Extensive and Intensive Iconography. Goethe’s Faust Outlined

Evanghelia Stead
UVSQ & IUF, evanghelia.stead@uvsq.fr

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/artlas

Part of the Comparative Literature Commons, Fine Arts Commons, Illustration Commons, and the Interdisciplinary Arts and Media Commons

Recommended Citation

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the CC BY-NC-ND license.
**Abstract**

The article examines the mark left by Moritz Retzsch’s 26 outline etchings after Goethe’s *Faust* (1816) distinguishing between *extensive* and *intensive* iconography in their circulation. In extensive iconography, copied or imitated images build a collective imagination, devaluing the original, albeit contributing to its aura — a view that challenges W. Benjamin’s influential essay. In intensive iconography, inventive artists rework Retzsch’s images, granting a particular scene genuine reinterpretation. How then should we value multiples, copies and genuine re-workings in modern print culture?

**Résumé**

L’article examine l’empreinte des 26 gravures au trait de Moritz Retzsch d’après le *Faust* de Goethe (1816) en distinguant entre iconographie *extensive* et *intensive* dans leur circulation. L’iconographie extensive désigne des images copiées ou imitées construisant un imaginaire collectif, dévaluant l’œuvre originale, mais contribuant à son aura — ce qui questionne l’essai influent de W. Benjamin. Cependant, les artistes inventifs, qui retravaillent Retzsch et réinterprètent puissamment une scène, dessinent une iconographie intensive. Comment évaluer les multiples, les copies et les réinterprétations authentiques dans la culture imprimée moderne?

*Evanghelia Stead, fellow of the Institut Universitaire de France, is Professor of Comparative Literature at the UVSQ Paris-Saclay, a linguist and literary translator. She has published extensively on fin-de-siècle culture, Greek and Latin myths in modern literature, literature and iconography, books as cultural objects, periodicals, and ‘the Thousand and Second Night’.*
How is a canonical author consecrated? How does a major text enter the national canon, become the very representative of that canon itself? Goethe’s 1808 Faust may be considered as such. It entered early the accepted body of texts that founded 19th-century German literature, was deemed representative of the German spirit, has fostered the author’s fame worldwide, and is still today a major classroom text. Establishment scenarios, such as the one it underwent, are generally based on historical investigation and reception studies, mostly in consideration of textual tradition, whether subject matter be material (printed items) or immaterial (contents). In this article, I look at how images contribute to the process through the productive metaphor of fliegende Blätter (loose leaves), involving outline images. These contributed significantly to launching the 1808 Faust and instituting it as a key work. An iconological precedent had emerged earlier in John Flaxman’s outline treatment of major literary works such as the Iliad, the Odyssey, Aeschylus’s tragedies, and Dante’s Commedia at the end of the 18th century. My key example, Moritz Retzsch’s Umrisse zu Goethe’s Faust (Outlines after Goethe’s Faust), followed on these. Originally published in 1816 by Johann Friedrich Cotta, Goethe’s main publisher, it boosted the tragedy’s sales by attracting buyers. The series is the first important published work of Dresden painter, draughtsman, and engraver Friedrich August Moritz Retzsch (1779–1857), an artist neglected in Germany, who met with success and appraisal in Europe, particularly in Great Britain, also by illustrating several Shakespeare plays. His plates set some of the trends Goethe’s Faust’s iconological canon, rapidly forming in the 19th century, would prolong.

Loose Leaves and Outlines

Fliegende Blätter is the very title of a popular humorous magazine published 1845–1944 in Munich, and profusely illustrated. The material I study is not satirical, although fancy and spirit pervaded Moritz Retzsch’s work on Goethe’s Faust. When he pictured for instance the Witch’s Kitchen in two successive plates of his Umrisse, he drew tiny creatures bobbing in the vapours of the witch’s cauldron, an inquisitive-looking owl marching on the mantelpiece (pl. 6), then bewildered at what it saw (Faust drinking the magic potion in order to rejuvenate, pl. 7), a spider at the end of its thread dropping from the ceiling, and a string of frogs hanging from the wall to which I refer later (Figs. 1 & 4). What may have been an ominous atmosphere was played down by witty details.

Moritz Retzsch’s twenty-six outlines spread quickly from Germany. They pleased readers and collectors and were much in demand. As early as 1817 they reached England as a gift from an important German publisher, Friedrich Christoph Perthes, to Henry Crabb Robinson, a socialite and key mediator of German culture in London. Following publication, the originals were imported by a resourceful German bookseller in London, Johann Heinrich Bohte, and sold on the UK market with a short English summary and separate captions. Soon, they were copied by a London engraver, Henry Moses, sometimes with significant changes that placated English sensibility and sense of decorum. When for instance Goethe’s Faust opens in heaven with a dialogue between God and the devil, precisely pictured by Retzsch, Moses replaced Retzsch’s representation of God by a radiant vacuum in deference to the second commandment (Exodus 20:4, Deuteronomy 5:8). Moses’s copy itself went through a remarkable number of reprints, copies, and adaptations in the 1820s and 1830s. Even an American

4 The approach and methodology used in this article are part of Goethe’s “Faust” Outlined, a monograph I am currently working on for publication. The latter bears on the many parts played by Moritz Retzsch’s 1816 outlines after Goethe’s Faust, eine Tragödie (1808), their circulation and reception in three main European cultural contexts, the German states, Great Britain (mainly England), and France, from their publication onwards.


lithographed version appeared in 1824. These images triggered translations of *Faust* into English. Further versions adorned various English items, and ended up as a regular fixture of *Faust* illustrated editions in the 19th century. Conversely, in France, where two *Faust* translations had already been published by 1823, Retzsch’s series had a longer and more varied fortune. Lithographed by Jean-Baptise Muret in 1824, later re-engraved by Trueb, Branche, and others, it survived in multiple forms until the 1940s, as a wide-ranging series of reproductions and books for diverse audiences. Other countries were keen on having their own Retzsch, or books adorned with Retzsch plates.

Moritz Retzsch’s twenty-six plates were originally etched by the artist himself. In a single frame, without captions, numbered above right from 1 to 26, they were simply held together by string. They sat, escorted by a booklet of *Faust* quotations, in a cleverly designed portfolio. A yellow folder in landscape format with green flaps opened on the right-hand side to disclose the plates and the slightly smaller booklet of quotes, whose green back pleasantly echoed the portfolio’s green flaps. Each of the contents could be compared, perused in alternation, together or separately.

Circulation marked this genuine and fanciful work in numerous ways. First, the serial engravings were issued in Germany as multiple exemplars, and then reissued from 1820 (even 1818). A revamped and augmented edition followed in 1834, in which Retzsch added three new plates. He also published eleven outlines in a separate portfolio, also cleverly designed in blue and fuchsia, for the second part of *Faust* in 1836, and Cotta astutely commercialized both together; a total of 40 plates in corresponding new albums. Second, through the new multiplication processes prevalent in the 19th century (lithography, engraved copies on copper or steel, wood-engraved replicas, and later photo-mechanical reproductions), they became loose leaves or insert plates in numerous successful publications. At least ten of those saw the light in England between 1820 and the 1840s. Three versions were published in France between 1824 and 1830 and the plates also travelled to Belgium, Poland or the Netherlands.

These triggered other copies and reproductions, setting new patterns in *Faust* iconography. They also significantly inspired major artists in their work, as we shall see. In so doing, they established Goethe’s reputation, easing the way for *Faust* to be known and appreciated.

Madame de Staël’s comment in her renowned book *On Germany* (1814), in which a chapter lengthily comments Goethe’s *Faust*, well shows the extent to which the play inspired his first readers with incomprehension and even awe:

Certainly, we must not expect to find in it either taste, or measure, or the art that selects and terminates; but if the imagination could figure to itself an intellectual chaos, such as the material chaos has often been painted, the “Faustus” of Goethe should have been composed at that epoch. It cannot be exceeded in boldness of conception, and the recollection of this production is always attended with a sensation of giddiness.

Percy Bysshe Shelley’s comment, while attempting to translate a *Faust* passage into English and looking at Retzsch’s plates replicated by Henry Moses, is also revealing. Retzsch’s compositions clearly facilitated comprehension and rivalled the text:

---

1 On Retzsch’s reception in England, see mainly Stella Esther Odenkirchen, “Moritz Retzsch, illustrator, with Special Reference to his Relation to England” (Master of Arts diss., University of Chicago, December 1948), and William Vaughan, *German Romanticism and English Art* (New Haven and London: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1979), 123–54. Further developments, including corrections, will be added to these studies.

2 *Faust* (Paris: Chez Auvray, Marchand d’Estampes, n.d. [1824]). The Bibliothèque nationale de France dates this either 1820 or 1840, but it was indeed issued in 1824 as confirmed by the Bibliographie de la France and press reviews.


4 This date (1818) is an object of controversy. It figures however in Johann Heinrich Bolte’s *A Catalogue of Books* (London: Published by Schulze and Dean, 1819), 203, in which, as German bookseller established in London, he listed the German edition with the indication “Tübingen.” It is further referred to in *Foreign Literary Gazette*. The Literary Panorama 8-51 (December 1818), 1490.


7 It would be pointless to explore these items here. The forthcoming monograph announced in note 1 analyses them in detail.

What etchings those are! I am never satiated with looking at them, and, I fear it is the only sort of translation of which Faust is susceptible—I never perfectly understood the Harz Mountain scene, until I saw the etching.—And then, Margaret in the summer-house with Faust!—The artist makes one envy his happiness that he can sketch such things with calmness, which I dared only to look upon once, and which made my brain swim round only to touch the leaf on the opposite side of which I knew that it was figured. —Whether it is that the artist has surpassed Faust, or that the pencil surpasses language in some subjects, I know not; or that I am more affected by a visible image—but the etching certainly excited me here more than the poem it illustrated.

Third, French reviews of the time encouraged artists to use Muret’s copies as models to train their hand in outline. Fourth, their modest price and availability made them ready cut-and-paste material, as in the early example of Thomas Frognall Dibdin’s *Bibliographical, Antiquarian and Picturesque Tour in France and Germany*. They amused Dibdin better against the ennui of “dull Stuttgart,” where he had visited the publisher’s bookshop and acquired the original *Umrisse*. According to his sayings in a fictive letter later turned chapter, he cut and pasted the characters of the outlines into his prose while giving his opinion both on Retzsch’s work and Goethe’s tragedy. He later reproduced this composition in his *Tour*, the outlines being now woodcuts by [John] Byfield, one of the Byfields regularly contributing woodcuts to Dibdin’s works. Such a treatment styles Dibdin’s 1821 example an early precursor of the scrapbook and 20th-century collage.

Retzsch had turned the tragedy into a silent picture story, shaping characters, places and plot by using the outline aesthetic. He was stirred by John Flaxman’s outlines that had widely circulated in Europe thanks to Tommaso Piroli’s engraved albums. However, diverging from Flaxman’s sparse treatment, both in number of plates and detail, his German emulator had multiplied the horizontal frames around a key incident, revealing its evolution. Their slow and silent succession turned the 1808 *Faust* into a visual narrative. This implied a few essential distortions of the play’s meaning I broach elsewhere. In a nutshell, his plates were not only outlines in August Wilhelm Schlegel’s sense. Penning a well-known and influential article in the *Atheneaum*, Schlegel had stressed the poetic nature of outline drawings, inciting the reader’s imagination to complete the picture, explore, and thus understand the poem for her- or himself. Schlegel wrote characteristically:

Ihre Zeichen werden fast Hieroglyphen, wie die des Dichters; die Phantasie wird aufgefordert zu ergänzen, und nach der empfangenen Anregung selbständig fortzubilden, statt daß das ausgeführte Gemälde sie durch entgegen kommende Befriedigung gefangen nimmt. […] So wie die Worte des Dichters eigentlich Beschwörungsförnem für Leben und Schönheit sind, denen man nach ihren Bestandtheilen ihre geheime Gewalt nicht anmerkt, so kommt es einem bey dem gelungenen Umrisß wie eine wahre Zauberer vor, daß in so wenigen und zarten Strichen so viel Seele wohnen kann.

Their signs almost become hieroglyphs, like those of the poet; from the stimulus received, imagination is encouraged to complete and continue to create independently, whereas, finished paintings hold it prisoner through a gratifying sense of satisfaction. […] Just as the words of the poet are inherently bewitching formulae for life and beauty, even if one does not perceive the secret power of their components, it turns out, as if by true magic, that in a successful outline so much soul can dwell in so few delicate lines.

**Note:**
15 My translation after discussion.
16 Commented in detail in the monograph (note 1).
18 cited by reference.
In a much simpler sense, particularly in the many re-workings they went through, Retzsch’s outlines were also seen as unpretentious engravings in contour: for an untried eye, they simply outlined the play, sketched, and condensed Faust, thereby offering a summary or synopsis that could be variously re-interpreted.

Cultural Objects in Circulation

Importantly, as they met with text in various forms (whether captions, summaries, excerpts, even Faust in full or partial translation), these pictures worked very differently from massive commentary. They turned into inter-semiotic tools, making numerous claims on a text they borrowed from but also changed, all the while contributing to understanding, appreciating, and establishing it. They replaced its fragmentary construction by a more or less structured and uninterrupted narrative, strung together scenes and events, brought forward characters, and highlighted situations. The combined effect made different demands on readers’ competences—textual linearity on one hand, over-intricate and silent representations on the other, either in succession, or echoing a motif within the series. Easily copied and cheap to reproduce, Retzsch’s compositions gave birth to a number of printed items, which, although they might look the same, read very differently, depending on how loose plates were inserted between text quires, and how readers perused them. As decorative designs on covers, they also became clever marketing tools, moulding books and albums as intriguing magical objects or desirable acquisitions. In one of these albums, a combination of magical elements is reproduced in gilt on the front cover. In a second version of the same, the cover reproduces a detail from Retzsch’s plate 10, showing Faust amorously contemplating Gretchen’s bed. In short, they shaped an important part of Goethe’s Faust reception and made a long-standing mark on Faust iconography.

The main question is then: how are these fliegende Blätter to be evaluated, what tools are to be used to assess their importance and malleability?

I suggest using extensive vs. intensive iconography. I coined the term in 2005 by reference to Ségolène Le Men’s article on “extensive” and “intensive culture of the image” in Jean-François Millet’s work.

Le Men expertly studies how Millet is extensively diffused thanks to reproduction from the 1850s, down to everyday life trivial and popular objects, against the background of an internationalized art market and competition between nations (Millet’s painting L’Angélus acquired by the United States outbidding France). She also shows how the artist expertly condensed and reduced an overabundance of images and materials into iconic compositions, his work preserving a tension between extensive and intensive culture. The incentive for such terminology comes from Roger Chartier’s notion of “extensive” and “intensive reading,” borrowed from German and American reading theories. Intensive reading, following Chartier and his peers, corresponds to a period in which books are sparse, valuable, and infused with (often religious) aura. Reading communities might gather around a key mentor, who would read aloud for a group. Conversely, extensive reading matches the age of multiple printed books, negligible by-products of the industrial era, easily discarded, often destroyed. Le Men first proposed to import “intensive” and “extensive” from history of reading to other cultural areas, particularly image and art reception. The pattern is readily applicable, from books to images, especially in the 19th century, rich in new techniques of multiplication and reproduction. I follow suit further transferring the concept from text to its iconographic interpretations, from one seminal

---


artist to several, from Retzsch’s originals to their multiple re-workings, reception, and aftermath, and from Goethe’s several iconographic interpretations to their gradual establishment of an iconographic canon.

Extensive iconography applies indeed to the “veritable flood of images” (eine wahre Bilderflut)23 with which artists across Europe hailed Goethe’s 1808 Faust, and strove to interpret, transpose or illustrate it. It underlines the role of images, active in the migration of motifs from artist to artist, while showing how they gradually constitute a collective imagination. Images and motifs pass from one edition to another, as when Édouard Frère from 1850, or Gaston Jourdain in 1904, copy, highlight, and rework key scenes by Retzsch. An intensive iconography however persists within the extensive trend, allowing for genuine reinterpretation within characteristic books. Such is the case of Delacroix’s brilliant development of Faust’s meeting with Gretchen, on the basis of a Retzsch plate, in his celebrated Faust issued by Auguste Sautelet and Charles Motte in 1828. A closer look will elucidate what I mean.

Extensive iconography

Under financial pressure, young Édouard Frère served as main artist for Joseph Bry’s “Literary Illustrated Evenings” (Les Veillées littéraires illustrées, 1849–1856) meant for the popular classes. Joseph Bry had instigated the roman à quatre sous, a sort of penny dreadful or dime novel of the time, printing 16 quarto pages on thin paper in two columns with wood engravings at 20 centimes (quatre sous) per part. However, his selection included many classical authors such as Rabelais, Le Tasse, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Samuel Richardson or Oliver Goldsmith. Modern celebrities, whom he contributed to popularize, comprised Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Charles Dickens, and even Charles Baudelaire. Goethe had opened the series with Werther24. Faust shortly joined the ranks in a revised version of Gérard de Nerval’s translation25. Perhaps surprisingly for such a lowly publication, significant additions make seminal to Nerval studies this his last contribution to translating and interpreting Faust in French26. Although such items tend to be overlooked, external appearance sometimes masking the value of contents, the inexpensive brochure harbours in fact an edition of major importance. Images gave it extra weight.

Ten in-text illustrations, hyped as “drawings by Édouard Frère,” adorn the 44-page quarto, shamelessly copied from Retzsch via Muret or some other go-between. In black and white contrast they focus on the main scene, with astute gradual shadowing. They enhance effect by preceding, paralleling or finishing off the most touching or gripping parts of Faust. Édouard Frère, not yet a popular genre painter specializing in domestic scenes, treated Retzsch in ways appealing to the masses, cut in wood by Belgian engraver [François] Rouget. Four revamped Retzsch copies titillated the reader from p. 12–13—well before the text. In one of these, Frère focussed on Retzsch’s plate 6, of Faust contemplating in the witch’s magic mirror a redining young woman, her eyes shut, comely yet chastely dressed (Fig. 1). In Frère’s rendering, the graceful figure becomes a feverish sheet-clad female with bared breasts, passionately gesturing as if in wild dreams or a fantastic amorous embrace (Fig. 2). Yet even this detail is not of Frère’s invention, since it had already been used, by Henry Moses in English editions, and Jean-Baptiste Muret in French ones. Two further wood engravings, set in matching passages (p. 24–25), opposed a malignant Mephistopheles, muttering to Martha, to a tender Faust, leaning over a petal-plucking Margaret, his arm over her shoulders. A fourfold climax, ending

---

Figure 1. Umrisse zu Goethe’s Faust gezeichnet von Retsch [sic] (Outlines after Goethe’s Faust drawn by Retzsch) (Stuttgart und Tübingen: in der J. G. Cotta’schen Buchhandlung, 1816), plate 6. Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek, Weimar, F 3487.

Figure 2. Faust par Wolfgang Goethe, Traduit de l’allemand par Gérard de Nerval, précédé de la légende populaire de Johann Faust, l’un des inventeurs de l’imprimerie, illustré de jolies vignettes par Ed. Frère (Paris: J. Bry âîné, 1850), 12, right-hand column, Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek, Weimar, F gr 5293.
with the text (p. 34–35), hammered home Marga-
ret’s suffering (at the spinning wheel, then at mass),
and Faust’s torments (killing Valentine, aghast at
Margaret’s spectre). On the front page, full centre,
Faust pledges to a white, phantom-like Mephis-
topheles, also reproduced on the cover. Above it, an
ornate “Veillées littéraires illustrées” header, with
two suave ladies nonchalantly reading, promised a
brighter future to the lowly consumer, for the mod-
icum of 50 centimes.  

Conversely, the book illustrated by Gaston Jourdain
belongs to fin-de-siècle book collecting, and was
issued after Gaston’s premature death. Jourdain’s
compositions in photogravures (héliogravures) by
J. Chauvet are insert plates in a deluxe publication
for private circulation, introduced by Frantz Jour-
dain, his architect brother, Art Nouveau theoretician,
and author. An impressive list of noble and literati
subscribers on four pages grants it prestige. The dra-
matized introduction implicitly styles Gaston’s early
death and his toils on Nerval’s tragic fate. The book
is once again based on Nerval’s translation. Accord-
ing to the preface, both artists are bonded through
a common creative idealism and passionate vision.

The iconography opens with a quasi-erotic scene—a
shapely female nude in meditative Faust’s dark

---

Footnotes:
27 The reader may access a fully digitized version of Faust illustrated by Édouard Frère in a later edition (1860) on Gallica, of poor quality however, as it is based on a previous microfilm and not on print, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k692289.
study—an intensified idea borrowed from the opening plate of Gabriel Max’s 1880 portfolio. In the latter, a body lies concealed under a veil in the foreground[29]. Franz Jourdain’s preface stresses how Gaston needed ten years for these compositions, commissioned by Paul Gallimard, although he knew Faust by heart: “Chacun de ses dessins résume un monceau de documents, de recherches, de croquis, d’études, d’essais, de tâtonnements qui l’épuisaient.” “Each drawing summarizes a mound of documents, research, sketches, studies, attempts, trials and errors that exhausted him.”[30]. Indeed, the plates read as a compendium of Faustian iconography where Retzsch is hailed, yet subject to fantastic or burlesque treatment and gender reversal. When the poodle appears in Jourdain’s plate 4, Gaston’s ferocious monster has swollen to extraordinary proportions, his muzzle revealing terrifying fangs, but both the creature and the room’s layout are based on Retzsch’s plate 3. A male sorcerer is swapped for the witch in her kitchen, and a string of frogs hangs from the ceiling (Fig. 3), clearly a graphic citation of Retzsch’s corresponding plate (Fig. 4). A true compilation, this book shows to what extent 19th-century iconography bears on pliable amalgams, at the heart of which Retzsch occupies pride of place.

**Intensive Iconography**

Goethe’s Faust by Delacroix is a major new creation imposed on the artist by publisher Charles Motte, in which the young painter-cum-lithographer, who would have preferred a portfolio of lithographs[31], meets the German poet to produce an important Romantic book. Delacroix knows Retzsch well from 1821, both directly and indirectly. The artist’s free-hand sketched copies show he had pored Retzsch’s work[32]. The German artist is also mentioned in his diary and correspondence[33]. Moreover, it is well known that a play he saw in London in May–June 1825 under the title The Devil and Doctor Faustus (or Faustus: A Romantic Drama in Three Acts), written by George Soane and Daniel Terry, triggered his inspiration. Significantly, it was performed in Drury Lane by James William Wallack (Faustus) and Daniel Terry (Mephistopheles, sic in the play) in costumes—and perhaps sets—after Retzsch[34].

In this case, Retzsch’s album works as an iconographic matrix. It inspires numerous scene compositions and details: the poodle’s twisting tail in Delacroix’s plate 4, as it lands near Faust and Wagner in open country, harks back to the trailing strokes of Retzsch’s plate 2. The upper diagonal of the Brocken scene, as Mephistopheles and Faust ascend the mountain in Delacroix’s plate 14, is similarly based on Retzsch’s plate 22[35]. The German artist was first to conceive the composition’s layout, to order the characters and their ascent, even though there are substantial differences in atmosphere and feeling between Delacroix’s superb dark lithographs and Retzsch’s fanciful, energetic, yet thin, outlines. We could compare several other plates too, spotting similarities and distinctive traits, but such an analysis would infringe on the scope of this paper and has to be deferred to a more appropriate opportunity.

The idea indeed is neither to seek an artist’s source of inspiration nor to discuss creations in terms of originality. Conception of creation—whether in literature or other arts—as pure originality or the elaboration of talented genius-cum-unique spirit is largely the outcome of a romantic myth, farfetched from artistic or literary realities[36]. Artists and...
writers create their work not only through talent, but also knowledge. Delacroix knew. What is really remarkable in his case is his capacity to extract the dramatic potential from a scene by Retzsch. Intensive iconography builds on this. One telling example is the way they both treat an important Faust scene, the protagonist’s first meeting with Margaret.

Exceedingly short in the play, the scene is momentous in Faustian iconography. Indeed, it brings together the two main characters of Gretchen’s story, setting the tone for what will subsequently be developed. Retzsch’s plate 8 (Fig. 5) could itself be seen as based on extensive iconography or perhaps setting the rules for such future development: it resembles Peter von Cornelius’s analogous conception although it is unclear which artist was first in conceiving the scene. His outline etching is also closely reminiscent of Gustav Heinrich Naecke’s (or Naeke’s) now lost oil painting Faust and Gretchen before the Cathedral (1811 or 1812), unless it was rather Naeke who, influenced by Retzsch, conceived the scene. They certainly knew each other’s work in Dresden, being friends and fellow students under the same professors. Naeke’s conception would be further diffused early on, thanks to lithography and etchings, some of them

Under the circumstances, the original configuration for such parallel treatment can hardly be pinned down. Ostensibly all three artists were stimulated by Goethe’s scene, whose several details can easily be conveyed into a picture. In all three representations, Faust offers his arm to Margaret—as he does in the play, and she refuses or turns away—following Goethe’s verse. Each of the three renderings however creates a special atmosphere and builds on variant symbolism. Compared to Retzsch, Delacroix’s conception however poses the question differently.

Retzsch’s outline bears the artist’s distinctive mark (Fig. 5). As Faust approaches Margaret, Retzsch subtly stresses the parallel between Faust in the foreground and Mephistopheles in the background through identical costumes and corresponding swords. Delacroix projects the analogy in the foreground, partly masking one of the swords under Faust’s large cloak while each figure lines up with the other on either side of Gretchen (Fig. 6). The male bodies become a narrow trap, into which an alluring, disdainful, yet frightened Margaret falls. The two partners close in on her in a powerful grip.

---


---

both real and fantastic, in which each is the other’s double as fascinatingly suggest their strongly similar profiles shown in parallel. Here, Faust turns devil, the real embodiment of Mephistopheles’s spectral form, while the contrapuntal movement of their legs and feet on the ground builds a metaphor of the road to destruction.

Within extensive and intensive iconography, the interaction and reinterpretation of iconographic motifs, and circulation of images re-evaluated from country to country, involve famous and less conspicuous artists in the comparative process. Illustration studies traditionally privilege exceptional cases but sideline complex cultural objects, such as mainstream or popular books. By contrast, the extensive/intensive concept allows us to address circulation of images in larger corpora and with an interdisciplinary approach.

**Conclusion**

In an article on the recycling of Théodore Géricault’s *The Raft of the Medusa* reproductions, Tom Gretton has pointedly opposed the notion of authorship, relating to intentional agency (individual or collaborative gestation), to the effect of pictures’ post-partum life and their power on the onlooker’s imagination. What Walter Benjamin names *aura* in his well-know essay is to be viewed in terms of authorship, specifically individual, which serves to grant artworks a precise place in space, time, personal career, and national history. It also later feeds the competition of nations for cultural recognition within an international arena. However, *aura* barely resists the mass culture phenomenon and the effectiveness of pictorial motifs in circulation, particularly when subject to combination, modification, or alteration. Jean-François Millet’s work gained aura in reproduction through his ability to condense images into icons, emblems or symbols, yet Retzsch’s case is different.

Customized copies of his twenty-six plates reveal intentional agency. In most cases, this does not reflect on Retzsch himself, but on Goethe’s *Faust*. The aura pertains to the author of a singular text, gradually canonized and treasured as paragon of heritage. In this sense, Retzsch’s outlines, much abused through copying, are a bait of outline, that is, a fishing line cast out by publishers to pull in clientele: small fry as well as big fish. Tailored as mass production publications in Frère’s case, they reveal diverse artistic intentions and the combined agency of authorship by its publisher Bry, the French artist, and a Belgian wood engraver. The item thus gains further aura, this time for both Goethe and Nerval, his translator, publicizing, with the German author’s approval and endorsement, his own translation. In Gaston Jourdain’s recycling of details, we perceive an ironic reference-packed fin-de-siècle compendium of culture, reflecting yet again on the play’s aura, but also his brother Frantz’s clever intention to parallel Gaston’s and Nerval’s common path for a choice audience. Extensive iconography prompts analysis of publishing context, readers’ reactions, public sensitivity to images, and imaginative processes. It reveals that books and prints are largely cultural objects, relegating authorship to second position. In considering their circulation, we are led to see those dimensions, and can hardly consider copied images in isolation.

In intensive iconography, intention is still manifest but strongly engages with the re-imaginative process of different communities. Delacroix’s *Faust* only acquired aura in the second half of the 20th century, when the artist himself emerged as a major master. In 1956 Jacqueline Armingeat would refer to it as “a forgotten book”. This *Faust* was a commercial failure at the time, for both publishers and artist, dismissed as “un des coryphées de l’école du laïd”.

In Delacroix’s case, historical, artistic, and ideological context is still to be taken into account, if we wish to properly evaluate image circulation.

---


44 Delacroix’s letter to Burty (see note 31), 304.