide. The scene "Nacht. Offen Feld." describes the preparations for Gretchen's hanging. The exchange between Faust and Mephistopheles in this scene commentaries Gretchen's role in Faust:

Faust. Was weben die dort um den Rabenstein?

Mephistopheles. Weiß nicht, was sie kochen and schaffen.

Faust. Schweben auf, schweben ab, neigen sich, beugen sich.

Mephistopheles. Eine Hexenzunft.

Faust. Sie streuen und weihen.

Mephistopheles. Vorbei! Vorbei! (Goethe, 139)

What Faust and Mephistopheles observe is a group of organized witches gathering around the site of Gretchen's execution. After the execution, they will take possession of her body and deliver her soul into Mephistopheles' hands. Mephistopheles' utterance of the words "Vorbei! Vorbei!" indicate that he wants urgently to move Faust away from the scene, for it is essential to Mephistopheles' plan that Faust does not recognize that Gretchen functions as a tool of Mephistopheles. If Faust were given time to contemplate the scene with the group of witches, he would have certainly identified the collaborative nature of the relationship between Mephistopheles, Gretchen and the witches. Faust's realization that Gretchen was falling into the hands of the witches would cause him to recognize the evilness of his own actions, thus foreshadowing his own demise. However much the truth is concealed from Faust, the incidence of infanticide and Gretchen's sentence to death by hanging again document Gretchen's participation in witchcraft-related activities.

An examination of Goethe's conception of and sources for Gretchen's character also supports the hypothesis that Gretchen is involved in a relationship with Mephistopheles that is of an evil nature. Paul Requadt describes the historical conception of Gretchen:

Durch Ernst Beutler wissen wir ausführlich von dem Kriminalprozeß gegen die Kindsmörderin Susanne Margarethe Brandt. Sie war Magd im Gasthaus "Zum Einhorn" gewesen, fünfundzwanzig Jahre alt, ihr Bruder und Vetter Soldat. Sie hatte von einem holländischen Goldschmiedegesellen ein Kind bekommen und es erwürgt. . . . sie bekannte also und gab in dem Verhör an, der Geliebte habe sie durch einen Trank willenlos gemacht und der Teufel ihr die Untat eingegeben. Am 14. Januar 1772 wurde sie durch das Schwert öffentlich hingerichtet, nachdem man sie durch die ganze Stadt geführt, nachdem der Richter das rote Stäbchen über sie gebrochen

und der Henker sich durch eine kräftige Mahlzeit gestärkt hatte. Goethe stand von Berufs wegen und durch Verwandtschaft mit einer Reihe der am Prozeß amtlich Beteiligten in Verbindung. Es ist daher so gut wie sicher, daß dies Ereignis die Konzeption der Gretchentragödie veranlaßt hat.<sup>17</sup>

Even the historical model for Gretchen's character thus professed to have some connection with the devil. Scholars agree that Goethe set this historical incident in the form of Gretchen into the drama of Faust (Requadt, 218). The connection between Gretchen and the devil, Mephistopheles, provided him with ideal solution to the task of making Mephistopheles' strategy to entrap Faust conceptually feasible, without requiring him to develop Gretchen as a character because the gaps in her history are compensated for by well-established traditions.

Not only does the historical model for Gretchen connect her with the devil , but her name, Margarethe or Gretchen, also is historically rooted in witchcraft. Margaret Alice Murray points out that: "the great mass of the names fall under eight heads with their dialectical differences: . . . 7, Margaret (Marget, Mag, Marjorie). . . " (Murray, 255). Gretchen's name, a diminutive, means literally "little Margaret" -- perhaps a minor witch, not central to the witchcraft movement? Her role in Mephistopheles' plan can be viewed as that of a "little tool", used to guide Faust down the path towards his demise.

If it is believable that Gretchen plays the role of a tool in Mephistopheles' plan to capture Faust's soul, then her salvation must be equally plausible. Martin Plantsch, a theologian at the University of Tübingen, addresses the fate of witches' souls in his theological work entitled Opusculum de sagis maleficis which appeared in January of 1507 (Midelfort, 34). Plantsch's conclusion is summarized as follows:

Yet when he dealt with ways of combating witchcraft, he nowhere recommended the direct method of simply executing the witches. Instead, they should repent and seek out the sacramentalia of the Church. If no cure worked, they could only endure the hand of the Lord, secure in the hope of increased reward in heaven. (Midelfort, 24)

Plantsch's attitude towards witches and witchcraft evident in this quotation impacted both Catholic thought for two hundred years following the appearance of Opusculum de sagis maleficis (Midelfort, 34). Thus, in terms of Catholic dogma, though an individual was involved with witchcraft and the devil while on earth, the opportunity for salvation was still available after death. Salvation required turning to God and asking for forgiveness. Goethe sets up the salvation of his "little tool" in terms commensurate with these dicta, and with the recognition that she was a Christian fallen away. In the scene "Kerker", Gretchen cries out before her death as she sees Mephistopheles approaching:

Margarete. Dein bin ich, Vater! Rette mich!  
 Ihr Engel! Ihr heiligen Scharen,  
 Lagert euch umher, mich zu bewahren!  
 Heinrich! Mir graut's vor dir!  
Mephistopheles. Sie ist gerichtet!  
Stimme, von oben. Ist gerettet! (Goethe, 145)

As the "Prolog im Himmel" indicated, Mephistopheles' work only extends to this world, not to the world beyond, and therefore, the Church's dicta about sin have not been violated, nor has God performed an extraordinary miracle.

Gretchen's repentance in the last minutes of her life removes her from Mephistopheles' evil power and insures the salvation of her soul in heaven. Her final words to Faust, "Heinrich! Mir graut's vor dir!", warn him of Mephistopheles' evil strength. Gretchen recognizes

that her relationship with Mephistopheles was the impetus for her sins on earth. She fears for Faust's soul, because she is now aware of the extent of Mephistopheles' power. Her exclamation of fear is a final attempt on her part to show Faust the way to possible salvation and rescue him from the claws of Mephistopheles. This attempt is initiated while Gretchen is still a human being living on earth. Gretchen's participation in Faust's salvation is not of a magical celestial nature. On the contrary, it is perceived as a humane gesture of concern for the welfare of another human being. Thus, even though Gretchen came in contact with witchcraft and the devil during her life on earth, it is her repentance and confession of sin that insures the conceivability of her soul being rescued from Mephistopheles and her salvation being insured in heaven. She may have been used as a tool of the devil, but her innocence of character was secured as a human being.

#### Conclusion

By considering the extent of Mephistopheles' power in Faust against the backdrop of the 18th century ideological and social environment, it is possible that Gretchen can be identified as a tool of Mephistopheles used to implement his strategy to entrap Faust's soul, calling on assumptions about good and evil in the world and avoiding developing a third major character in the play. Mephistopheles uses Gretchen, as he does the other witches in the "Hexenküche Szene" and the "Walpurgisnacht Szene", in his strategy to capture Faust in his web of power and to provoke him to say, "Verweile doch du bist so schön".

If Gretchen is perceived as tool of Mephistopheles, Faust

cannot be said to be saved by the divine intervention of "das Ewig-Weibliche". Faust is saved by his own means; he acts upon the advice Gretchen gives him before her death. With or without Gretchen's help, Faust's realization of his sins is sufficient to insure his salvation and rescue his soul from the hands of Mephistopheles. Such a picture of the strength of the human soul brings the concept of Faust as a human hero much closer into line with the concept of limited evil used in the Enlightenment, where the devil was largely banished from earth.

At the beginning of Faust in the scene "Prolog im Himmel", the boundaries of Mephistopheles' power are very clearly laid out: men are fair game for him during their stay on earth, and not necessarily in their ultimate fates. With God's permission, Mephistopheles is free to exploit and manipulate men during their earthly existence, and to enlist the help of witches, human contacts, to execute his plans and strategies for humanity. Gretchen, representative of an eighteenth-century Christian, appears to be fully within the reach of Mephistopheles' power, yet neither she nor Faust can be plausibly damned within the context of the play.

Seen against the backdrop of the 18th-century and prevalent small witch trials, Gretchen becomes a representative figure, a type, and not necessarily as a developed individual character. Gretchen's fate is inevitable and is therefore subordinate to the overall understanding of the Faust drama, focused on two well-articulated male characters. This figure or type of female was automatically held responsible for her actions as products of a weakness in her character, and so was not the

focus of attention which is instead aimed at the interaction between Faust and Mephistopheles. Seen from this perspective, Gretchen is not intended to be a representative 18th-century person: she is rather a representation, a personification of a tenet of eighteenth century Christian dogma.



## 2.1 Notes

<sup>8</sup>An array of critical approaches have treated Gretchen in a variety of ways. For a classification of Gretchen as a victim of her socio-economic position, see Georg Lukacs, "Die Gretchen-Tragödie", in Aufsätze zu Goethes 'Faust I', ed. Werner Keller, Wege der Forschung Band CXLV (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft); for an analysis of Gretchen as a literary figure, see Stuart Atkins, Goethe's Faust: A Literary Analysis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); for a feminist analysis of Gretchen's role, see Margaret B. Guenther, "Faust: The Tragedy Reexamined", in Beyond the Eternal Feminine: Critical Essays on Women and German Literature, ed. Susan L. Cocalis and Kay Goodman (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1982); for a report on the historical references to the Gretchen figure, see Eudo C. Mason, Goethe's Faust: Its Genesis and Purport (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967); for a critical treatment of Gretchen as a divine feminine force which guides Faust through his universal experience, see Harold Jantz, The Form of Faust: The Work of Art and Its Intrinsic Structures (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); for a history of ideas approach, see Emil Staiger, Goethe Band II (Zürich and Freiburg i. Br.: Atlantis Verlag, 1956) and Benno von Wiese, Die deutschen Tragödie von Lessing bis Hebbel (Hamburg: Hoffman and Campe Verlag, 1952). The present paper will treat Gretchen as a stage character and literary figure.

<sup>9</sup>Claudia Honegger, Die Hexen der Neuzeit (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978), p. 87 (=Honegger in text).

<sup>10</sup>Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Faust: Eine Tragödie, Vol. III of Goethes Werke (Hamburg: Christian Wagner Verlag, 1957), p. 18 (= Goethe in text).

<sup>11</sup>Emil Staiger, Goethe (Zürich and Freiburg i. Br.: Atlantis Verlag, 1956), II, pp. 527-28 (= Staiger in text). For further information on critical treatments of Mephistopheles' role, see Peter Heller, "Gretchen: Figur, Klischee, Symbol," in Die Frau als Heldin und Autorin, ed. Wolfgang Paulsen (Bern and München: Francke Verlag, 1979), pp. 175-89; and Benno von Wiese, Die deutsche Tragödie von Lessing bis Hebbel (Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe Verlag, 1952).

<sup>12</sup>H.C. Erik Midelfort, Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562-1684 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp. 13-14 (= Midelfort in text). For further information on witchcraft and the devil, see Michael J. Harner et al., Hallucinogens and Shamanism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Max Marwick et al., Witchcraft and Sorcery (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1970).

<sup>13</sup>Eudo C. Mason, Goethe's Faust: Its Genesis and Purport (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 217 (=Mason-Genesis in text). The qualities which make Gretchen an ideal tool are generally acknowledged by modern critics. According to Eudo C. Mason, Mephistopheles' apparently indifferent attitude towards Gretchen serves:

. . . to tease Faust and to intensify his impatience. . . . Similarly his profession of ignorance as to what "Dirne" (wench) Faust is speaking about is transparently a mere pretense. He shows

in the following instant that he is very exactly informed about Gretchen and all the circumstances of her life, and must therefore have been previously taking a great interest in her.

Mason points out that it is precisely Gretchen's innocent nature which lends itself ideally to Mephistopheles' plan for Faust's deception:

In his (Mephisto's) cynical eyes all the noble and tender feelings which Gretchen inspires in Faust are nothing but "flache Unbedeutenheit", and -- a still more important point -- he is not completely mistaken in his estimate of them. He knows all about "love" and has seen through it, as he has seen through all the other idealistic aspirations of humanity. . . . He is confident that the kind of tender, romantic love that Faust feels for Gretchen will degrade him far more effectively and profoundly than any gross liaison with an abandoned woman could do, just because his whole being and not only his physical appetites will be involved in it. (Mason-Genesis, 212-13)

<sup>14</sup>Ines Brenner and Gisela Morgenthal, "Sinnlicher Widerstand während der Ketzer- und Hexenverfolgungen" in Gabriele Becker, et al., Aus der Zeit der Verzweiflung (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), p. 226 (=Becker in text).

<sup>15</sup>Margaret Alice Murray, The Witch-Cult in Western Europe (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 11 (=Murray in text).

<sup>16</sup>Albrecht Schöne, Götterzeichen, Liebeszauber, Satanskult: Neue Einblicke in alte Goethetexte (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1982), p.176 (= Schöne in text)

<sup>17</sup>Paul Requadt, Goethes "Faust" (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1972), p. 218 (= Requadt in text).

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