

2022

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Recommended Citation

Solass, Pasqual (2022) "Mephistopheles' Atopy, Allotry, Lottery. On textual proliferations in Goethe's Faust I and II," *Vernacular: New Connections in Language, Literature, & Culture*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/vernacular/vol7/iss1/2>

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Mephistopheles' Atopy, Allotry, Lottery. On textual proliferations in Goethe's *Faust I* and

II

“Scholars know to grasp it,/ For the Devil however it is long past” (6590 f., P.S.) says Mephistopheles when he returns with Faust to the “high-vaulted, narrow Gothic room” (cf. stage directions, scene 1) at the beginning of the second act of *Faust II*.¹ What is being said in these scolding iambs of the stage-devil shall become a question for us, namely, if it is possible to stay on the devil's track in a rather *unscholarly* manner, that is, to do without the urge of grasping what is long past, without trying to take “hold” of the devil. This question might lead us to a wager, namely, that the devil is precisely not “long past”. Even negating the “stets” in “der Geist, der stets verneint.” (1335) – which is translated as “the spirit of perpetual negation” (1338) – he is “stets”, constantly, somewhere else – in space and in time. This aporia of constant negation, that even negates its constancy, does not exclude, that one might actually encounter the devil. But in what form, under what name? *Mephistopheles*, one might say, is such a name. However, only one among many. It might come as a surprise that the figure, which at least for the readers of Goethe's *Faust* is present under the name “Mephistopheles” on almost all pages, and which, sometimes seems to spy in places, in which the name does not appear, is called by this name only once in the entire play: “Mephisto” (4183). He himself – and it is not at all sure, who that is – hints at the proliferation of his names, when he says “Mit vielen Namen glaubt man mich zu nennen–”² (7117). But who calls him?

¹ Numbers of verses according to: Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Faust. Texte*. Schöne, Albrecht (ed.). Frankfurt a. M. et al.: Insel, 2003 (FA). English translation either by me (marked as P.S.) or by: David Luke. Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. *Faust. Part One and Part Two*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008 (DL).

² The translation offered by Luke “I am called many names [...]!” (7117) deserves more extensive commentary since it may help to elucidate the argument of this essay. The strong emphasis Luke's translation puts on the subjective status of Mephistopheles (“I am”) as well as the referential consistency that is suggested (“I am called”) is being suspended in the original text. A possible – perhaps fearful – translation would be “One believes to call me with many names–”. While, as the self-referential pronoun “me” suggests, the subjective status of the voice speaking here is still

From the perspective of cultural history, the devil's names are legion. He was recognized in all sorts of animals: *Borstenteufel*, *Waldteufel*, *Teufelsbolzen* (HWdA VIII, 897 f.). Whereas the prominent name "Mephistopheles" obscures the plurality of other names in the play, assuming that "Mephistopheles," even more so "the devil," is only one among others, and thus its power gone (Schöne 168), would imply the forgetting of the aporia of constant negation, that was mentioned before. The constant negation of names which devalues every one of them, again negates itself. The proliferation of the devil's names does not evaporate his power, but only intensifies it, that is, intensifies the fear of accidentally calling him. As superstition, or *Aberglaube*, has it: if you call him, he comes (HWdA VI, 956). But what if the proliferation of names is only a symptom of avoiding his name? What if calling him becomes a question of lottery, as it were, that is, what if one cannot even tell by which name to call him?

My suggestion is to call this aporia an aporia of the devil's allotry. This becomes all the more clear if we pay attention to the devil's figure. Browsing once again through his history, the devil has always been a shapeshifter, and Mephistopheles is again only one of those shapes. His most renowned one is probably the black cur, which approaches Faust and Wagner "In a narrowing spiral" (1153) on their "Osterspaziergang" in the scene "Outside the Town Wall". Not as well known as the black cur might be the fact that Mephistopheles once took on the shape of the one who called him. Goethe wrote a *Maskenzug* for the occasion of the visit of Maria Fjodorowna, formerly known as Sophie Dorothee von Württemberg, at the Weimarer Hof. On December 18th, 1818, Goethe appeared as Mephistopheles on stage (Goethe 1818, 77). Maybe

more or less stable, any secure knowledge of naming or calling is called into doubt – one only believes that one is calling him. Casting doubt not only on naming, but also on belief or "Glaube", the *diabolos*, if one can call him that, makes for the occurrence of "Aberglaube", superstition. However, as the aporia of constant negation suggests, the affect of fear that comes with this superstition lies in the possibility, that one might still, accidentally, call him.

he remembered the early verses that he wrote for the first part of his *Faust* between 1773/74 as he was playing his part: “My face, forsooth! conceals some runic spell; / She guesses I’m a genius certainly, / Perhaps indeed the Devil as well.” (3539-3541)

Throughout the course of my paper, it will become clear that Mephistopheles as the figure of a modern devil can maybe only be described in terms of allotry, precisely because he is constantly shifting shapes, because of this uncanny plurality of names, and in terms of atopy, because of the strange fact, that he is everywhere in parts and nowhere as a whole. It seems impossible to grasp the devil, to take hold of him. Can the devil in this modern sense, stripped from a fixed place as well as from a name, from characteristics, in his evasive movements, constantly proliferating and pluralizing, can this modern devil be the subject of an investigation? This strange, alien figure – if one could still call him that – seems to become familiar once again in the second part of Goethe’s *Faust*, namely in that which he produces: paper money. But only to alienate us once more from it, since it shares this impossibility of grasping. It is the pluralization of *Scheine*. “Schein,” in German, is the word for “bill” and for “semblance,” “illusion,” “sham.”

1. Diabolics

Mephistopheles introduces himself as devil. Already at the end of the *Prologue in Heaven* he says: “It’s civil / of the old fellow, such a *grand seigneur*, / To have these man-to-man talks with the Devil!” (351 ff.) Throughout the entire text one gets reminded of the devilish nature of Mephistopheles by way of references to his traditional attributes. Mephistopheles unfolds these bits of tradition by acting them out. The noun “devil” is one of them. According to the Grimms’ *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, the word is a loanword deriving from the Greek διάβολος (DW 21, 256), which is in turn a translation of the Hebraic *sâtan* in the *Septuagint* (Frey-Anthes,

“Satan”). Menge-Güthling translate διάβολος as “verleumderisch, gehässig” (Menge-Güthling 1, 136), that is “defamatory,” “spiteful.” Additionally, the noun διαβολή means “allegation, suspicion, blame, reproach,” as well as “shame”, “hate, hostility.” (Menge-Güthling 1, 136) Mephistopheles acts diabolically insofar as he makes accusations. “Hast du mir weiter nichts zu sagen? / Kommst du nur immer Anzuklagen?” (293 f.) If one looks closer at the meanings of the words that make up the compound διάβολος, one will find that the prefix διά- gets translated as “asunder, in two”, and the word -βολή as “throw” and “shot.” (Menge-Güthling 1, 136) Figuratively, βολή can also mean: “to cast a glance”, “the blink of an eye” and “ray (of the sun).” (Menge-Güthling 1, 136) The diabolos casts asunder, rips in two, jumbles and confounds. He causes what one could call in German “Zerwürfnis”. The prefix διά- also points at a distance, a movement of departure. Such a distancing happens in the diabolical cast. But who is being distanced? Two people or parties from each other, or one distanced from herself, split in two? Appearance from being, name from essence? “So that was the core of the cur!” (1323, P.S.) says Faust, after the shape-shifter appears as “student tramp” (1324) behind the oven. The diabolos has distanced the cur from itself, has thrown off his shape, just to take on another one. However, it only seems as if the core, as if Mephistopheles himself is now standing before Faust. The cur’s core is yet another departure of the core. The diabolos is constantly coring, as it were, and the revelation of his core perpetually suspended.

Mephistopheles divides, others from each other, and from themselves (3245 f.). As diabolos he knows no coincidence. Thus, a lot of the diabolic is thrown together in Goethe’s *Faust*. Out of the rich cultural history of the devil Goethe takes a multitude of other names and shapes. Mephistopheles is called “ironic scold” (339), “[s]trange son of Chaos” (1383), “a gentleman from Hell” (1397), “snake” (3324), “a sophist and a liar” (3050), “disgusting pimp”

(3338), “Satan” (6950). Mephistopheles appears with “cloven hoof” (4065) and with “false calves” (2502), as “cavalier” with “cock’s feather” (1535 ff.), another traditional symbol for the devil. He acts as minstrel (3682 ff.), as “fool” (4755), “Phorcyas” (8027), and commander of troops (10705). He looms “like a hippopotamus” (1254), “[a]n old hell-lynx” (1262), “an elephant” (1311). He rides on black horses, “crickets, beetles, and moths” call him “master” (6592) and “daddy” (6598). “[W]ill-o’-the-wisps” (3865) and “ravens” are subjected to his will. Almost all of the figures, shapes, names and attributes mentioned in this open list bear witness to what one could call the traditional diabolic arsenal. The *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* lists that the devil can take on the shape of all animals except dove and lamb (HWdA VIII, 834 f.), that he appears as minstrel (ibid. IX, 578), as master of will-o’-the-wisps (ibid. II, 1644) and ravens (ibid. VII, 437), and not least as “Mephistopheles,” the fable- and stage-devil. That is why he has to make an appearance in the *Faust* as well. There however, he is called by his truncated nickname, “Mephisto” (4183). The stage-devil of the “Volksbücher” by Spieß and Widmann is traditionally conceived of not as the devil himself, but as a “Spiritus familiaris” (ibid. VI, 174 f.). Goethe gives yet another interpretation of the “familiaris”, namely one in favor of Mephistopheles’ allotry, as the shapeshifter has to find out about his relatives that are scattered all over the place and all over time. In the *Classical Walpurgis Night*, he finally says: “How old a book I’m browsing in! / German or Greek, they’re kith and kin.” (7742 f.) It is no coincidence that Mephistopheles talks about browsing in a book, since the fact that he meets his relatives even in Greek antiquity again points towards the dissolution of any orthodox place or consistent religious framework. Due to the adaptation of ancient depictions of satyrs, fauns and the God Pan that occurred in the Christian iconography of the devil, the figures of the *Classical Walpurgis Night* recognize Mephistopheles as a relative (7736 ff.). When the diabolos

opens the book of genealogy, he realizes not just his departures, but also how he departs from himself. It is precisely in this moment in which the devil recognizes himself in his historical sediments, in other words, in his allotry, that he is outside of himself. I want to focus now on two scenes, in which this departure, the coring of Mephistopheles, takes place: *A Witch's Kitchen* and *A Walpurgis Night*.

2. Allotry and atopy

Whereas Albrecht Schöne stresses Faust's rejuvenation in his commentary on the *Witch's Kitchen* (Schöne 281), and Jochen Schmidt puts emphasis on the satirical aspect of the scene, when he describes it as "Nonsens-Revue" (Schmidt 157), it is important to acknowledge first that this scene anticipates a lot of the plot that unfolds later. The witch asks for Mephistopheles' ravens (2491). They are put to use in *On the Foothills (Auf dem Vorgebirg)* (10670). Additionally, the forthcoming *Walpurgis Night* is mentioned, and the name of Helena comes up for the first time (2603 f.). But even beyond that, Mephistopheles' gives the advice "Go out onto the land at once, begin / To dig and delve" (2353 f.) in *A Witch's Kitchen*, the same advice he will once more give to the emperor in the *Imperial Palace*: "You yourself must take tools and excavate; / Such pleasant labour, Sire, will make you great" (5039 f.). The scene *A Witch's Kitchen* is what one could call a scene of departure. However, not just because it anticipates later scenes, but also because it is the first scene where we get the chance of observing Mephistopheles' departure from himself.

This departure begins with a failure of recognition. Of all things it is the witch that does not recognize her master. She recoils "in rage and terror" (2381 ff.), and Mephistopheles scolds her ignorance, pointing at his "red doublet" (2485) and his "cock's feather" (2866). Apparently, these props had no effect on the witch. She asks for the "horse's leg" (2490) and his "two

ravens” (2491). In his very own sphere, *A Witch's Kitchen*, the devil appears as a stranger. Whereas the witch lives in a past, in a traditional, highly coded imagery that is situated in cultural history, as it were, the devil has already distanced himself from this past imagery. Mephistopheles says: “civilization, which now licks / Us all so smooth, has taught even the Devil tricks; / The northern fiend's becoming a lost cause— / Where are his horns these days, his tail, his claws?” (2495-2498) The civilized devil uses what modern culture has to offer: “As for my foot, which I can't do without, / People would think me odd to go about / With that; and so, like some young gentlemen, / I've worn false calves since God knows when.” (2499-2502)

But Mephistopheles' allotry goes further than that. The witch calls him “young Lord Satan” (2504). A misplaced name, and he backs away, precisely in placing that name in a historical frame: the name belongs to the “Fabelbuch” since a long time. By referencing the “Fabelbuch”, a book of fables or tales, Mephistopheles on the one hand points to the ineffectiveness of the witch's cultural code, on the other hand towards the historicity of the sediments of his own figure. This is not only true for the name “Lord Satan” but especially true for “Mephistopheles”. At least since the end of the 16th century, with Marlowe's *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, civilization “licked the devil” under the name “Mephistopheles”. Around 1597 English traveling theaters brought him to continental Europe (Mahal 112). Thus culturally inscribed, Goethe's “Mephistopheles”, just as the “young Lord Satan”, already received his place on the boards of traveling stages and later theaters, his sphere of activity in the letters of book pages, which in turn hold their place on bookshelves, in libraries. Thus, if we take the one who distances himself from his name at his word, we must assume that he would do the same with the name “Mephistopheles.”

Nevertheless, at his “gala night” (4063) Faust calls him “Mephisto”, as if the *Walpurgis Night* would be the appropriate place, the appropriate time for calling him by this name. Despite that, “Mephisto” distances himself again from his “World of magic, land of dreams” (3871). He introduces himself as “Squire Volland” (4023) only to make use of the “landlord’s rights” (4022). The name serves the purpose of paving a way through the crowd. The use of this old name shows again that Mephistopheles can situate the scenery and knows about its repertoire, and additionally, that Mephistopheles does not coincide with that name – and with that figure. Even if he appears with horse legs, he only “play[s]” “a role”, acts “like” the devil (4061). Mephistopheles is misplaced once more. “It’s all too crazy, even for my taste.” (4026) he says and hides with Faust. Faust calls him “spirit of paradox” and notes the inconsistency of their adventure: “to climb / The Brocken on Walpurgis Night and spend the time / Hiding out in some isolated den!” (4031 ff.) Mephistopheles responds: “Let the great mad world go its way; / It’s cosy here, so why not stay?” (4042 f.) Unfortunately, the English translation misses one strange word in Mephistopheles’ answer: “Stille”, silence. Literally translated, he says: “Let the great mad world go its way / We want to reside in silence.” What does it mean to reside, to dwell in silence? Considering the amount of talking that Mephistopheles does in the play, this must come as a surprise. What is the place of silence? Can one orient oneself in silence, without a sound coming or going? Mephistopheles seems to try to find refuge in what one could call a space of timeless presence. If that is so, the devil retreats into silence, maybe the ultimate form of distancing himself from all his shapes, his roles, his names. When Faust calls for him, calls him “Mephisto”, he calls him out of that silence, situates him again, just like “Mephisto” himself did by the name “Squire Volland”. The nickname “Mephisto” situates the devil in the *Walpurgis*

Night, precisely there, where he only wants to use his “landlord’s rights” but where does not want to reside, *wo er sein “Hausrecht” gebraucht, nicht aber “hausen” will*.

Although we already glanced the devil’s atopy here, I want to turn to one other phrase that underlines the pluralization of the devil due to his allotry. The phrase is: “Den Bösen sind sie los, die Bösen sind geblieben.” (2509) What gets lost in the English translation – “the Evil One / They’re rid of, evil is still going strong.” (2508 f.) – is precisely the pluralization of evil: “the Evil One they’re rid of, the Evil Ones remain”. Mephistopheles, the stage-devil, the devil of the fable books, is one among many, one of the Evil Ones. The Evil One is in all other Evil Ones and at the same time nowhere. Allotry and atopy are closely related. Always being another Evil One, being plural and pluralizing, the devil loses his place, his situatedness. And this only intensifies the diabolic threat. Even on classical ground he could be waiting as Phorcyas, and if he has left no trace whatsoever, he could still be spying (3521). Mephistopheles is the only character of *Faust*, which appears in heaven, in the air and on earth. He leads from one scene to another. Unexpectedly, he manages to find his way around the crossed halberds of the Emperor’s guard (4740 ff.), with “strange suddenness” (4736) he replaces the old fool. He even escapes the stage directions and appears out of nothing, as it were (Goethe 2003, 116), or vanishes with Faust after the murder of Valentin, Gretchen’s brother (ibid. 161). Allotry and atopy go together. Whereas Mephistopheles still knows vaguely how to play his role as “Squire Volland” at the Brocken, there is no role for him in ancient Greece. But still, he is able to “control it with our new ideas / And various modern, fashionable veneers ...” (7088 f.) The shape-shifter comes to an understanding with the Phorcyads and takes them out of their “deep solitude” (8000) by way of taking on their shape. Thus, he rewrites Helena’s myth and revives the “phantom” (8879). He by far does not stay on his northwestern “stamping ground” (6950).

What proliferates in this allotry and atopy is appearance, or, with the words of Johannes Andereg, the “as-if”, *Als-ob*. Andereg writes: “What gets manifest in the ever-changing appearances and names is the futility to grasp the essence [...]” (Andereg 64 f.)

Mephistopheles is the one “that always appears only ‘as’ someone or ‘like’ someone else, who, paradoxically realizes himself in the ‘as-if’.” (ibid. 78) The element of Mephistopheles is “Schein”, appearance, illusion, sham – ungraspable, staying on his track means browsing in books that he opens, in which he looks up the cultural history of the devil, as it were, rewrites is, and spreads it out in front of us. Is this “wisdom’s final word” (11574)? Apparently. But Mephistopheles’ element is not only appearance and illusion, it is also what the German word “Schein” means as well: banknote, bill.

3. Hyperbolics: money

Mephistopheles is devilishly busy (342), as the Lord says in the *Prologue in Heaven*. He has to “get that girl”, Margarethe, for Faust in the first part of the play, and money for the Emperor in the second part (4926). The devil’s work does not only work through the tragedy, but it also moves it. As superstition has it, the devil is the power that generated money. Traditionally, the devil’s animals also generate it (HWdA III, 595). Additionally, the notion of the *Teufelstaler* shows, that the devil was believed to have the ability to turn into gold coins (ibid. 1618). But how does “the spirit of perpetual negation” generate paper money? We already heard about his allotry and atopy, about proliferation and pluralization, e.g. in the verse “the Evil Ones remain”. And it is not at all clear if the “Evil Ones” are finite or not. One could claim though, that his pluralization assumes an independent existence and keeps itself running. It turns into a hypertrophic deregulated process. And precisely this process, the paper money that Mephistopheles generates, is maybe the peak of his allotry and atopy. “Schein” becomes yet

another name, as it were, albeit only a seeming one, “scheinbar” – apparently. In contrast to gold, bills or *Scheine* can be pluralized indefinitely. Bills are always already *überzählig*, supernumerary, in excess, a surplus. Whereas earlier versions of Mephistopheles are known for digging treasures out of the ground (HWdA VI, 175), Goethe’s Mephistopheles declares as securities the Emperor’s treasures that are only presumably buried in his lands and that one can only speculate about (4927-4938) – another form of superstition, of *Aberglaube*. However, the credit is bottomless. The print on the bills says: “To whom it may concern: hereby be advised and told, / The present note is worth a thousand crowns in gold. / This sum is secured and covered in full measure / By Imperial land’s abundant buried treasure; / The same to serve as its equivalent / Upon recovery, as is Our intent” (6057-6062). Already the *Unzahl*, the countless abundancy of the Emperor’s treasures points to the fact, that there’s no deposit underground. Nothing is counted, measured and transposed into paper money but the *Schein*, an illusion, a sham. Since it is only the *Unzahl* that is virtualized, the bills become “supernumerary”, “überzählig” (6081), just like the Emperors signature on the bills. Beyond every number, a constant surplus, precisely because the *Unzahl* covers every “more”, a surplus that can only virtually exist as “appearance”, as *Schein*. This in turn causes discomfort at the Emperor’s court, which is why Mephistopheles again and again speaks about “paper”, about “Blätter”, leaves, *billets* (6119 ff.). Still, the *Scheine* are ungraspable, unsubstantial, like Mephistopheles himself, not coinciding with any self.

The conditions for this pluralization without count however seem to be generous in the Empire. The pluralization of evil only must be transferred to that of money and an uncontrollable proliferation emerges. Maybe the most precise image for this “automatism” (Schmidt 231) are the Seven Mile Boots, on which Mephistopheles arrives in the fourth act of *Faust II*. After he

descends from them, they “hurry on” (Goethe 2003, 392). With giant steps progress walks on, as it were. Diabolics assume their own dynamic and become hyperbolics. Whereas in *Faust I* the diabolos casts asunder, thereby departing from or losing self in the process, in *Faust II* diabolic sundering becomes hyperbolic overshooting, an uncontrollable proliferation without reference or starting point.

Interestingly, the stylistics of the text reflect that: “A nightmare of deformity, a dream / Of monsters, law to lawless power unfurled, / And rooting error spread about the world” (4784 ff.) The “über” – over – in the German word for hyperbolia, “Übertreibung”, is spread throughout *Faust II*. It appears in those verses that speak of overbidding, of the supernumerary, of immoderateness. “Und Übel sich in Übeln überbrütet” (4781), which gets translated to “And evils breed from evil’s brood of harm?” (ibid.). Similarly, the golden calf turns into “a whole herd [...] of golden calves” (5041 f.), Phorcyas/Mephistopheles, the “eldest”, becomes the “great-great-ancient” (8949 f.). But especially the “über” in “Überzahl” and “überbrüten” is being repeated and reaches its peak precisely in Euphorion’s “Übermut”, haughtiness or “overconfidence”. No summit is high enough, Euphorion jumps from one “Überhang”, “cliff edge” (9621), to the next, and over all deepness. The “Überlebendige” (9739), who pluralizes two to three (“ein köstlich Drei”) (9702), departs from his family and reflects the assumption of a separate existence and the emancipation of products from their producers by his “assumption”, as it were, his climbing and his leaps into ever higher altitudes. Euphorion is the child of hyperbolics. Whereas he first played *Kriegen*, tag, with his parents and the choir (9773 ff.), Euphorion exaggerates *Kriegen* to “Krieg”, from tag to war (9837): “Only what’s hard to win / Fills me with rapture.” (9783 f.). In the scene *On the Foothills*, when Faust and Mephistopheles take over the command of the Emperor’s army, it gets clear that war is a consequence of

hyperbolics. Meanwhile, Euphorion died hitting the floor while he tried to fly (Goethe 2003, 383).

4. Lottery

“There’s nothing one can trust.” (11622) It comes as a surprise that of all personae it is Mephistopheles who turns from diabolical accusation, from “Anklage”, to complaint, to lamentation, to “Klage”, at the end of *Faust*. “Now who shall I complain to? Who / Will give me justice, give me back what’s mine? / Poor fool, at your age you’ve been tricked. A fine / Mess you are in, and well deserve it too!” (11832-35) He has fooled himself not just about his allotry and atopy, but about the lottery of his contract with Faust. As Werner Hamacher writes in “Faust, Geld”, “where no word is stable, also the word that promises instability does not count – and thus every legally formed contract, that is supposed to guarantee a permanently unsatisfied striving in the future, becomes superfluous. At the same time that word, which promises instability, the unreliability of a given word, has to account for it all.” (Hamacher 134) Who is the person that Faust closes a deal with? How can the diabolos, the “spirit of perpetual negation” actually give “his” word? This “aporia of the contract” (Hamacher 135) reflects the aporias of constant negation, of allotry and atopy. The contract itself is “diabolical” (Hamacher 137). And so “[t]raditional custom, the old rules” (11621) have lost their binding force, as the heavenly crowds turn the devil’s own methods against him, only to take the hyperbolic pluralization further: “The hypocrites, the riff-raff! Here they are! / That’s how they’ve cheated us of many a prize; / They fight with our own weapons in this war— / They’re devils too, but in disguise.” (11693-96) The irony of Mephistopheles lies precisely in his belief that he himself actually *is*, or to be more precise, *are* the diabolos. The “true witchmasters” (11781) however are the others, who salvage Faust’s soul. As Albrecht Schöne writes in his commentary, the heavenly, “all-

encompassing love” is “clearly inverted into the Mephistophelic” (Schöne 767), when the devil sees the angels and turns gay (“schwul wird beim Anblick der Engel.”) (Schöne 766). This heavenly witchcraft again demonstrates “Mephistopheles”’ allotry and atopy. Unbound pluralization transcends the earthly sphere, transcends the heavenly sphere and thus renders it ambivalent, distancing it from itself. In the end, the celestial personnel is the devil’s “kith and kin” as well.

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