

The German Program, the Department of
Foreign Languages & Literatures & the
Comparative Literature Program at
Purdue University

present

Prof. Clark Muenzer

German & Comparative Literature at
Pittsburgh University

“Forms of Figuration in *Faust*:
A Kantian Reading of
Goethe”

Friday Oct 16, 2009

2:30-3:45 p.m., lecture &
discussion upstairs

West Lafayette Public Library

This Lecture is a Special “Experience
Liberal Arts Event”

complimentary refreshments after the lecture

For more information, contact
Professor Beate Allert <allert@purdue.edu>

Co-sponsored by the College of Liberal Arts, the
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Even the casual reader of *Faust* will notice how the complex of figurative structures at work throughout the play move with compelling lyrical immediacy across the impassioned, personal investments of Part One, only to re-emerge as the characteristically rarefied intellectual abstractions of Part Two, with its challenging allegorical and symbolic exhibitions. Rather than valorize the poetic

figure within an ontological-genetic framework as a form that reveals origins in history (Emrich), or expose it as a site of deconstructive semiosis (Flax), I want to reframe the discussion about figuration in *Faust* by focusing attention on the play’s figurative processes. To accomplish this kind of Kant-inspired re-evaluation, I will consider a few passages from the first part of the work. Beginning with the dedicatory poem “Zueignung,” and moving through Faust’s encounter with the signs of the “Macrocosm” and “Earth Spirit” in “Nacht,” to his gaze into the magic mirror in “Hexenküche” and his contemplation of the moonlit landscape in “Wald und Höhle,”



I argue that already in the “small world” of Part One, as Faust justifies his erotic involvement with Gretchen, Goethe sets the stage to redeem the power of judgment by picturing it more expansively than the fatal “gerichtet” of “Kerker” suggests. In fact, the complex called mind, where all thinking is enacted, can be saved, or “gerettet,” so long as we can learn the lesson of the *Faust*-work to see the interconnected activities constitutive of mind purely. By this I mean to say in the spirit of Kant that Goethe’s work challenges its readers to perform complex mental operations themselves by judging the mind, in its Faustian figurations, in terms of the limited human destiny to know the world, to feel its pleasures and pains, and to inhabit it within a community of autonomous agents.