

# Nature or God: Pantheistic affinities between Goethe and Martius ‘the Brazilian’

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*“Hier bin ich auf und unter Bergen,  
suche das Göttliche in herbis et lapidibus.”*

*“Was kann der Mensch mehr im Leben gewinnen,  
als dass sich Gott-Natur ihm offenbare?”<sup>1</sup>*

ON SEPTEMBER 13, 1824, Goethe recorded in his journal the visit, in Weimar, of the young botanist Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius - the “Brazilian Martius” as the poet liked to say. Goethe mentions having hung in his office the big “Brazilian map” to greet the guest, among other details of the meeting (e.g., rereading Martius’ texts about palm trees amidst preparations for the talks). We can interpret this gesture as a symbol of Goethe’s great interest in Brazil, which he expressed at various times in his life, including in many other journal entries as well as in records of conversations prepared by Eckermann in the seventeen books related to Brazil in Goethe’s his private library, or in his library card from the Weimar library of showing that he had borrowed numerous books about Brazil.

An initial moment in the German poet’s relationship with the huge South American country – an aspect perhaps not yet fully recognized by Goethean philology - took shape in two poems written in 1782 under the subtitle *Brasilianisch*, which resulted from his reading of Michel de Montaigne’s essay “On cannibals”. More than forty years later this relationship rises to a new level through his personal contact with the young botanist Martius. And if Goethe himself pointed to the possibility of extending the concept of “intensification” (*Steigerung*) developed within the natural sciences to the aesthetic, moral and existential spheres, then one can say that through his friendship with Martius (one of the most fertile in his old age), his fascination with Brazil experiences a significant intensification, leaving traces also in his literary production. Goethe’s exchange with the botanist deepens considerably over the last years of life, and in March 1831 he borrows once again from the Weimar library the big atlas of Martius and Spix’s *Travels in Brazil*, and dedicates himself fully to studying the sections of the atlas on Brazilian vegetation.

In principle, it should be no surprise that Brazil was also on the horizon of interests of the creator of the concept of “world literature” (*Weltliteratur*). However, approaching Goethe from a Brazilian perspective requires mediations that would not be necessary if the approach had its point of view in Greece or India, or still in Persia, Arabia, China and even North America.

Goethe dedicated himself directly, extensively and intensely to all those cultures, but let us just remember the prominent position that the United States holds in his work as regards, for example the thematization of the migration to that country in the novels *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* and *Wilhelm Meister Travels* - “Here or nowhere is America!”, in Lothario’s famous statement to Jarno in the letter announcing his return to Europe: “ I will return, and in my house, amid my fields, among my people, I will say: Here or nowhere is America!” (Goethe, 2006, p. 415) Reverberations of the United States are also found in his lyrical work, such as in the geognostic poem “America, your lot is fairer than ours”, and as to *Faust* it should be remembered that in the nineteenth century the philosopher J. Denton Snider, in his commentary on the tragedy portrays the Settler in the fifth act as “a propagandist of the American myth,” which had converted a wild and inhospitable continent into a free land for free men and rational men.<sup>2</sup>

An allusion to the exotic (and empty) lands is found in Otilie’s famous entry in her journal in the second part of the novel *Elective Affinities*: “No one can walk beneath palm trees with impunity. And ideas are sure to change in a land where elephants and tigers are at home”. And, continuing, in Goethe’s beautiful homage to Alexander von Humboldt through the delicate girl: “We admire only the naturalist who knows how to describe and depict for us the strangest and most unusual objects in their proper locality and environment. How I would like to hear only once Humboldt talk”. About a decade and a half later, Goethe would recognize these same qualities in Martius, the traveler in Brazilian lands, about whom Humboldt himself wrote: “For as long as the human being sees palm trees and talks about palm trees, Martius’ name will always be mentioned with glory.”

And that is how Brazil entered the wide circle of Goethean studies and interests, thanks to the mediation of scientists who traveled across Brazil and back in Europe fueled the Weimar poet’s greed for knowledge about the huge South American country, which back then was home to about 3.5 million people: Martius first, but also his fellow botanist J. C. Mikan, mineralogist J. B. E. Pohl, zoologists Spix and Natterer, all members of the Austrian expedition (with Bavarian participation) that accompanied Princess Leopoldina, daughter of Emperor Francis I, in her bridal trip to Brazil in 1817. But even before this expedition, mention should be made of Prince Maximilian von Wied-Neuwied, who in 1820 published his *Reise nach Brasilien in den Jahren 1815 bis 1817* [Travels in Brazil in the years 1815 to 1817], which Goethe read attentively. And in the

year 1817 the poet's journal records the study of the book *Travels in the interior of Brazil*, published in 1812 by the English geologist John Mawe.

A close contact was established between the poet and Wilhelm Ludwig von Eschwege (1777-855), a leading name in Brazilian geological studies, (mentioned by Euclides da Cunha in the beginning of *Rebellion in the Backlands* as the author of the "suggestive name" Espinhaço Range) who in 1833 published, under the title *Pluto brasiliensis*, a number of "treatises", as the subtitle indicates, "about Brazil's wealth in gold, diamond, and other minerals". Director of the Portuguese and Brazilian mines, Baron Eschwege accompanied the Portuguese royal family to Brazil in their flight from Napoleon, and in subsequent years (until just before Independence in 1822) travels the country, especially Minas Gerais, studying its geological structure and mineral reserves. Upon his return to Europe in 1821 he published, through a Weimar publisher, the book *Geognostisches Gemälde von Brasilien* [*Geognostic Structure of Brazil*], which awakens in Goethe the keenest interest. The opportunity for personal contact stemmed from negotiations for the purchase of Brazilian diamonds, which Eschwege had brought back with him and offered to, among other possible buyers, the Grand Duke of Weimar, Karl August, who in turn asked the poet (and since 1815 State Minister) to take over the negotiations.

An exceptionally important chapter in Goethe's biography was written, as explained before, by the Bavarian botanist Carl F. P. von Martius (1794-1868). The breadth, richness and diversity of this exchange are apparent, for example, in the dinner described by Eckermann on October 7, 1828, in which botanical, aesthetic, religious and philosophical topics alternate in a tone that oscillates between serious and playful: "We laughed", concluded Eckermann describing the evening, "the conversation became general; Goethe, excited by Von Martius to argument, said many interesting things, which, under the appearance of jesting, had a deeper meaning at the bottom." The extraordinary *Flora brasiliensis*, work in several volumes to which Martius devoted over forty years (completed only in 1906) was read and reread by Goethe until the end of his life, and while writing the end of *Fausto II* he became particularly enthused by Martius' theory on the "spiral tendency of plant growth", relying on this hypothesis to draft in March 1831 a study to integrate the Franco-German edition, prepared by Frédéric Soret (1795-1865), of his *An Attempt to Explain the Metamorphosis of Plants*.

It is therefore in the Brazilian Nature - "of exceptional fertility" and "infinitely prodigal", to quote verses by Manuel Bandeira, an avid reader and translator of Goethe - that this friendship will take roots, symbolized, if one may say so, in the kind of Malvaceae endemic to Brazil that von Martius and the botanist Nees von Esenbeck named *Goethea*, which deeply moved the poet.

In early April 1823, von Esenbeck writes to the Weimar poet:

I dared to give this dear name, which lives in so many hearts, to a genus of plants because it does the botanist much good to be able to symbolically address the coryphaei and promoters of his science amid lush plants and see them as if verdant and flourishing before their eyes. I hope Your Excellency will not consider this Malvaceae entirely unworthy of your name! It represents a safe genus, very well founded, of South American plants, perhaps mainly Brazilian, and in the near future it is expected to gain significant expansion into new species. (Mandelkow, 1988).<sup>3</sup>

And twenty days later Goethe, who was recovering from a serious illness (and deeply heartbroken from the end his relationship with the young lady Ulrike von Levetzow) replies:

The fact that you have chosen me as godfather of such a magnificently special plant, thereby assigning to my name such a beautiful position in scientific matters - is at the moment, as you yourself are noticing and feeling, doubly poignant and pleasant. (ibid.).<sup>4</sup>

But the other name related to the *novum plantarum genus: Goethea* was given by Martius, whom Goethe greets in Weimar in 1827 with the following distich: *Was Hiesse wohl die Natur ergründen ? / Wie Gott ebenso draußen innen finden* ("What does it mean, then, to probe Nature? / Finding God both outside and inside yourself"). The pantheistic philosophy with its expression *God sive Natura* comes immediately to mind, and if Goethe was an Espinosa reader from childhood, this indicates a significant affinity with the botanist, who in May 1825 said in a letter to the poet that nothing had prepared him so well for the Brazilian journey like the thought of Espinosa and *Faust*.<sup>5</sup>

These letters to Goethe also contain curious observations on Brazilian literature, which Martius praises for not yet being impregnated with romantic tendencies, which are so repulsive to Goethe, and by the macabre and ghostly; but Martius bitterly criticizes the epic *Caramuru*, by Santa Rita Durão, "as altogether so chilled, pale and little poetic." And on January 13, 1825, the young botanist sends to Weimar poems written by him under the Southern Cross and by the Amazon River; also enclosed are indigenous songs, accompanied by the note:

I also came across some short songs of indigenous origin in the Tupi or general language, which I dare to reveal to Your Excellency before they find their place in my "travel description." To me, who can feel at least in part the language of those children of nature in their laconic poverty, this expression of roughness in feelings and even in sensory relations has something of tragicomic. Is it not as if mankind had to get used little by little to managing human mentality and customs, like clothing or an instrument?

However, even before Martius, Eschwege, Pohl and other travelers en-

tered Goethe's life the poet had already been introduced to Brazilian affairs, decades ago, through a contemporary of the historical Doctor Faustus: Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592). As well known, in the essay "On cannibals" ("Des cannibales") Montaigne reports his meeting, in Rouen, with three Tupinambá Indians brought to France to be paraded before the French court, and also reproduces in sober prose two songs supposedly recited by the Indians. Reading this essay inspired in the poet, then 33 years old, the "trans-creations" published in 1782 in a Weimar magazine.

One is titled "Song of the death of a captive" ["Todeslied eines Gefangenen"] and subtitled *Brasilianisch*. What follows is a literal translation of the German verses, based on a French translation by Montaigne from the original in Tupi:

Come without fear, come all, and  
Gather for the feast!  
For you will intimidate me neither with threats  
Nor with hope.  
Behold, here I am, captive yes,  
But not yet defeated.  
Come, savor my members,  
And with them you will savor at the same time  
Your ancestors, your parents  
Who to me have turned into a meal.  
This flesh I offer you  
Is, you fools, your own,  
And mixed with my bones,  
Is the marrow of your ancestors.  
Come all, come, at every bite  
Your mouth can taste it.

The other song has a love theme and is titled "Love song of a savage" ["Liebeslied eines Wilden"]. In the center of the song is the image of a serpent whose colorful skin inspires the savage to make an adornment for his beloved: it seems to be a coral snake, which the German poet indicates to have never heard of (and much less Montaigne). Goethe went back to these Brazilian verse forty three years later, certainly encouraged by his contact with Martius, and gave them a new version titled just *Brasilianisch*:

Snake, stop!  
Stop, snake!  
My sister wants  
To make you a model;  
She wants to braid me a belt,

Splendid and colorful as you are,  
For me to offer to my beloved.  
When she flaunts it, you'll always be,  
Above all snakes,  
Beautiful and magnificent, exalted.

When Goethe wrote these verses he was submerged in *Faust II* and launching the idea of “world literature”. How much appreciation he showed to this manifestation of the Brazilian Indians by including it in another poem of his old age, along with David’s psalms and Persian poetry!

Like David sang the harp and the princely chant  
The song of the vine-dresser sounded sweetly by the throne,  
The Persian’s bulbul [nightingale] involves the rose garden  
And snake skin shines like an Indian belt,  
From pole to pole, songs are renewed,  
A dance of the spheres, harmonious in turmoil;  
Let all peoples under the same sky  
Lively rejoice in the same gifts.

Had not Montaigne himself (1972), however, already ascribed to the Tupi song (with generous deference to the submitted culture) an unmistakable Anacreontic tone? And he then adds: “In fact, the language they speak needs no sweetness. The sounds are pleasant and the endings of the words are close to Greek.” The hermeneutical approach shows how this particular observation is in tune with the general tenor of the essay, which is to put into perspective the concepts of barbarian and civilized, of progress and backwardness; advancing in this argument, Montaigne regrets that Plato had not known the customs and laws governing Amerindian societies. And in a later essay, “On the coaches” (“Des coaches”), the philosopher resumes the same theme, and this time regrets that the conquest and colonization of America had not occurred under the rule of Caesar or Alexander, but rather under the stigma of a level of greed never seen in the history of humanity:

What progress their civilization would have achieved if with that a climate of brotherhood and sympathy had been established between these Indians and us! In contrast, they only had before them examples of unruliness and abuses. [ ... ] Has so much crime ever been perpetrated for the benefit of commerce? So many cities leveled with the ground! So many nations exterminated! And the richest and most beautiful part of the world turned upside down for the traffic of pearl and pepper! Mechanic victories! Never did ambition, never did animosities engage men against one another to such a degree of hostility and miserable calamity.

How did Goethe react to these pages by Montaigne, derived from reading the accounts of Francisco Lopez de Gomara (*Historia general de las Indias con la del conquest of Mexico y la Nueva - España*) and Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas (*Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*)? Would it not be possible to envision relationships between the image Montaigne presents us of cotemporary commerce, in the name of which unprecedented crimes were perpetrated, and the expansionist policy of the Faustian Empire? In a particular mix of cynicism and violence, Mephistopheles proclaims the motto of this expansionism in famous verses: “You have power, you have therefore the right./[...] ...Navigation is known! / War, trade and piracy / are three-in-one and not to be divided”.<sup>6</sup> Or soon after, turning to the old Settler in order to get his permission to eliminate the elders Philemon and Baucis (and raze the last reserve of primordial nature): “Why let thyself be troubled here? / Until when? / Is colonizing not thy sphere?”

Goethe certainly converged to the fifth act of the tragedy also his knowledge about the massacre of indigenous during the colonization of the Americas, showing with unique clairvoyance in Western literature that the so-called civilizing process is inseparable from the accumulation of wealth, power, and therefore also inseparable from violence. This is not meant to say that the content of the fifth act of the tragedy lies flatly on the historical phenomenon of colonization, but only that its ambivalences and contradictions, as so significantly illustrated by the history of Brazil, found there such an insurmountable aesthetic expression, that very rarely the destructive side of civilization and industrial progress was captured with such force and clarity in a literary work as in these scenes from *Faust*.

And at this point one could also speculate on the reaction of the ‘Neptunist’ Martius - who always endeavored to envision in Brazilian history a harmonious, promising and peaceful process – to the Faustian colonization, of a clear ‘volcanic’ character, as it unfolds in the final act of the tragedy. How will Martius have interpreted that cynical and brutal exhortation of Mephistopheles to the old Settler in order to destroy the peaceful resistance of the elders Philemon and Baucis to the developmental project under way: “Why let thyself be troubled here? / Until when? / Is colonizing not thy sphere?”

The botanist has left us only declarations of his enthusiasm about *Faust I* (as well as about the elegy *The metamorphosis of plants*), and if this enthusiasm is explained in his letters to Goethe, it also implicitly permeates passages of *Travels in Brazil*, as I shall try to show in the light of the beginning of the third volume. With the support of this passage to be quoted, it would be possible to say that the verses of *Faust* that most deeply touched the Brazilian traveler are precisely those that enable a glimpse of the influence of the pantheistic philosophy.

A significant example in this respect is found in the scene “Outside the city gate”, and we have strong reasons to consider it one of the favorite passages

of Antonio Candido, a *Faust* reader for many decades who, however, only ventured into Goethe's work in the essay "*O albatroz e o chinês*", which opens the eponymous book published in 2004. The critic presents the verses of the said scene as a prime example of what he calls 'ascensional poetry', referring to the doctor's Easter promenade along with his servant Wagner, during which they come across a strange black dog that approaches them winding in 'wide spirals' that appear to leave behind a swirl of fire (observations that Goethe resumes and develops in his *Theory of Colours* reverberate during the scene). Very appropriately, Antonio Candido's comment (2004) brings up the pantheism of Spinoza: "To use expressions from Spinoza, which Goethe certainly would accept, let us say that Faust's levitation aims to give him access to 'naturing Nature', that is, to the knowledge of essence by means of deep identification with the reality of 'nature Nature'."

What do we have in this outdoor scene, a beautiful counterpoint to the previous exasperated monologues that unfolded in the doctor's gothic room, inveighed against as 'vile hole' and also 'damn, sultry lair'? Contemplating the sunset, Faust gives wings to fantasy and surrenders to the desire of a cosmic flight that continually preceded nightfall and made him see the world always under the colors of the sunset. However, darkness eventually swallows the light, and the doctor is finally forced to come down to reality. However, he barely touches it and the image of the image of birds inspires him to resume the previous rapture and renew the unwavering desire to overcome boundaries and limits. The final verses of the long monologue say:

Yet it's natural in every spirit, too,  
 That feeling drives us, up and on,  
 When over us, lost in the vault of blue,  
 The lark sings his piercing song,  
 When over the steep pine-filled peaks,  
 The eagle widely soars,  
 And across the plains and seas,  
 The cranes seek their home shore.<sup>7</sup>

*Doch ist es jedem eingeboren,  
 Daß sein Gefühl hinauf und vorwärts dringt, Wenn über uns, im blauen  
 raum verloren, ihr schmetternd Lied die Lerche singt;  
 Wenn über schroffen Fichtenhöhen Der adler ausgebreitet schwebt, und über  
 Flächen, über seen,  
 Der Kranich nach der Heimat strebt.*

As it occurs throughout the drama, also in this passage there are several hidden levels of meaning, such as the allusion to doctor Faust's wish, in the popular book of 1587, to acquire 'eagle wings' to fly and see the whole world, which subsequently leads Mephistopheles to provide a chariot drawn by



dragons, on which Faust takes an eight-day journey around the earth and even through the stars.<sup>8</sup> Also the mention of birds (lark, eagle, crane) refers to literary and mythological meanings that contribute to thicken the symbolic richness of the passage.<sup>9</sup> And it is also possible, as Antonio Candido does, to envision in this ascensional reverie the yearning for cognitive penetration in Nature - both *Natura naturans*, the infinite immutability determined by its divine attributes, and *Natura naturata*, which covers all finite phenomena, the *modi* that depend on infinite Nature.<sup>10</sup>

From this pantheistic perspective one could also say that Faust renews here the search for that “which holds the world together in its deepest core”, as he had just expressed in the gothic room (v.382-383). And so the opportunity emerges to return to the relationship between Goethe and the ‘Brazilian’ Martius, under the assumption that the Faustian longing for a higher understanding of Nature, creating one of the rare moments of happiness experienced by the hero, will very probably have been among those passages of *Faust* that encouraged, in a special way, the young botanist Martius, as he writes to the poet in May 1825, to soar to his ‘Brazilian journey’.

This thereby reiterates the importance of Spinoza’s philosophy as the lynchpin of the affinities established between Goethe and Martius, which developed over the years into a relationship of mutual influence. One of the directions in which it occurred is explicit, and the extraordinary literary qualities of the young botanist become more understandable when one knows that *Faust* and the elegy *The metamorphosis of plants* have always been in his luggage during his long travels throughout Brazil. I have already mentioned Martius’ fondness, during his years in Brazil, of the tragedy published in 1808; as for the elegy, it is worth remembering that in October 1823, when he sent to Goethe the first part of his treatise *Palmae Brasilienses*, the botanist wrote: “Often we said, my friend and traveling companion Spix and I, Your Excellence’s name with enthusiastic love, whenever we basked in the contemplation of nature, and like a shining star ‘The Metamorphosis of Plants’ enlightened our investigations”.

A fine sample of Martius’ literary talent is found at the beginning of the third volume of *Travel in Brazil* - the volume, incidentally, which Goethe got more involved with. The author records, during the night, his impressions of Amazonian Nature, the feeling of cosmic merger as well as the happiness and deep peace that assault him, when then he could perhaps cry out those words that Faust cannot say: “Oh, stop! You are so beautiful!”



*Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius (1794 -1868).*



*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832).*



*Lagoa dos Pássaros by the São Francisco River, illustration contained in Travel in Brazil by Spix and Martins*

Below is a short excerpt of these impressions:

Pará , August 16, 1819. How happy I am here, how I come to deeply understand much of what hitherto had been inaccessible! The sacred place where all forces come together harmoniously and resonate as a triumphal chant and ripen sensations and thoughts. I seem to better understand what the historian of Nature actually is. Daily I venture into meditating on the great and unspeakable picture of Nature, and although it is beyond me to understand its divine purpose, it fills me with delicious emotions. – It is three o'clock in the morning; I get up from the hammock because excitement prevents me from falling asleep; I open the blinds and look at the dark and solemn night. The stars shine magnificently, and the river sparkles with the reflection of the laying moon. How quiet and mysterious everything is around me! I take the lampion to the cool balcony and behold my dear friends, the trees and bushes around the house. (Spix & Martius, 1981, v.3, p.18)

“I behold my dear friends” is the opportunity to interrupt the quote and remember the verses from the scene “Forest and Cavern”, in which Faust thanks the spirit of the earth for the gift of knowing, in the midst of Nature, his dear friends or even ‘brothers’: The ranks of living creatures thou dost lead / Before me, teaching me to know my brothers / In air and water and the silent wood.”

And Martius continues to paint his majestic tropical picture:

Some [of the dear friends] are sleeping with the leaves neatly folded, others, however, which rest by day, rise peacefully in the quiet night; few flowers are open; only you, fragrant hedges of Paulínias, salute the walker with the most delicate fragrance, and you noble and shadowy mango tree, whose leafy crown protects me against the night dew.

Large moths flit like ghosts around the seductive light of my lampion. Increasingly the dew moistens the fresh meadows and the night and humid air and surrounds the warm body. A cicada, an inhabitant of the house, calls me back inside with its familiar cricking chant and keeps company to the happy dreamer who awaits daybreak, guarded by the buzz of mosquitoes, the beating of a timbale of the big toad or the sad call of a goatsucker. At five o'clock dawn begins to break on all sides; a thin and uniform gray, stained by brightness and thus joyful covers the sky; only the zenith is of a darker color.

And on that same note he continues to describe the course of the day: the heat that slowly becomes a crisis of Nature with the increasing number of clouds heralding a violent storm ravages the area; then the quiet evening and nightfall with all Nature drifting again “into sleep and dreams” that inspire “humility and trust in the human heart: the most divine gift after a day of contemplation and pleasure.”

If it is possible, however, to say that the assiduous reading of *Faust* and

*The metamorphosis of plants* contributed decisively to improving Martius' literary skills, the other direction (and hypothesis) to be covered points to the fact that reading Martius' works not only greatly stimulated Goethe's scientific work, but also left marks in the last phase of his literary production. As already said, a plethora of Goethe's studies and readings converged to the immeasurable *Faust II*, like the countless tributaries that converge to the Amazon river. Thus, it would be possible to raise in that work of a "collective being," to quote the poet himself,<sup>11</sup> traces left also by the contact with Brazilian travelers, such as geological and mineralogical images inspired by exchanges with Baron Eschwege, but especially tributary suggestions from the 'Brazilian' Martius, whose treatise *Genera et species palmarum* is commented by Goethe in a review that concludes with the following words: "And going, thus, through the circle of the aforementioned writings, we feel fully present and at home in such a remote part of the world."

I would like to briefly venture into the field of how Martius' works were viewed by Goethe, with a reference to the interest of the old poet in the "spiral tendency of vegetation," which experienced an extraordinary 'intensification' through his contact with the Bavarian botanist, as inferred from the beautiful letters he receives from Weimar on December 3, 1823 and, mainly, on March 28, 1829.

Extending to the aesthetic dimension concepts and principles originally within the scope of the natural sciences is a procedure typical of Goethe, as illustrated by the novel *The elective affinities* with the chemical principle that the poet borrowed from the work *De attractionibus electivis* (1775), by the Swedish scientist Torbern Olof Bergman. Although with extreme brevity and without providing examples, Ernst Robert Curtius (1950) had already pointed to this procedure in the essay "Goethe as a critic," when he describes in the following terms a dominant trend in *Faust II*: "temporalities and spaces interpenetrate mutually and are transposed to the allegorical-symbolic simultaneity. [...] It is not continuity that prevails, but rather the return at a higher level - 'spiral tendency', to borrow a concept from the Goethean theory of Nature."

Goethe's mastery in transforming scientific principles and concepts into symbols, allegories, metaphors, similes, etc., can be seen throughout his literary work. I remember, in this regard, that in the great novel of his old age, *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Travels*, the narrator symbolically attributes to the mysterious Makaria not only an intimate relationship with the solar system but also a cosmic spiraled movement, as seen in Chapter 15 of the third book:

Makaria is found to be in a relation to our solar system which one may hardly venture to express. In the spirit, the soul, the imagination, she cherishes it; she not only contemplates it, but forms as if it were a part of it. She sees herself drawn onward in those heavenly orbits, but in a manner quite peculiar; she has revolved round the sun since her childhood, and in fact, as is now

discerned, in a spiral continually receding from the central point and circling towards the outer regions.

Taking as an example the figure of Makaria, would it not be possible to hypothesize that also in the ascensional movement of the “immortal part” of Faust, as shown in the last scene of the tragedy (“Mountain Gorges”), the ‘spiral trend’ (“return at a higher level,” according to Curtius) is also in action? It is actually around a spiral staircase that this outcome of the tragedy is set in the full performance that Peter Stein staged in the year 2000.<sup>12</sup> And to quote the respective entry in a reputable dictionary of symbols: “the spiral symbolizes also the journey of the soul after death along unknown paths but that lead it, through its ordered detours, to the central abode of the eternal being” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1997, p.400).

Regarding specifically the relationship of the spiral tendency with botany, it is worth paying attention to the images that Goethe borrowed from that sphere in “Mountain Gorges.” Botanical metaphors are not rare in *Faust*, and I remember that back in “Prologue in Heaven”, the Lord expresses his confidence that the restless doctor can still be brought to the light: “When buds the sapling, doth the gardener know / That flowers and fruit will deck the coming years.” About twelve thousand verses later, in the final scene, we find, for example, the Choir of Angels hovering through “the pine-trees’ swaying hair”, as said by the PATER SERAPHICUS in the middle regions; but what stands out mainly is the comparison made by the PATER PROFUNDUS between divine love and the trend that governs the growth of the trees: “As with its own strong impulse, above / The tree lifts skywards in the air: / Even so all-powerful love / Creates all things, in its care.”<sup>13</sup>

For Adorno, in his essay on the final scene of *Faust*, in these verses it is as if Nature pronounced the very history of its creation and the “being of the landscape held itself as simile of its [i.e., of the landscape] coming to be.”<sup>14</sup> Albrecht Schöne, in turn, in his beautiful commentary on this same final scene points to the homology between the mystical conceptions of the old Goethe and his scientific views on the formation and disintegration of clouds: by making the textual surface of this scene transparent to meteorological phenomena related to the cloud system, Goethe at the same time gave poetic plasticity to the pantheistic conception that taught him, in his own words, “to irrevocably see God in Nature, Nature in God” - a concept which, as the poet states, is in the “foundation of my entire existence.”

*God sive Natura*, to recall once again Spinoza’s formula that merges the elective affinities between Goethe and the ‘Brazilian’ Martius. Therefore, a proper understanding of the various levels of meaning that make up the final scene of *Faust II* cannot stray from the pantheistic conceptions shared by the old master of Weimar and the young Bavarian botanist, and that enable envisioning in the final apocatastasis that thrusts the ‘immortal’ part of Faust, his

return to the bosom of God, to which, according to the theology of Origin (an important source in the scene “Mountain Gorge”) all beings shall return, and at the same time his permanent return to Nature. At this point, the ineffable joy experienced by Faust is a great exception in the tragedy - an exception, however, that would authorize, in the Dantesque conception of literary genres, to call *Faust* a comedy,<sup>15</sup> since it “ends in happy things.” But this exception is not like lightning falling from a blue sky; it does not mean the intervention of a *deus ex machina*. The hermeneutic understanding of the “Mountain Gorges” scene requires the approach of those extremely rare moments when Faust briefly experiences the full bliss that is a simile of the final bliss (*Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis*, as the *Chorus Mysticus* finally says: “All of the transient is parable, only”). These would be the brief happiness with Helena in an extraterritorial Arcadia, the religious feeling experienced in childhood and adolescence and whose memory leads him give up suicide at the end of the “Night” scene,<sup>16</sup> and also two other moments amidst Nature, the ascensional monologue he plunges into during the previously mentioned Easter promenade scene and the extraordinary monologue (in unrhymed verses) in the “Forest and Cavern” scene, a vigorous thanks to the ‘spirit sublime’ that would have given him Nature as a gift:

Thou gav’st me glorious nature as a royal realm,  
The power to feel and to enjoy her. Not  
Amazed, cold visits only thou allow’st;  
Thou grantest me to look in her deep breast  
Even as in the bosom of a friend.

As suggested earlier, these passages of *Faust I* probably inspired, in a very special way, the young Martius, an assiduous reader of Goethe and Spinoza, to penetrate the prodigious Brazilian nature “as if it were the bosom of a friend.” If divine love, as Dante says in the last verse of the *Commedia* after passing through the entire spiral of heaven, is the force that “moves the sun and the other stars” (“*che move il sole e l’altre stelle*”), for the pantheism of Goethe and Martius this love is also the force that should be probed in the prodigious vegetable kingdom.

#### Notes

- 1 “There I am on and under mountains, seeking the divine in *herbis et lapidibus*” [herbs and stones]. (Goethe in a letter dated June 9, 1785 to his friend FH Jacobi.) “What greater gain in life can man e’er know, / Than when God-Nature will to him explain?” (verse from the poem published in 1829, *Bei Betrachtung von Schillers schädel*, “Lines on seeing Schiller’s Skull”).
- 2 Denton Jacques Snider (1841-1925) published his comments to the two parts of *Faust* in the book *A Commentary on the Literary Bibles of the Occident* (1886). On the relations of Goethe with the United States, see Walter Hinderer’s article “Goethe und



Amerika”, available at: <<http://www.info.sophia.ac.jp/g-areas/de-GoethesymHinderer.htm>>.

- 3 The aforementioned letter from Nees von Esenbeck is on p.347 of *Briefe na Goethe 1809-1832*.
- 4 Cf. volume *Briefe von Goethe, 1821-1832*, p.64.
- 5 A meaningful testimony of Goethe’s Spinozism is found in the letter of June 1785 (quoted in the epigraph to this essay) to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who had just published the book *On the doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Mr. Moses Mendelssohn*. Goethe, who was then in the mines of Ilmenau (and thus literally “on and under mountains”), strongly opposes the imputation of ‘atheism’ that fell on Spinoza: “He proves not the existence of God (Daseyn), but rather that existence is God. And if others for that reason inveigh against him as Atheum, I would like to call him *theissimum* and even *christianissimum* and praise him for it”.
- 6 The verses of *Faust* quoted in the Portuguese version of this essay follow Jenny Klabin Segall’s translation (Goethe, 2004 and 2007).
- 7 The Portuguese translation by the diplomat Agostinho d’Ornellas was published in 1867 (Part I) and 1873 (Part II). In the original, this passage spans eight verses, and the reference to each bird takes two of them respectively; d’Ornellas, however, condenses in three verses Faust’s reference to the eagle and the crane.
- 8 In the second chapter of the anonymous book *Historia von D. Johann Fausten*, the narrator speaks of the doctor’s tendency, under the influence of *curiositas* (Fürwitz, in the German word at the time), condemned by the Christian doctrine, to “love what should not be loved”, which arouses the desire to acquire “eagle wings” to investigate every corner “of heaven and earth.” Between chapters 24 and 27, the travels that took him to far away countries, as well as and to hell and heaven, are then reported.
- 9 In his commentary on these verses, Ulrich Gaier (1999) refers to a passage in *Theologia platônica*, in which Marsilio Ficino talks about the effort of the soul to become God: “Such an aspiration is as innate to human beings as the flight of the birds.” Then the comment refers to the lark as the primordial being of immortality (as it appears in Aesop’s fable 211), to the eagle as the bird of Zeus, and to the crane as Apollo’s bird and symbol of the poet.
- 10 In book I of his *Ethics* (Scholium to proposition 29), Spinoza (2009, p.35) writes: “Before going any further, I wish here to explain what we should understand by nature viewed as active (*natura natarans*), and nature viewed as passive (*natura naturata*). I say to explain, or rather call attention to it, for I think that, from what has been said, it is sufficiently clear that by nature viewed as active we should understand that which is in itself, and is conceived through itself, or those attributes of substance, which express eternal and infinite essence, in other words, God, insofar as he is considered as a free cause. By nature viewed as passive I understand all that which follows from the necessity of the nature of God, or of any of the attributes of God, that is, all the modes of the attributes of God, insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and which without God cannot exist or be conceived.
- 11 Frédéric Soret noted the following words by Goethe during a conversation in French on February 17, 1832, about a month before the poet’s death: “*Qu’ai-je fait? J’ai recueilli, utilisé tout ce que j’ai entendu note. Mes nourries pair sont*

*des œuvres d'milliers Individus divers, des ignorants et des sages, des gens d'esprit et des sots. L'enfance, l'âge mûr, et Vieillesse, tous leurs sont Venus m'offrir pensées, leurs Faculties, leur manière d'être, j'ai souvent la moisson that recueilli d'autres avaient semée. Mon œuvre est celle d'un être collectif et elle le nom size of Goethe.* “What have I done? I reaped, used everything a saw and observed. My works are fed by thousands of different individuals, ignorant and wise, cunning and foolish people. Childhood, maturity and old age - all came to offer me their thoughts, their faculties, their way of being; often I reaped the fruits that others had sown. My work is that of a collective being, and it bears the name Goethe. “

- 12 This 21-hour long staging by Peter Stein, which took ten years of rehearsals and preliminary work, premiered in Hannover at the Expo 2000. (The performance was recorded by TV station ZDF and released in four CDs in 2005).
- 13 In the original (v.11.870 -873) : “ Wie mit strack eignem kräftigen Triebe / Der stamm sich in die Lüfte trägt: / so ist die Liebe allmächtige, / Die bildet alles, alles hegt”.
- 14 The considerations of adornment (1990, p.133-4) on these verses, which also express a ‘grandeur’ comparable to the feeling of “breathing out of doors”, continue as follows: “It is this come to be hidden in it [i.e. in the landscape] that incorporates it, as creation, to the love whose acting is glorified in the ascension of the immortal part of Faust. To the extent that the word of natural history invokes degraded existence as love, the aspect of reconciliation of the natural opens up. In the recollection of the very natural being, it subtracts it from its natural degradation.”
- 15 On the title *Commedia* that Dante gave to the sacrum poem *al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra*, see, among many other texts, the study by Erich Auerbach “Farinata and Cavalcante,” chapter eight of his book *Mimesis*, especially the commentary on Benvenuto of Imola’s explanations of the Dantesque conception of the genre ‘comedy’.
- 16 TN – This note applies only to the Portuguese (and original) version of this essay.

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*ABSTRACT* – In the second part of the novel *Elective affinities*, young Otilie registered the following words in her journal: “The only inquirers into nature whom we care to respect, are such as know how to describe and to represent to us the strange wonderful things which they have seen in their proper locality, each in its own special element. How I should enjoy once hearing Humboldt talk!” Besides Goethe’s admiration for Humboldt, this excerpt reveals his interest in natural sciences, which experienced significant intensification in September 1824 when Goethe established a personal contact with botanist Carl F. P. von Martius. In this young interlocutor, Goethe soon recognized the qualities of a naturalist which, in the novel, were attributed to Humboldt. He then developed a keen interest in and started to keep up with the publications in which Martius elaborated research, observations and experiments carried out throughout the three and a half years in which he traveled across more than ten thousand kilometers of Brazilian territory together with zoologist Spix. Thus, a most fruitful scientific and cultural exchange arose, rooted mainly in the pantheistic conceptions shared by Weimar’s old poet and the young botanist. In addition to focusing on some aspects of Martius’ expeditions in Brazil, the present essay aims to expose the reception given to them by Goethe and discuss occasional influxes in his literary production. The re-elaboration, in 1825, of one of the songs Goethe had written 43 years earlier with the subtitle *Brazilianisch* is certainly due to this exchange. We also aim to discuss the hypothesis that certain texts and conceptions by Martius have left marks on passages in the second part of *Faust*.

*KEYWORDS:* Goethe and Brazil, Carl Fr. Ph. Martius, *Travels in Brazil, in the Years 1817-1820*, Exchange between Goethe and Martius, Spinoza, Pantheistic philosophy.

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Received on 20 March 2010 and accepted on 5 Apr. 2010.