

'An old man young or a young man old?': On Goethe's Friendship with Felix Mendelssohn

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We have recently celebrated the 200th anniversary of the birth of Felix Mendelssohn at no.14 Grosse Michaelistrasse in Hamburg. The story of his birth has a slightly enigmatic feel to it: This has something to do with the mystery that hangs over these early years in Hamburg, with the family's omission of their son's birth on the Jewish birth register, with the stealth of such privacy, and with the hovering possibility of a child prodigy about to emerge. Of course, the fascination of these years was every bit as potent for Mendelssohn's contemporaries, for it did not escape their notice that the boy's early years were vaguely foreshadowed in accounts of Mozart's boyhood years. Schumann hailed Mendelssohn as the Mozart of the 19th century and considered him an »unforgettable« composer.¹ Yet somehow over the past two centuries he has become sidelined, and overshadowed by Mozart in the popular imagination. Although Mendelssohn's early death at the age of 38 made sensational news and resulted in the composer's becoming a legendary figure, his premature end was seen to be implicit in his prodigious talent all along: his early intellectual and musical maturity were prophetic of his fate. In early reception of his work, its daring qualities and the transgressions that it encompassed were the first things to be emphasized in the aftermath of his death. Yet its ironies and complications were soon neglected: highlighted instead were Wagner's image of the composer and those musical works of his that were seen to conform to Victorian expectations. The image of a conservative lightweight soon replaced that of a prodigious talent.

This trajectory is captured in contemporary and posthumous portraits of the composer. James Warren Childe's watercolour of Felix Mendelssohn (1829) in black evening dress coat and top hat² is an early portrayal of Mendelssohn as dandy.³ Mendelssohn was well-versed in the dandified manners and dress imported into post-Napoleonic France from England as part of an all-pervasive Anglomania. In an essay, »The Painter of Modern Life«,⁴ written by the French poet and critic, Charles

¹ R. Larry TODD, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) xix. Hereafter referred to as *Mendelssohn: A Life*.

² Housed in a private collection.

³ One of the earliest examples of the dandy in the visual arts dates from 1826-27, namely Delacroix's portrait of Louis-Auguste Schwitzer.

⁴ Charles BAUDELAIRE, *The Painter of Modern Life* in: *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. J. Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964).

Baudelaire (1821-1869), dandyism is linked with a critical issue of identity, namely »the burning need to create for oneself a personal originality, bounded only by the limits of the properties«. For Baudelaire, the dandified artist, typically portrayed in the uniform frock-coat, was »a fastidious aristocrat eschewing the vulgar and the trivial« as illustrated by the famous caricature of Mendelssohn by Aubrey Vincent Beardsley (1872-1898) published in *The Savoy* in December 1896.⁵ For Beardsley, as for Whistler and J.K. Huysmas, author of the novel, *A Rebours* (1884), art is a refuge from a vulgar and materialist society, the antithesis of progress. The hero of Beardsley's caricature is shut away in a hermetic, artificial world. Distinguished by his exquisite demeanour, his refined sensibility and his immaculate taste, Mendelssohn, musical aesthete of the early nineteenth century, is a relic of a former, more elegant age, in denial of his time.

Given the disconsolate note of this trajectory, it is heartening to realize that Mendelssohn's music can obviously sustain a variety of interpretations and answer to very different times and needs. What remains mysterious, however, is the source of that original strength, the very fact of musical power itself, the ways in which its unpredictability gets converted into inevitability once it has manifested itself, the way a generation recognizes it is in the presence of one of those great unfettered events that constitute an important stage in music history. It is the manifestation of this power in Mendelssohn's early years and the significance of what must be one of the most extraordinary friendships in music history that I wish to examine in this paper.

The essentials of the relationship between Goethe and Mendelssohn have been explored in Larry Todd's mighty argosy of scholarship, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music* (2003), in Lawrence Kramer's article, »Felix culpa: Goethe and the image of Mendelssohn«,⁶ in Julie Prandi's article, »Kindred Spirits: Mendelssohn and Goethe: *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*« (2002);⁷ in Martin Wehner's essay, »Zu Goethes Verhalten gegenüber Mendelssohn« (2004)⁸ and most recently in John Michael Cooper's seminal study *Mendelssohn, Goethe and the Walpurgis Night* (2007).⁹ Central to all five studies is Karl Mendelssohn's monograph, *Goethe und Felix Mendelssohn* published by Hirzel Verlag in 1871 and translated into English the following year.¹⁰ The signifi-

⁵ On the shifting images of Mendelssohn's masculinity, see Marian Wilson KIMBER, The composer as Other: Gender and Race in the Biography of Felix Mendelssohn in: John Michael Cooper and Julie D. Prandi (eds.), *The Mendelssohns: Their Life in Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 335-51. Hereafter referred to as *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History*.

⁶ Lawrence KRAMER, *Felix culpa: Goethe and the Image of Mendelssohn* in: *Mendelssohn Studies* ed. by R. Larry Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 64-79.

⁷ Julie PRANDI, Kindred Spirits: Mendelssohn and Goethe: *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* in: *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History*, 135-46.

⁸ Martin WEHNERT, Zu Goethes Verhalten gegenüber Mendelssohn, in: *Dem Stolz und der Zierde unserer Stadt: Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy und Leipzig* ed. Wilhelm Seidel (Leipzig: Edition Peters, 2004), 205-19.

⁹ John Michael COOPER, *Mendelssohn, Goethe and the Walpurgis Night: The Heathen Muse in European Culture 1700-1850* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Karl MENDELSSOHN BARTHOLDY, *Goethe und Mendelssohn* (Leipzig: Hirzel Verlag, 1872). Hereafter referred to as GM.

cance of this book's publication in the 1870s has not been wholly grasped by Mendelssohn scholars. At that time, all critical opposition to Goethe had disappeared,¹¹ and the ascendant nationalist discourse of the 1860s was combined with the post-Hegelian dialectical advocacy of Goethe's classicism as a synthesis of polarities to render him more German, despite his emphatically cosmopolitan, aesthetic outlook. Mendelssohn, whose cosmopolitan successes never impeded his dedication to the cause of German music and the public perception of him as a quintessentially German composer, became less genuinely German and more Jewish in the eyes of his critics – with all the liabilities that contemporary culture ascribed to that identity. Karl Mendelssohn's *Goethe und Felix Mendelssohn*, therefore, was an attempt to restate the image of Mendelssohn as German by linking him with Goethe, who, like Beethoven, became widely viewed as the prophet of the modern world.

While that book has remained a keystone in Mendelssohn studies, any serious engagement with the image of Mendelssohn as presented in the Goethe-Zelter letters is strikingly absent. One reason for this neglect is that until now the musical discussion of these letters has never been published in English.¹² A second – and more telling – reason that scholars have cast a suspicious eye on the correspondence of Goethe and Zelter is that their letters have been placed in the false context of their authors' musical conservatism.¹³ At the 200th anniversary of Mendelssohn's birth, it seems an abdication of scholarly responsibility to be swayed by such misguided attitudes to the point where an imaginative and richly informative correspondence is read simply and solely as a function of conservative discourse, or as the reprehensible masking of contemporary musical developments. Although Thomas Mann became regarded as the rightful heir to German Classicism, furthered by Mann himself through his *Lotte in Weimar* and *Doktor Faustus*, the negative reception of Goethe's musicality has contributed to Mendelssohn's failure to don a similar musical mantle.

Negative reception of Zelter's musical conservatism goes hand in glove with the perception of Mendelssohn as epigonal, a composer who never quite succeeded in outgrowing the archetypal »period of imitation« and who consequently remained overly reliant on models from the past. While it lies beyond the scope of this paper to re-evaluate the musicological image of his teacher, Zelter, whose fidelity to his vocation and his fulfilment of its public demands were steady and characteristically

¹¹ On the anti-Goethean attitude of the Young Germans, see *Das Junge Deutschland: Texte und Dokumente*, ed. Jost HERMAND (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1966), 21-30; Helmut KOOPMANN, *Das Junge Deutschland: Analysen seines Selbstverständnisses* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1970), 114-31; Wolfgang LEPPMANN, *Goethe und die Deutschen* (Bern: Scherz, 1982), 74-76.

¹² Lorraine BYRNE BODLEY, *Goethe and Zelter: Musical Dialogues* (Surrey and Burlington USA: Ashgate, 2009). Hereafter referred to as *Musical Dialogues*.

¹³ I have discussed this issue at length in: *Musical Dialogues*, 1-28; Lorraine BYRNE BODLEY, A Musical Cornucopia: Thirty Years of Correspondence between Goethe and Zelter, in: *Publications of the English Goethe Society* (London: PEGS, 2005), 3-24; Goethe and Zelter. An Exchange of Musical Letters, in: Lorraine BYRNE (ed.), *Goethe: Musical Poet, Musical Catalyst* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2004), 41-65; *Schubert's Goethe Settings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, May 2003), 1-24; Goethe's Musicality Reconsidered, *The Schubertian. Journal of the English Schubert Society* (March, 2000), 6-13.

vigorous, it is possible to consider as Zelter's greatest gift to his young protégée an introduction to Goethe, who was an active witness to the composer's early years.

Between the ages of 12 and 21, Mendelssohn stayed in Goethe's home on four separate occasions, three of which are recorded in the Goethe-Zelter letters.¹⁴ Their first encounter was from 2 to 19 November 1821, when Mendelssohn and his teacher stayed with the poet for 17 days, a visit whose duration only extended to very close friends. That Felix Mendelssohn was conscious of the significance of this extraordinary event is evident in his letter to his parents and family on 6 November:

»Now listen, all, gather around [...] On Sunday Weimar's sun appeared. Goethe. [...] he was in the garden and appeared from behind a hedge; is that not strange, dear father: exactly the way it happened when you met him. He is very friendly, but I find no portrait captures his likeness accurately. [...] One would think he was fifty years old, not seventy-three. After dinner Ulrike, the sister of Goethe's daughter-in-law, asked for a kiss and I followed suit. Every morning I receive a kiss from the author of *Faust* and *Werther* and every evening two kisses from father and friend, Goethe. Imagine!«¹⁵

During this visit two parties were arranged for Felix in Goethe's home: on 8 and 11 November 1821. On the first occasion Goethe granted Felix the opportunity to display his precocity in public by performing various tests, in the manner of those early concerts given by the 18th-century musical prodigy, Mozart, whom Goethe had witnessed in Frankfurt in 1763. The public audition for the role of Mozart's successor was (i) to measure Felix's improvisational skills – including the improvisation of a complete fugue on a Bach theme which Goethe favoured – (ii) testing the boy's ability to play a complex orchestral score from memory and (iii) sight-reading various manuscripts from Goethe's private collection, which included deciphering Beethoven's hand as Mendelssohn unraveled a draft setting of Goethe's »Wonne der Wehmut«.¹⁶ What this series of musical trials demonstrates is that Goethe knew how to test veritable musical talent and knew that it would stand Felix in good stead. The second gathering, a private assembly which reconvened in the *Junozimmer* in

¹⁴ The details of the three visits are given in GM; I have recounted and interpreted the four encounters in Lorraine BYRNE BODLEY, Mendelssohn as portrayed in the Goethe-Zelter Correspondence, in: *Mendelssohn Perspectives* ed. Nicole Grimes and Angela R. Mace (Surrey and Burlington USA: Ashgate, forthcoming).

¹⁵ Mendelssohn to his parents on 6 November 1821. "Jetzt höre Alle. Alle zu. [...] Sonntag kam die Sonne von Weimar. Goethe. [...] Er war im Garten und kam eben um eine Hecke herum: ist das nicht sonderbar, lieber Vater, ebenso ging es auch Dir. Er ist sehr freundlich, doch alle Bildnisse von ihm finde ich nicht ähnlich. [...] Man hält ihn nicht für einen Dreiundsiebenziger, sondern für einen Fünfziger. Nach Tische bat sich Fräulein Ulricke, die Schwester der Frau von Goethe, einen Kuß aus, und ich machte es ebenso. Jeden Morgen erhalte ich vom Autor des Faust und des Werther einen Kuß, und jeden Nachmittag vom Vater und Freund Goethe zwei Küsse. Bedenkt!" Quoted in: Rudolph ELVERS (ed.), *Mendelssohn Bartholdy Briefe* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984); *Felix Mendelssohn: A Life in Letters*. Translated by Craig Tomlinson (New York: Fromm International Publishing, 1986), 21-22.

¹⁶ Beethoven's Autograph, »Wonne der Wehmut« (1810), Goethe's Music Collection, GSA 142.3.

Goethe's home, was a testing-ground for Felix's compositional gifts. Goethe assembled three Weimar court musicians to perform Felix's Piano Quartet in D minor with the young composer. After the performance, Goethe initiated the treasuring process, and cautiously proclaimed Mendelssohn as Mozart's successor:

»As far as mere technical execution goes, musical prodigies are probably not so rare any more: but what this young fellow can improvise and play at sight borders on the miraculous, and I did not consider it possible in one so young.«¹⁷

Recalling Mozart's performance at the age of seven at Frankfurt, Goethe concluded:

»at that time I myself was only twelve years old, and was certainly, like all the rest of the world, completely astonished at his extraordinary execution; but what your pupil already accomplishes, bears the same relation to the Mozart of that time, that the cultivated talk of a grown-up person does to the prattle of a child.«¹⁸

According to Abraham Mendelssohn, this visit to Goethe »ennobled« Felix's youth. More than this, Goethe – knowing that Felix needed a tremendous amount of support to flourish – provided avenues for publicity and offered different energies and talents in productive directions. The literal quickening Felix felt in his bones brought him to an awakening self-knowledge following his first encounter with Goethe, whose immediate identification with Felix was anchored in the high voltage of his early talent. Like Mendelssohn, Goethe had surpassed his local masters by early adolescence. At an early age had moved to the European centres of artistry where he accomplished his art with obvious supremacy. The extraordinary friendship which subsequently developed between the 12 year-old Mendelssohn and 72 year-old Goethe had its roots in the common emotional experience which they shared.

During the first three visits on 2-19 November 1821, 7 October 1822 and May 1825 we find Mendelssohn intent on pleasing the venerable Goethe. He relieves the poet's work on *Faust II* by performing for him as his 77 year-old friend strives »to complete in carefully measured days what [he] failed to do at a time when [he had] the right to believe or to suspect that there is another tomorrow or that there is al-

¹⁷ GM, 17 (after Lobe). 6. November 1821, *Digitale Bibliothek*, Volume 10: *Goethe: Briefe, Tagebücher, Gespräche*, 29769. »Die musikalischen Wunderkinder sind zwar hinsichtlich der technischen Fertigkeit heutzutage keine so große Seltenheit mehr; was aber dieser kleine Mann im Fantasieren und Primavistaspielen vermag das grenzt an's Wunderbare und ich habe es bei so jungen Jahren nicht für möglich gehalten«.

¹⁸ Ibid. »Damals zählte ich selbst erst zwölf Jahre und war allerdings, wie alle Welt, höchlich erstaunt über die ausserordentliche Fertigkeit desselben; was aber Dein Schüler jetzt schon leistet, mag sich zum damaligen Mozart verhalten wie die ausgebildete Sprache eines Erwachsenen zu dem Lallen eines Kindes«.

ways a tomorrow«. ¹⁹ Following the third visit he dedicates the Piano Quartet no. 3 to Goethe, who wrote to Felix what Zelter affectionately termed a »love letter«, thanking him and praising the quartet:

»Through this wonderful dispatch you have brought me great pleasure, my dear Felix; although expected, it surprised me. The script, the title page, as well as the most beautiful cover vie with each other to give the gift a noble finish. I have regarded it as the graceful embodiment of that beautiful rich, energetic soul which so astonished me when you first made me acquainted with it. Accept my warmest thanks and let me hope you will soon give me the opportunity again to marvel at your astounding accomplishments. Give my regards to your worthy parents, your equally talented sister, and the excellent Maestro himself. May my memory live on in such a circle.« ²⁰

In September 1826 Mendelssohn sent his cogent translation of Terence's Latin comedy, *Das Mädchen von Andros* to Goethe – a translation which mirrors the poet's approach to historical translations – who entertained members of the court with a reading. ²¹ Alluding to the first book of Samuel verses 16-18, Goethe invoked its musical metaphor as an allegory of love and proclaimed his gratitude to the composer:

»You are my David and if I am ever ill or sad, you must banish my bad dreams by your playing; I shall never throw my spear at you, as Saul did.« ²²

This symbolic sense of the Old Testament Psalmist which is allied to spiritual destiny and artistic power, has, surprisingly, not been acknowledged by Zion-

¹⁹ Goethe to Sulpiz Boisserée, 22 October 1826. Johann Ludwig Gustav von LOEPER, Erich SCHMIDT et al. (eds.), *Goethes Werke herausgeben im Auftrage der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen* 143 vols (Weimar: Herman Böhlau, 1887-1919), IV, 41, 209. Hereafter referred to as WA. "...und vollende sinnig in zugemessenen Tagen, was man zu einer Zeit versäumt, wo man das Recht hat, zu glauben oder zu wähen, es gebe noch Wiedermorgen oder Immermorgen."

²⁰ Goethe to Felix Mendelssohn, 18 June 1825, WA IV, 39, 231. »Du hast mir mein theurer Felix, durch die gehaltvolle Sendung sehr viel Vergnügung gemacht; obschon angekündigt überraschte sie mich doch. Notenstich, Titelblatt sodann der allerherrlichste Einband wetteifern mit einander die Gabe stattlich zu vollenden. Ich habe sie daher für einen wohlgebildeten Körper zu achten, mit dessen schöner, kräftig-reicher Seele Du mich zu höchster Bewunderung schon bekannt machtest. Nimm daher den allerbesten Dank und laß mich hoffen Du werdest mir bald wieder Gelegenheit geben Deine staunenswürdigen Thätigkeiten in Gegenwart zu bewundern. Empfiehl mich den würdigen Eltern, der gleichbegabten Schwester und dem vortrefflichen Meister. Möge mein Andenken in solchem Kreise immerfort lebendig dauern.«

²¹ Goethe to Zelter, 11 October 1826, *Musical Dialogues*, 364; Hans-Günther OTTENBERG, Sabine SCHÄFER and Edith ZEHM (eds.) *Briefwechsel mit Zelter* in Karl Richter (ed.) *Goethe Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens. Münchner Ausgabe* vols. 20.1, 20.2 and 20.3 (Munich: Hanser Verlag, 1985-98); here MA, 20.1, 954-55. Hereafter referred to as MA. For a discussion of Mendelssohn's translation, see Leon BOTSTEIN, Neoclassicism, Romanticism, and Emancipation: The Origins of Felix Mendelssohn's Aesthetic Outlook in: *The Mendelssohn Companion* ed. Douglass Seaton (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2001), 1-27, here, 5-9.

²² GM, p.34. »Du bist mein David, sollte ich krank und traurig werden, so banne die bösen Träume durch Dein Spiel, ich werde auch nie wie Saul den Speer nach Dir werfen.«

ist Mendelssohn scholars, though the theme is widely prevalent in Jewish art.²³ In Goethe's case the soothing music of David's harp is symbolic of the artistic and intellectual nexus between himself and Mendelssohn and the daemonic power of music on its audience, but it also implies that Mendelssohn, the protégé, would become his artistic equal and successor.²⁴

The soothsaying force of Goethe's words is keenly felt in accounts of Mendelssohn's final visit, which took place in the *annus mirabilis* of 1830. Buoyed by the success of the *St Matthew Passion*, his publications and his English tour, Mendelssohn now greeted the poet as an established artist, asked for and was granted the familiar »du« – a form of address which Goethe rarely granted after 1800. (Even Schiller and Goethe had always remained on »Sie« terms, though their correspondence shares a different intimacy to the Goethe Zelter letters.)²⁵

That these meetings were vitally important to Mendelssohn is acknowledged in his letters. For Mendelssohn, to meet Goethe was to encounter a gathered force, and he was moved by a feeling that innate gifts of fortitude, tenderness and fairness had been concentrated in a degree of discipline which placed immense intellectual and personal demands on the poet, but which rewarded him with an absolutely solid emotional verity. In Keats's terms, Goethe was a goading intelligence that had been schooled into a soul, and the palpable consequences for Mendelssohn have been acknowledged. That they were comparably important to Goethe, however, has not been acknowledged. Although the majority of Goethe biographies have been written by Jewish authors (Ludwig Geiger,²⁶ Albert Bielschowsky,²⁷ Richard M. Meyer [1913],²⁸ Emil Ludwig,²⁹ Georg Simmel,³⁰ Friedrich Gundolf,³¹ Richard Friedenthal³² and Hans Mayer³³), Goethe's successful attempt to persuade Mendelssohn to ex-

²³ See, for example, Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) *David and Saul* (1660) and Avraham Natan (Israeli artist) *David and Saul* (1951).

²⁴ Here music becomes an element of insight and control. In the biblical tale it is subversively implied that art can have a corrosive and treacherous (but ultimately enlightening) effect on its audience.

²⁵ While the 'du' form was a natural outgrowth of his friendship with the child, Felix, who was familiar with this form of address and wanted to retain it with Goethe, it is still a significant and relatively isolated gesture in Goethe's life.

²⁶ Ludwig GEIGER, *Goethe und die Seinen* (Leipzig: R. Voigtlander, 1908) and *Goethe. Sein Leben und Schaffen. Dem deutschen Volke erzählt* (Berlin, Vienna: Ullstein, 1910). Geiger is the only biographer who discusses the Jewish question at any length while Bielschowsky, in fact, avoids anything connected to Jewish life, though his biography is twice as long as Geiger's.

²⁷ Albert BIELSCHOWSKY, *Goethe: Sein Leben und seine Werke* 2 vols (Munich: C.H.Beck, 1909/10, r.1918).

²⁸ Richard M. MEYER, *Goethe* (Berlin: Ernst Hofmann & Co., 1895).

²⁹ Emil LUDWIG, *Goethe. Geschichte eines Menschen* 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1920; trans. New York and London: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1928).

³⁰ Georg SIMMEL, *Goethe* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1913).

³¹ Friedrich GUNDOLF, *Goethe* (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1916).

³² Richard FRIEDENTHAL, *Goethe. Sein Leben und seine Zeit* (Munich, R. Piper & Co., 1963, r.1977, 1989).

³³ Hans MAYER, *Goethe: Ein Versuch über den Erfolg* ed. Inge Jens (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973, r.1999).

tend his last visit from two days to two weeks is rarely recorded therein and their relationship has never been explored in Goethean literature. This is to some extent natural, since Goethe's life was substantially longer than Mendelssohn's and the composer entered into it only in the last twelve years of the poet's life. This lacuna in Goethean literature is also linked with the reception history of both artists: for late 19th- and early 20th-century commentators, Mendelssohn's artistic stature was buttressed by his artistic and personal affinities with Goethe, but Goethe needed no such support. The German-Jewish Mendelssohn thus features less prominently than comparatively minor figures in many accounts of Goethe's life and work – a deliberate omission by several biographers which, rather ironically, has contributed to the negative representation of Goethe's engagement with music.

The phantasmagoria of myths surrounding Mendelssohn's tutelage of the sage of Weimar in music history, which ranged from the works of Western canonical composers (Bach to Beethoven) to works by himself (and his contemporaries) still prevail in musicological and popular disquisitions. These myths are usually cited as evidence of the poet's musical conservatism. But we should note, by contrast, the willingness of the 80-year-old poet to learn from the 22-year-old composer, together with his openness to contemporary music. This openness is recorded in Goethe's letters to Zelter: »Who can understand any kind of occurrence if he is not thoroughly acquainted with its development down to the present time?«³⁴ He describes himself as »passionately active, aspiring and keen to learn«³⁵ from the musicians Zelter sends him, and he relates how he is elevated by Felix's conversation and presence.

Following the composer's departure, the poet immediately reflected on what Felix's visit had meant to him and all he had learnt from him. What impressed Goethe most was Mendelssohn's immense historical knowledge and his ability to grasp music history as a process. Goethe's profound interest in history and historical processes was analogous to Mendelssohn's own interest in music history and his contributions to the formation of a musical canon. So, too, the poet's admiration for Classical antiquity and his classicizing impulse in general found its counterpart in Mendelssohn's knowledge and love of Classical languages and literature and his own artistic cultivation of ideas, styles, and techniques from earlier repertoires. Such shared traits, along with Mendelssohn's wide-ranging topics of conversation on this last visit, topics which included Scotland, the Protestant theologian Wilhelm Hengstenberg, Hegel's lectures on aesthetics, Hugo's *Hernani*, Walter Scott, Schiller, botany, meteorology, as well as music and music history led the poet to identify Mendelssohn's views on music as being remarkably close to his own.

For Mendelssohn, Goethe was an important figure in the question of identity – both in relation to his assimilation into German society and in terms of his artistic identity. In his writing and in person Goethe offered Mendelssohn important les-

³⁴ Goethe to Zelter, 3 June 1830, *Musical Dialogues*, 469-70; MA, 20.2, 1357. »denn wer versteht irgend eine Erscheinung wenn er sich von dem Gang des Herankommens (nicht) penetriert?«

³⁵ Ibid. »und gedenke meiner als eines, zwar nicht immer behäglich, aber dch immerfort ernst ja leidenschaftlich strebenden und wirkenden Freundes, der sich an Deinen Beispielen gern erbaut.«

sons on how an artist ought to conduct himself. The high standards he set were the usual basis for the attainment of durable distinction in any life or art: openness, courage and complete commitment to one's art. Goethe's courage was evident in the embrace of solitude (both personal and intellectual) in his latter years in order to produce *Faust II*. But it had also been evident half a century earlier, in the writing of *Werther*, the era-defining novel that made his name at 22. This was Mendelssohn's age when he met Goethe for the last time. Such resemblances between Goethe's and Mendelssohn's circumstances added intimacy to his final encounter with the Olympian patriarch, whose wisdom, abundance and acuity were made available to the composer.

The parallels between Mendelssohn's and Goethe's artistic careers are quite remarkable, given the considerable difference in their ages.³⁶ Both had acquired an extraordinary international reputation by their mid-twenties: Goethe through *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* and Mendelssohn through his musical profession of faith, the 1829 landmark performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, and the publication of his Octet for Strings (op.20) and his already-acclaimed *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Hebrides* overtures (opp. 21 and 26) in 1832-35. Both artists possessed a deep sense of German cultural identity, and this self-image fuelled their later efforts to use art as a tool for a large-scale cosmopolitan social project aimed at upholding the ideas of *Bildung* and of high moral and aesthetic standards in the face of certain corrosive aspects of Romanticism (xenophobic nationalism in Goethe's case, empty virtuosity and dilettantism in Mendelssohn's). Both were firmly convinced of the enduring value of the great art of the past, both in itself and as a source of inspiration for the present. And by the end of their lives both had become central figures in European cultural politics – figures whose numerous admirers and comparatively few detractors were equally ardent, but whose significance and contributions could be neither denied nor ignored.

For Goethe, »true happiness is really only to be found in sympathetic sharing«³⁷ and, perhaps more than in anyone else he had encountered, with the sovereign exception of Friedrich Schiller, Goethe found mirrored in Mendelssohn his own passionate focus on reality in all its forms, as well as the strength to affirm life and the ability to partake in it.³⁸ In order to comprehend more fully the extraordinary nature of this kinship (which transcended an age gap of almost 60 years), one must borrow Goethe's »old and tried method« and »gently to unveil« its many facets »as we remove layers of an onion«; to observe »the law that governs the way roses and lil-

³⁶ See John Michael COOPER, *Mendelssohn, Goethe and the Walpurgis Night: The Heathen Muse in European Culture 1700-1850* (Rochester, New York and Suffolk, UK: University of Rochester Press and Boydell and Brewer, 2007), 163-167. Hereafter referred to as *Mendelssohn, Goethe and the Walpurgis Night*.

³⁷ Goethe to Sarah von Grotthuß, 23 April 1814, WA IV, 24, p.225. »daß eigentlich nur in der Teilnahme das wahre Glück besteht«.

³⁸ My title for this paper– borrowed from the W.B. Yeats poem, »A Girl's Song«, ll.10-12 ('When everything is told,/ Saw I an old man young/ Or a young man old') – was suggested to me by this reciprocity; see W. B. YEATS, *Collected Poems* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1933), 296.

ies bloom.«³⁹ Or to express this somewhat more critically, we can apply the circular nature of understanding often discussed in 19th century hermeneutic theory, namely that we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole.⁴⁰ Goethe's encounter with Mendelssohn is indeed a circular relationship and should be examined in the context of both artists' lives.

Firstly, it is essential to realize that the communicative man who carried on a world-wide correspondence nevertheless lived a life of carefully preserved seclusion and avoided exposing in words the core of his existence. This hermetic stance did not only emerge in Goethe's late years. As early as 1778 he writes to Charlotte von Stein that he is beginning to fortify not just the »castle« but also the »town« of his soul.⁴¹ A good 20 years later he takes up this image in a letter to Schiller. »The wall which I have erected around my existence should now be raised a couple of feet higher still,«⁴² and in a letter to Zelter in 1831 he writes, »Do not fail, my dear friend, to continue sending me from time to time a few sheaves from the rich harvest of the outer world to which you are sent,⁴³ unlike myself who am completely confined to the inner life of my garden hermitage.«⁴⁴ And so for one who saw himself during these years as »the hermit who, though in his cell, still hears the raging of the sea«⁴⁵ and who, months before Mendelssohn's final visit describes himself as »the lonely

³⁹ Goethe to Zelter, 7 November 1829, MA.20.3, 1048. »...mich bringt nichts von meinem alten erprobten Wege: die Probleme sachte sachte, wie Zwiebelhäute zu enthüllen und Respekt zu behalten für allen wahrhaft still-lebendigen Knospen...Je älter ich werde, jemehr vertrau ich auf das Gesetz, wornach die Rose und Lilie blüht.« (cf. *Chinesisch-Deutsch Jahres- und Tageszeiten*, XI, MA 18.1, 19.)

⁴⁰ For an engaging discussion of Heidegger's hermeneutic circle see Hans-Georg GADAMER, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1990), 270-281. See also *Truth and Method*, rev. trans. Joel WEINSHEIMER and Donald G. MARSHALL, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 'The Hermeneutical Significance of Temporal Distance', 291-99.

⁴¹ Goethe (from Berlin) to Charlotte von Stein, 17 May 1778, WA IV, 3, p.224. »The gods preserve my equanimity and purity extremely well, but, against that, the bloom of trust, openness and loving surrender is fading more every day. My soul was once a city with low walls with a citadel behind it on the mountain. I guarded the castle and I left the city without defences in peace and in war. Now I am beginning to fortify it...« »Gleichmut und Reinheit erhalten mir die Götter aufs schönste, aber dagegen welkt die Blüte des Vertrauens, der Offenheit, der hingebende Liebe täglich mehr. Sonst war meine Seele wie eine Stadt mit geringen Mauern, die hinter sich eine Zitadelle auf dem Berge hat. Das Schloß bewacht ich, und die Stadt ließ ich in Frieden und Krieg wehrlos, nun fang ich auch an, die zu befestigen...«

⁴² Goethe to Schiller, 27 July 1799, in *Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe in den Jahren 1794-1805* ed. Manfred BEETZ (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1990), MA. 8.1, 727. »Die Mauer, die ich schon um meine Existenz gezogen habe, soll nun noch ein Paar Schuhe höher aufgeführt werden.«

⁴³ Reference to the biblical words of the great harvest, Matthew 9, v. 37-38; Luke 10, v. 2.

⁴⁴ Goethe to Zelter, 1 June 1831, *Musical Dialogues*, 511. »Fahre ja fort, mein Guter, aus der reichen äußern Ernte in die Du gesendet bist, mir von Zeit zu Zeit einige Büschel zuzuschicken, indes ich ganz ins innere Klostergarten Leben beschränkt bin«, MA 20.2, 1477. In his late years Goethe often uses the image of a hermitage with reference to his own walled garden. See his letters to Reinhard on 28 January 1828 (WA IV/43, 265-69) and to Willemer of 2 March 1831 (WA IV/48, 136-37), to Zelter on 26-29 January 1830 (WA IV/46, 221-26) and to Wilhelm von Humboldt on 1 December 1831 (WA IV/49, 164-67). This image mostly stands for Goethe's loneliness and seclusion from the world; here it refers to Goethe's endeavour to bring *Faust II* to completion.

⁴⁵ Conclusion of Goethe's letter to Sulpiz Boisserée, 16 July 1820, WA IV, 33, 119. »den Einsiedler, der, von seiner Klause aus, das Meer doch immer tosen hört«.

man, who, like Merlin from his shining grave, let his own echo be heard, quietly and occasionally, both near and also in the distance«,⁴⁶ Goethe's openness to Mendelssohn is remarkable.

Secondly, Mendelssohn's description of the poet as being »unaltered in appearance but more inward than he had remembered him« tallies with Goethe's self-image. In the year in which Mendelssohn was born, the poet described himself as a »magic oyster washed over by strange waves«;⁴⁷ even more astonishing is the continuity of this image throughout his life. To the novelist and philosopher, F.H. Jacobi, he confessed, »I live in solitude, cut off from all company, which now finally makes me dumb as a fish,«⁴⁸ and to Charlotte von Stein, he observed: »A person who is used to silence remains silent«.⁴⁹ While Goethe's »customary silence«⁵⁰ – »almost a vow of silence«⁵¹ – was severed on the first evening of the 1830 visit, Mendelssohn's portrayal of a private poet encapsulates the resigned wisdom of an esoteric person. In a letter to Passow, the poet laureate once confessed, »I have often thought it was bad, a misfortune that gained ground more and more in the second half of the previous century, that no distinction was made any more between the esoteric and the exoteric«.⁵² Goethe's recognition of Mendelssohn in 1830 as a fellow artist, as part of an enlightened or initiated minority, was the key through which Mendelssohn gained admission to the poet's »magic circle«.⁵³ While the poet's parting gift of a bifolio of *Faust II* to Mendelssohn affirms the composer's initiation into this »secret society« founded on art⁵⁴, the bestowal is even more remarkable when we realize that the manuscript of the last *Faust* scenes came down to posterity sealed. It is interesting too how Adorno, who turned to Goethe on his return from Nazi-imposed exile, identifies in »Die letzte Szene des Faust« (1959) how these scenes deal with the idea of transcendence as transmitted by Judeo-Christian faith.⁵⁵

⁴⁶ Goethe to Zelter, 14 December 1830, MA, 20.2, 1418. »Indessen ich einsam, wie Merlin vom leuchtenden Grabe her, mein eignes Echo, ruhig und gelegentlich, in der Nähe, wohl auch in die Ferne vernehmen lasse.«

⁴⁷ Goethe to Charlotte von Stein, 8 March 1808, WA IV, 20, 30. »wie eine magische Auster, über die seltsame Wellen weggehen.«

⁴⁸ Goethe to F. H. Jacobi, 14 April 1786, WA IV, 7, 205. »Ich lebe in einer Einsamkeit und Abgeschiedenheit von aller Welt, die mich zuletzt stumm wie einen Fisch macht.«

⁴⁹ Goethe to Charlotte von Stein, Rome, 20 December 1786, WA IV, 8, 101. »Der zum Schweigen Gewöhnte schweigt.«

⁵⁰ GOETHE, *Kampagne in Frankreich 1792*, MA 14, 455: »Ich [...] gelobte mir innerlich das gewohnte Stillschweigen so bald nicht wieder zu brechen.«

⁵¹ Goethe to Herzog Carl August, 26 December 1784, WA IV, 6, 416. »Ein fast gelobtes Stillschweigen.«

⁵² Goethe to Passow, 20 October 1811, WA IV, 22, 182. »Ich habe es immer für ein Übel, ja für ein Unglück gehalten, welches in der zweiten Hälfte des vorigen Jahrhunderts mehr und mehr überhand nahm, daß man zwischen Exoterischem und Esoterischem keinen Unterschied mehr machte.«

⁵³ Goethe to Duke Carl August (from Rome), 8 December 1787, WA IV, 8, 305. »einen magischen Kreis.«

⁵⁴ Goethe to Schiller, 14 January 1801, »geheime Gesellschaft.«

⁵⁵ Theodor W. ADORNO, *Noten zur Literatur* 3 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1958-65), 495-514. The essays are available in translation in Theodor W. ADORNO, *Notes to Literature*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, r.1992).

However manifold the forms of Goethe's silence, and whatever their unconscious roots and conscious motives may have been, the possibility of a purer perception of reality is always at its centre. That Goethe's silence is above all the silence of one who listens intently is evident in Mendelssohn's image of him as a *Jupiter tonans*, a thundering Jupiter whose listening silence is open to the language of music, open to the nature of music's existence, which is the greatest endorsement of Goethe's willingness to learn. Goethe could not listen in silence if he did not expect something to come of it, some awareness of musical truth, as his letters to Zelter affirm.⁵⁶ So too Mendelssohn's correlation of Goethe and Jupiter –which anticipates Heine's comparison of Goethe with Jupiter in *Die Romantische Schule* (1836)⁵⁷ – communicates his admiration of the poet.

In a letter to Zelter, Goethe captured the paradox of an artist's existence: »The greatest charm of an author's otherwise hazardous life is that while one is personally silent with one's friends, one is meanwhile preparing a great conversation with them in all parts of the world.«⁵⁸ That this artistic conversation continued after their final encounter is evident in Mendelssohn's musical realizations of Goethe's works, which span virtually all the genres in Mendelssohn's secular oeuvre.⁵⁹ His first published engagement with Goethe, the programmatic concert overture *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt* (*Calm Sea and Prosperous Journey*), op.27, was purely instrumental; his last was the second version of the secular cantata, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*, op.60. These two large-scale compositions are joined by the first setting of the *Walpurgisnacht* and the Scherzo from the Octet for Strings, op.20, which, according to Fanny Hensel, was inspired by the *Walpurgisnachtstraum* scene from *Faust I*,⁶⁰ and they frame a number of less imposing published compositional engagements: the solo songs, »Ach, um deine feuchten Schwingen« (»Suleika«, op.34, no.4, 1837) and »Was bedeutet die Bewegung« (»Suleika«, op.57, no.3; 1837-43),⁶¹ as well as six choral songs (op.41, no.6; Op.50, nos.1-3; and Op.59, nos 1 and 4). To these must be added a number of compositions that Mendelssohn withheld from publication during his lifetime. Five of these works were published posthumously⁶² and another four were

⁵⁶ Goethe to Zelter, 3 June 1830, *Musical Dialogues*, 469-70; *MA* 20.3, 1357.

⁵⁷ Heinrich HEINE, *Die Romantische Schule* (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1836).

⁵⁸ Goethe to Zelter, 18 February 1821, *Musical Dialogues*, 277; *MA*.20.1, 654. »Dieses ist denn doch das höchst Reizende eines sonst bedenklichen Autor-Lebens, daß man seinen Freunden schweigt und indessen eine große Konversation mit ihnen nach allen Weltgegenden hin bereitet«.

⁵⁹ *Mendelssohn, Goethe and the Walpurgis Night*, 37-38.

⁶⁰ See Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life*, 149-93.

⁶¹ For discussion of Mendelssohn's setting of Goethe's text, see Douglass SEATON, *With Words: Mendelssohn's Vocal Songs in: The Mendelssohn Companion* ed. Douglass Seaton (Westport, CT-Greenwood, 2001), 661-700; here, at 666-68.

⁶² These are the choral songs »Im Nebelgeriesel, im tiefen Schnee« (»Zigeunerlied«, Op. posth. 120, no.4; 1820s) and »So lang man nüchtern ist« (»Trinklied«, Op. posth.75, no.3; 1837), as well of the solo

completed but have remained unpublished or published only in facsimile.⁶³ Finally, and perhaps most tantalizingly, there is an unfinished and unpublished solo setting »Meine Ruh ist hin« ('Gretchen', ca.1825) and two substantively different versions of an unfinished concert aria, »O laßt mich einen Augenblick noch hier« (for brass and orchestra, written in 1847, the year of Mendelssohn's death).

This brief inventory unveils significant patterns in Mendelssohn's musical relationship to Goethe. Firstly, while Mendelssohn's preoccupation with Goethe's texts spanned his entire creative life, he withheld more settings of Goethe than those published between 1837 and 1843. Secondly, the number of settings for solo voice is surprisingly small, and in three instances – *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*, »Suleika« and »O laßt mich einen Augenblick« – he cast aside his initial draft and set the text again to substantially different music. All three attributes bear the imprint of Mendelssohn's belief that the complex sentiments of Goethe's words impeded the sort of intimately individualized communication that he considered central to musical expression.⁶⁴ Perhaps the most veritable paradox in Mendelssohn's artistic affinity with Goethe is that the masterful author of 149 volumes of the Weimar *Ausgabe*,⁶⁵ who carried on a world-wide correspondence, shared the composer's experience of »the inadequacy of language« which is »only a surrogate«.⁶⁶ Just a week before his death Goethe expressed how: »Our best convictions cannot be expressed in words. Language is not capable of everything«.⁶⁷ Finally, and perhaps most tellingly, the choice of literary themes in Mendelssohn's Goethe settings suggest the convergence of artistic voices of poet and composer.

One of the most cogent and complex concerns of Goethe's relationship with Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy is the composer's German-Jewish identity. Rather than rehearse the theme of whether this identity was anti-Semitic⁶⁸ or philo-Semitic

songs, »Ein Blick von deinen Augen« (»Die Liebende schreibt«, Op. posth. 86, no.3; 1831) and »Ach, wer bringt die schönen Tage« (»Erster Verlust«, Op. posth. 99, no.1; 1841) and the third movement of the A major (»Italian«) Symphony (1830-34), which may be based on the humorous poem, *Lilis Park* (see John Michael COOPER, *Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 183-87.

⁶³ These are the choral songs »Lasset heut am edlen Ort« (1828) and »Trunken müssen wir alle sein« (»Lob der Trunkenheit«, 1838), and the solo song »Zarter Blumen leicht Gewinde« (»Die Freundin«, 1837) and another solo setting of »Ach, um deine feuchten Schwingen« (»Suleika«, ca.1834-37).

⁶⁴ SEATON, With Words (as note 61), 667.

⁶⁵ Johann Ludwig Gustav von LOEPER, Erich SCHMIDT et al. (eds.), *Goethes Werke herausgeben im Auftrage der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen* 143 vols (Weimar: Herman Böhlau, 1887-1919).

⁶⁶ Goethe to C. L. F.Schultz, 11 March 1816, WA IV, 26, 290. »die Erfahrung 'der Unzulänglichkeit der Sprache' [die] 'nur ein Surrogat' [sei]«.

⁶⁷ Goethe to Count Kaspar von Sternberg, 15 March 1832, WA IV, 49, 271. »Das Beste unsrer Überzeugungen ist nicht in Worte zu fassen. Die Sprache ist nicht auf alles eingerichtet«.

⁶⁸ In his book of 1937 *Goethe und die Juden* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlag, 1937), even such a National Socialist as Franz KOCH collected little convincing evidence of anti-Semitic leanings that go beyond generalities. And recent studies such as those by Alfred D. LOW, *Jews in the Eyes of the Germans* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1979), 67-76, Wilfried BARNER, *Goethe und die Juden in: Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts* 63 (Jerusalem: Bitaon, 1982), 75-82, Norbert OELLERS, *Goethe und Schiller in ihrem Verhältnis zum Judentum in: Conditio Judaica*, ed. Hans Otto Horch and Horst Denkler (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1988), 108-30, and Günther HARTUNG, *Goethe und die Juden, Weimarer Beiträge* 40 (1994), 398-416, have not come up with much that go beyond Koch's findings.

as a recent article has done,⁶⁹ it is more enlightening to examine the German-Jewish symbiosis in Mendelssohn's relationship with the German *Ur*-poet, a relationship emblematic of the tremendous influence Goethe's works exerted on an elite Jewish audience in Germany. Goethe's concept of *Bildung* – as developed in Moses Mendelssohn's Enlightenment essay of 1784⁷⁰ and in the *maskilim*,⁷¹ was refined in Goethe's educational novel, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795).⁷² Much later, it would become a model for the cultural assimilation of the Jewish elite. For the cultural historian George L. Mosse, this concept of *Bildung* became part of a German-Jewish identity, if not an *Ersatzreligion* for a Jewish elite.⁷³ *Bildung*, as Mosse believes, »transcended all differences of nationality and religion through the unfolding of the individual personality.«⁷⁴ It was, therefore, »an ideal« as Stephen Aschheim observes, »perfectly suited to the requirements of Jewish integration and acculturation ... rendering it the animating ideal of modern German Jewry.«⁷⁵ While the first sign of this osmosis can be detected in the Goethe-cult in Berlin's Jewish salon culture (1780-1830) into which Felix Mendelssohn was born,⁷⁶ the question remains: was it

⁶⁹ HARTUNG, Goethe und die Juden, 398-416. The theme, 'Goethe and the Jews' has been thoroughly researched, and one can hardly expect to still be making new discoveries. A brief overview of the research undertaken thus far is offered by OELLERS, Goethe and Schiller in ihrem Verhältnis zum Judentum (as note 68), 110-13. The best collections of material can be found in Ludwig GEIGER, *Deutsche Literatur und die Juden* (Berlin: Riemer, 1910): 81-101; Alfred D. LOW, *Jews in the Eyes of the Germans* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1979), 67-86; and HARTUNG, Goethe und die Juden (as note 68), 398-416; abbreviated version in *Goethe Handbuch*, ed. Bernd WITTE et al. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1988) 4, 581-89. The most comprehensive apology is to be found in Mark WALDMAN, *Goethe and the Jews: A Challenge to Hitlerism* (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1934). For a more critical approach see Klaus L. BERGHAIN and Jost HERMAND, *Goethe in German-Jewish Culture* (Rochester New York and Suffolk, UK: Camden House, 2001).

⁷⁰ Moses MENDELSSOHN, Über die Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?, *Berlinische Monatschrift*, September 1784, in: *Was ist Aufklärung? Thesen und Definitionen*, ed. Ehrhard Bahr (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1996).

⁷¹ Haskalah [Heb.,=enlightenment] was a Jewish movement in Europe active from the 1770s to the 1880s. Beginning in Germany in the circle of the German Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn and spreading to Galicia and Russia, the Haskalah called for increased secularization of Jewish life through secular learning, expressed a concern for aesthetics, and recommended linguistic assimilation (especially in Germany), all in the cause of speeding Jewish emancipation. The proponents of the Haskalah (*maskilim*) established schools and published periodicals and other works. By publishing in Hebrew, they contributed to the revival of the language.

⁷² Goethe summed up this ideal in one phrase: »mich selbst, ganz wie ich da bin, auszubilden« (»the cultivation of my individual self just as I am«), *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Book 5, Chapter 3, MA 5, 288.

⁷³ See George L. MOSSE, *German Jews beyond Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1985), 44-45. Mosse does not mention Mendelssohn in this book.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.14.

⁷⁵ Steven E. ASCHHEIM, *Culture and Catastrophe: German and Jewish Confrontation with National Socialism and Other Crisis* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 32. See also David SORKIN, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁷⁶ For further reading on this theme, see Wilfried BARNER, *Von Rahel Varnhagen bis Friedrich Gundolf: Juden als deutsche Goethe-Verehrer*, Kleine Schriften zur Aufklärung 3 (Wolfenbüttel: Lessing-Akademie; Göttingen: Wallstein, 1992) and »Jüdischer Goethe-Verehrung vor 1933« in his *Pioniere, Schulen, Pluralismus: Studien zu Geschichte und Theorie der Literaturwissenschaft* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997), 129-49.

part of a new German-Jewish identity for Mendelssohn after Jewish emancipation in the early decades of the nineteenth century?⁷⁷ Certainly such questions of assimilation affected the composer's reception after the *Reichsgründung* (the founding of the Second Empire) in 1871 and during the Weimar Republic (1914-1933) when the connection between *Bildung* and Jewishness was especially strong. Did Mendelssohn's relationship with Germany's national poet affirm his artistic place in the German nation? Or did it reinforce resentments against Mendelssohn, when his son, Karl Mendelssohn, dared to connect him with Germany's premier cultural icon? Clearly the answers to such complex issues of national-identity formation and cultural symbolism lie beyond the scope of this paper. What is writ large is the life-long influence the patrician scion, Goethe had on Mendelssohn, who became the proudest German, an exemplary *Bildungsbürger* – until this image was sullied in an anti-Semitic reception history which neither artist had foreseen or expected.

Goethe's identification with Moses Mendelssohn's proverb »every human has his own religion«⁷⁸ and the profound influence of Baruch Spinoza's treatise on ethics on his own philosophy of life⁷⁹ are widely known. Goethe's knowledge of Yiddish and Hebrew,⁸⁰ by contrast, are unsung skills. His knowledge of the five books of the Old Testament, his employment of biblical metaphors and recognition of the beauty of Hebrew poetry, his translation of the Psalms and the Song of Songs, his respect for cultivated Jews⁸¹ and his recognition of the people of the Covenant as living reminders of ancient times,⁸² are further examples of his admiration for elements in Jewish history and culture. To attempt a more penetrating interpretation would invite several questions, including his self-characterization as »neither anti-Christian nor un-Christian, but decidedly non-Christian«.⁸³ A characteristic ambivalence and reverent shyness »when there is talk of a divine being« certainly accounts for Goethe's omission of religion in discussions during Mendelssohn's final visit.

»To tolerate is to offend' « reads Goethe's oft-quoted maxim, though its completion is rarely given: »Tolerance should actually just be a transitory form of thinking: it must lead to acceptance.«⁸⁴ Goethe's deep admiration for a spirit of religious tolerance which he saw as feasible (if not yet assured) in the young United States, is recorded in his maxims, where he proposes such ideological pluralism as a goal for all areas of enquiry and endeavour:

⁷⁷ For a broad discussion of this 'dual legacy' see David SORKIN, *The Spirit of Prussian Jewry: The Dual Legacy of Berlin* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, 1993).

⁷⁸ See GOETHE, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Part Three, Book Fourteen, MA 16, 652. »Man wiederholte so oft in jenen toleranten Zeiten, jeder Mensch habe seine eigne Religion, seine eigne Art der Gottesverehrung...«.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 667.

⁸⁰ GOETHE, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Part One, Book Four, MA 16, 133 and 136ff.

⁸¹ A list of all the Jews with whom Goethe associated over the course of his life can be found in LOW, *Jews in the Eyes of the Germans* (as note 68), 79-84.

⁸² GOETHE, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Part One, Book Four, MA 16, 163.

⁸³ Letter to Johann Caspar Lavater, 29 July 1782, WA IV, 6, 20. »... [I]ch (bin) [sic] zwar kein Widerkrist, kein Unkrist aber doch ein dezidierter Nichtkrist...«

⁸⁴ GOETHE, *Maximen und Reflectionen*, no.875, MA., 17, p.872. 'Toleranz sollte eigentlich nur eine vorübergehende Gesinnung sein: sie muß zur Anerkennung führen. Dulden heißt beleidigen.

»In New York there are ninety different Christian denominations, each of which recognizes God and the Lord in its own way without being at all disconcerted by the others. In the natural sciences, indeed in every area of inquiry we must achieve this; for what sense does it make that everyone speaks of liberality while wishing to hinder others from thinking and speaking in their own ways?«⁸⁵

Such Enlightenment notions of tolerance and acceptance are woven into the fabric of Goethe's literary work, where the conceptual motifs of understanding (*Verständnis*), recognition (*Anerkennung*) and respect for cultural otherness (*Geltenlassen*) are continually explored.⁸⁶ Yet even in *Iphigenie*, a play which Goethe described as »ganz verteufelt human« (»exceedingly human« or »devilishly human«),⁸⁷ the contradictions of humanity are always present. In his discussions of Goethe's language, Adorno identifies its *Rauschen* (»streaming quality«), punctuated by breaks that allow sediments to wash up.⁸⁸ These eddies, which alter the auditory flow, strike a note of discordance and so capture the fullness of humanity through negative extremes. This drama of extremes is present also in the reception history of Felix Mendelssohn, whose powerful impact on German cultural life was eclipsed by the devastating consequences of intolerance. On a recent visit to Prague I was horrified to recognize Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, a work in which the composer explored Jewish and Christian themes, played at the opening of a Nazi propaganda film made in Theresienstadt, thereby subtly placing Mendelssohn's music where it belonged (in the mind of the film's director) – in a Jewish concentration camp.⁸⁹ This was the last music many of its inhabitants heard before they were transported to Auschwitz.⁹⁰ Such a violation of Mendelssohn's music is radically different to the Enlightened path proposed by Goethe which would lead not only to religious, intellectual and social toleration, but to acceptance and recognition, an Enlightened path which offered the German-Jewish Mendelssohn a glimpse of the possibilities of escape from the entrapments of binary thinking, a chance to acknowledge the claims of two contradictory identities.⁹¹

⁸⁵ GOETHE, *Maximen und Reflexionen* (Aus dem Nachlass) no.1181, MA, 17, 915-16. »In Neu York sind neunzig verschiedene christliche Confessionen, von welchen jede auf ihre Art Gott und denn Herrn bekennt, ohne weiter an einander irre zu werden. In der Naturforschung, ja in jeder Forschung, müssen wir es so weit bringen; denn was will das heißen, daß jedermann von Liberalität spricht und den andern hindern will, nach seiner Weise zu denken und sich auszusprechen?«.

⁸⁶ For development of this idea, see Paul E. KERRY, *Enlightenment Thought in the Writings of Goethe: A Contribution to the History of Ideas* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 2001).

⁸⁷ Goethe to Schiller, 19 January 1802, MA 8.1, 874.

⁸⁸ Theodore W. ADORNO, *Ästhetische Theorie*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedermann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), 506.

⁸⁹ The opening of this film is also used in the BBC4 documentary, *Mendelssohn, the Nazis and Me* broadcast on 26 June 2009, made by Sheila Hayman, Mendelssohn's great-great-great-great niece. This documentary, marking the 200th anniversary of his birth, considers the reception of Mendelssohn, his music and his family during the Nazi regime. It also traces the influences of Judaism and Christianity on Mendelssohn's music.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ This theme is musically realized in so many of Mendelssohn's musical works, to name but a few: A Midsummer Night's Dream is about shifting identities musically realized in Mendelssohn's

To conclude: many of Mendelssohn's works have attained for us that permanence of ancient forms, which shadowed his own imagination as he grew up in Berlin. There he became aware of the lines of history, there he became capable of discovering the only possible way of saying something as luminously as possible, of expressing the small secrets of childhood and the life-anchoring memories of erotic experience. The manifold celebrations at the 200th anniversary of his birth affirm how, to borrow Seamus Heaney's words, »art can outface history«. Mendelssohn's music has been able to take the strain of the great historical and political atrocities many have faced and to register with honesty and delicacy the most intimate felicities and desolations we all know (and can only know) alone. Ultimately, his music has become part of the collective memory of humanity, of whom we are and where we have been.

metamorphosis of the opening chords; motivic transformation of the central motif at the beginning of the overture in Mendelssohn's *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* recurs in the overture and in nos. 1, 4, 7 and 9. For discussion motivic transformation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* see Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life*, 159-165; see also Douglass SEATON, *The Romantic Mendelssohn: The Composition of 'Die erste Walpurgisnacht'*, *The Musical Quarterly*, 68/3 (July 1982): 398-410.

Sažetak

»STARI MLADIĆ ILI MLADI STARAC?«: O GOETHEOVU
PRIJATELJSTVU S FELIXOM MENDELSSOHNOM

»Osim mladog Felixa Mendelssohna, koji je prema sudu istaknutih glazbenika muzičko čudo i može postati drugim Mozartom, ne poznajem ni jednog glazbenog genija među rođenim Berlinčanima«, izvijestio je Heinrich Heine 1822. godine. Goethe bi bio mogao prosuditi takve usporedbe jer je prisustvovao izvedbama koje su priredila oba čuda od djeteta: Mozart kao sedmogodišnjak, a Mendelssohn kao dvanaestogodišnjak. Goetheova prosudba Mendelssohnova virtuoze, njegove nadarenosti u improvizaciji i sposobnost da *a vista* odsvira Mozartov orkestralni predložak sadržana je u pjesnikovoj prepisci s Zelterom. Ono što je najviše impresioniralo Goethea bilo je Mendelssohnovo golemo povijesno znanje i sposobnost da shvati glazbenu povijest kao proces. Mendelssohnova glazbena nadarenost spojena s njegovom kulturom i naobrazbom, profinjenom društvenom elegancijom i svestranošću njegova talenta, koja je uključivala vještinu akvarelista i pisca pisama, dovela je pjesnika do spoznaje da se radi o osobi u kojoj su objedinjeni svi humanistički ideali.

U svojim je napisima, a i osobno, Goethe ponudio Mendelssohnu važnu poduku o tome kako umjetnik mora sam sebe voditi. Visoki standardi koje je postavio bili su uobičajen temelj za stjecanje trajne vrsnoće u svakom životu umjetnosti: otvorenost, hrabrost i potpuna posvećenost umjetnosti. Goetheova hrabrost bila je očita ne samo u njegovu prihvaćanju samoće u kasnijim godinama, kako bi stvorio *Fausta II*, nego i pri pisanju *Werthera*, romana koji je definirao razdoblje i osigurao mu slavu u dobi od 25 godina: bio je tek nekoliko godina stariji nego Mendelssohn kad se posljednji put sastao s Goetheom. Takve slučajne sličnosti između Goetheovih stvaralačkih godina i Mendelssohnovog vlastitog iskustva pridodali su prisnost tom posljednjem susretu s olimpskim patrijarhom, kad je skladatelj mogao iskusiti njegovu mudrost, obilje i pronicavost. Ovaj članak propituje značenje Mendelssohnovog posljednjeg susreta s Goetheom, čija se vidovita usporedba mladog skladatelja sa Schillerom pokazala tragičnim predosjećajem. Za Mendelssohna Goethe je bio važna osoba u odnosu na pitanja asimilacije i kulturnog identiteta, trajno prisutnih u doba Mendelssohnova formiranja.

