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Defining Humanity: A Postwar Reconstruction of the Faust Myth

Abstract

Johann von Goethe's *Faust* left a monumental impact on the European intellectual consciousness as soon as it was performed for the public. This effect persisted through centuries, even dazzling audiences in the time of Nazi Germany, when the culture was carefully procured and prescribed. Once the censorship was lifted, authors living in the wake of the Reich dealt with their atrocious reality through their art. Two authors, both accomplished but seemingly unrelated, approached the concept of the Nazified *Faust* and used its motifs in their own stories in an attempt to recreate the art free from political influence. These writers, Vladimir Nabokov and Wolfgang Borchert, and their specific works, *Bend Sinister* and *The Man Outside*, are not only chronologically contemporary, but also thematically, spiritually, and conceptually linked. The superficial similarities between *Bend Sinister*, *The Man Outside* and *Faust* lend themselves to a deeper analysis of these works in conversation with each other, the lives of their authors, and the time during which they were published. For *Faust*, this moment serves as the realization of a morality beyond religious definition, encouraging the creation of a superior version of humanity through the divine justification of Faust's spiritually degrading pact. At least, that was the version perpetuated most by the National Socialist Party. It was this iteration that Nabokov and Borchert were tasked with reassembling, and both authors' works brilliantly retell the myth, revitalizing movements that were swiftly ended with the rise of the Third Reich.

Introduction

It goes without saying that in the time of Nazi Germany, every form of media was carefully constructed to perpetuate the government's own agenda. This concept goes beyond the overtly political propaganda pieces, sweeping nationalistic speeches, or the notorious swastikas adorning each building, however. Every form of consumption, down to the sale of cigarettes to the fictional plays performed in theaters, were carefully vetted for support of the totalitarian state. Works that were published before the time of the Nazis were also reevaluated and censored, rebranded, or outright destroyed if their beliefs were "harmful" to their society.

Some of those who were first hand witnesses to this wanton infringement on personal liberty were understandably outraged. Anything that the Nazis touched was forever tainted—permanently branded with that black and white insignia across the cover. Authors in the wake of the destroyed Nazi Reich were left with the perverted remains of the grandeur that once was, often wracked with guilt, disgust, and disappointment in what the country had become. Because of this, there was a multinational movement away from the characters and works that the former government had heralded as fine examples of the "German spirit" in action.

One particular case of such a rejection was Johann von Goethe's monumentally championed *Faust*, which was one of the most widespread stories in German theaters and playhouses. The timeless story of ambition, hubris, and tragedy emerged during a time when humanistic introspection was at its peak, and the authority of the Christian definitions of "good" and "evil" was beginning to wane. Goethe expertly navigates this new secular morality by using Christian characters in an early modernist setting, mixing the accepted spiritual battle of The Lord and Mephistopheles with the humane excitement and pride in the Renaissance. This

investigation continued throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Different aspects of this amoral battle between modernity and antiquity attracted the attention of several authors and spawned new movements, ranging from Fredreich Nietzsche's definition of the *übermensch* in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, to Franz Kafka's expressionistic and absurd nightmares in *The Trial*, to Bertolt Brecht's politically-charged *The Stories of Mr. Kreuner*. All of these examples sought a definition of humanity and morality, especially after The Great War ravaged Europe to an unimaginable extent.

Of course, these trends violently ended with the rise of the Nazi Party. After over a decade of a cultural winter, the Third Reich finally dissolved, and the next generation of artists rose from the rubble, trying to make sense of the past in the same way that their predecessors did: by creating a new kind of humanity—hopefully, a humanity that would refrain from indulging in the monstrous rampages of the current one. This paper seeks out the pieces of the first new human, Faust, in postwar stories that thoroughly dissect and reconfigure the myth in order to fit this burgeoning era. To this end, there are two authors that emerge as prime candidates due to their unique situations and relative under-appreciation in this area.

With both pieces published in 1947, these creations capture some of this reclamation effort that occurred immediately after the war ended. The first work, penned by Vladimir Nabokov soon after fleeing his second encounter with an blooming authoritarian regime, is *Bend Sinister*, a dystopian tale that investigates the struggle between pride and banality. Nabokov's affluent background, personal experience with this subject, and notoriously detailed writing style has already affixed him as one of the most accomplished modern writers, and yet thorough interpretations of his works from a German point of view are relatively few, especially when

compared to Russian or American viewpoints. Although he was likely not so concerned with the lofty “creation of a new humanity,” his favorite *l'art pour l'art* ideology was also a piece of expressionistic and modernist art. was Following *Bend Sinister* and offering an alternate reaction is Wolfgang Borchert, who famously wrote *The Man Outside* shortly before his premature death. Only twenty-six years old when he passed, Borchert’s short career is historically lamented as a crucial new voice that was silenced far too early. It is due to this limited repertoire that comparative analyses of his works in relation to other contemporary and past authors is almost nonexistent. This piece seeks to fill in that gap and offer an insight into the intersection between Faust, German Socialist Nationalism, and the creation of a new mankind.

Goethe, *Faust*, and German Nationalism

As the new national socialist German country rose from the ashes of the Weimar Republic, Nazi officials toiled day and night to reconstruct their own history to better fit their own cause. Immediately after Hitler was elected, Goebbels and his league of *Kulturkammer* began identifying and categorizing works in circulation. Verdicts on a book’s positive or negative effect on “public morality” decided if the work ended up in a library or on a pyre (Atkins 12). While some novels were easy for the Nazis to put on the *schwarze Bücherliste*, some preexisting and widely celebrated authors offered more of a challenge.

Upon reconciling the past eras of German literature with the idealized Nazi future, most works after the 17th century were deemed to be too influenced by worldwide movements: overtly religious musings and writings styled in the French aesthetic after the Enlightenment were the two biggest offenders (Atkins 22). This *Gelehrtenkultur* gripped German literature until the middle of the 18th century, eventually fading as the *Sturm und Drang* movement shifted the

cultural attention back to the plight of the German individual. At the head of this new kind of writing stood two giants in the realm of global literature, Friedrich Schiller and Johann von Goethe. The latter, even in the 1930s, was already recognized as an ingenious writer, brilliant scientist, and figure of German innovation. It should follow that such an internationally recognized author could be easily shaped into an example of the superior German spirit, but the reality of the situation was far more complex.

In addition to his fictional works, Goethe also wrote on modernity and cosmopolitanism, as his *Weltliteratur* concept (which suggests a literary canon that ignores national borders) and his emphasis on humanity and emotion directly defy the image that the Nazis were attempting to build. The author was also heavily influenced by classicism, seamlessly weaving Greek and Roman archetypes into his own stories, which created another issue when trying to redefine Goethe's values. It would also be impossible to ignore Goethe entirely, as he was simply too important, too central to the German literary sphere to omit or discard his writing (Atkins 29). Therefore, these censors took multiple subtle approaches to dealing with Goethe.

One of the earliest tactics employed by the *Kammen* involved reanalyzing the effect of Goethe's massive success on his contemporary and modern authors. Audiences, they argued, were too fixated on the achievements of one man, and thus unwittingly ignored the work of other (more nationalist) writers (Atkins 24). Another method, as suggested before, linked the *Sturm und Drang* and Romantic movements to their own ideology and attempted to sweep the specific details under the proverbial rug. Upon needing to defend Goethe's "adherence" to Nazi ideals specifically, some of his quotes on nationalism and the unification of art and politics were fractured, dragged out of their context, and offered as "reinterpretation." There is one work,

however, that is repeatedly cited by the Nazis as Goethe's realization of the importance of community and leadership as well as acknowledgement of the shift towards amorality: his masterpiece *Faust* (Atkins 21-22).

As with all forms of art in Nazi Germany, dramas needed to fulfill two basic requirements. The art needed to provide an escape for the viewer, who had to exist in a world run on terror, and it needed to strictly adhere to pro-National Socialist values. Each prospective state-funded play had to be submitted for approval, regardless if it was a new piece or a theatrical classic. Towards the end of the regime, there were even movements to include more older pieces, as those performances were far more financially consistent than the new, sometimes experimental works. In this sense, one of the most reliable plays to produce was *Faust*, which from 1940 to 1943, was performed over a thousand times across Germany (Swett et al. 87-9). Nazi critics wrote their own interpretations of the drama, which echoed some of the original critique contemporary with Goethe but additionally combined the plot with the propagated ideologies of the time. Interestingly, this combination of politics and drama only existed on the page, as the stage performances were often commended for their accuracy to the original work. This fact means that there *was* room for a legitimate pro-Nazism interpretation within the text itself.

There are two primary pieces to the Nazi interpretation of Faust and his tragedy, the first of which is embedded in both of Mephistopheles' deals. Faust swears to the devil that "Should I ever take ease upon a bed of leisure,/ May that moment mark my end!" (Goethe et al. 45) and The Lord proclaims, as he foreshadows the doctor's eventual salvation, "Man never errs the while he strives." (Goethe et al. 10) Not only does this make a self-fulfilling prophecy in the

story, but it also suggests that genuine work towards progress is always morally “right”—regardless of how high the cost may be. In this light, Faust was justified not only in his pact with Mephistopheles but also his actions towards Margarete, Valentine, Baucis, and Philemon, as tragic as they were. A similar line of logic applied to the Nazis (from their perspective). Their way was just because they were progressing towards an idealized life: one free of impurity and contamination of the German spirit. This interpretation also emphasizes the value of individual sacrifice for the good of the community. After all, as painful as Gretchen’s death was for him, it was regrettably necessary for Faust to achieve his ascension.

The secondary piece to this viewpoint, connected to the first, refers to Faust’s articulation of “humanist faith,” as in, a faith that operates separately from the traditionally Christian “good and evil” morality (Swett et al. 96). This concept is largely based on the righteousness of progress, but it also includes a spectrum of humanity, as it were. For instance, according to the Earth Spirit, Faust’s metaphysical being ranks below its own, but it is high enough for the doctor to be able to conjure these spirits in the first place. Wagner even begins to raise his own spiritual ranking through the creation of the Homunculus, celebrating his own personal achievement in the alchemical arts. There is a clear Nazi *Übermensch*-like undertone to this concept, as some men are able to command these powers while other, weaker characters are fated to serve these superhumans or die. In addition to all of this background work, the drama itself uses Christian figures to deliver these truths, making the whole concept far more likely to land for the deeply religious German audience. The Lord commends Faust’s progress, Faust’s plight evokes that of Job, and an angelic Margarete in service of Mother Mary appears in a deus-ex-machina of sorts to personally redeem her wayward lover.

Unfortunately, Goethe's presence and reverence in the realm of German art and science made his assimilation into Nazi Germany inevitable. Although the man himself proved rather difficult to reevaluate, the nature of his literary art means that there is always room for text-supported interpretation, regardless of the author's natural disposition. Nevertheless, the Nazis not only continued to praise Goethe as one of their predecessors, but also continued to put on his works, *Faust* being the most popular out of all of them. For two authors who were coming to terms with their own life and writing style, the impression of this multilayered tragedy seeped into their own views on totalitarianism, power, and sacrifice.

Nabokov Biography, Connections to Goethe

Although the author himself insists that his personal experiences had little to no effect on this piece, it is worth discussing Vladimir Nabokov's life until the publication of *Bend Sinister* in 1947. The oldest son of Vladimir Dimitrievich and Elena Nabokov, Vladimir Valdimirovich Nabokov was born just before the turn of the 19th century in St. Petersburg—the then capital of the Russian Empire. His life was one of nobility and luxury until his father, fearing the emerging power of the Bolsheviks in the capital, sent Nabokov and his brother to Crimea. Two years later, the family had to flee this new country, which gave the twenty-year-old author and poet the chance to study briefly at Cambridge in London before finally arriving in Berlin in 1920 (Bethea and Frank 11-12, 16).

Nabokov spent the next seventeen years in this city. Under the penname Sirin, he took advantage of the expansive Russian emigre population and published many poems and short stories—even marrying one of his avid readers in 1925, Vera Evseevna Slonim. He then experienced moderate fame after the successes of *Mary* (1926), *King, Queen, Knave* (1928) and

finally *The Defense* (1929) (Bethea and Frank 17-18). In 1932, however, Nabokov published “Posviashchenie k ‘Faustu’,” “Dedication from *Faust*,” alongside several other miscellaneous translations from the drama (Barabtarlo 242). In the same city and year, actor Gustaf Gründgens first appeared as Mephistopheles in the Preußisches Staatstheater (today, the Konzerthaus Berlin), sending shockwaves through the art world for his career-defining performance (Swett et al. 90). It stands to reason that Nabokov’s translations could have been a reaction to the *Faust* craze, as the massive Russian emigre population in Berlin would have flocked to a translation from the new production.

For the author, though, the back half of the 1930s would see the publication of immensely popular novels, not just translations: praise for *Invitation to a Beheading* (1935) and *The Gift* (1937) allowed Nabokov and his family to remain in Berlin until 1937, when his wife’s Jewish heritage proved too much of a risk to remain in the capital of Hitler’s Germany. After three subsequent years of wandering across Europe, the Nabokov family moved to the United States in 1940. Through the union of Soviet, British, and American forces, the Nazi regime was eventually toppled, causing a new communist movement to sweep through the US. Nabokov was entirely repulsed by this development, which inspired him to finish the book that he had been writing since 1942, *Bend Sinister*.

Borchert Biography, Connections to Goethe

Wolfgang Borchert, despite passing away at the age of twenty-six, is often praised as the defining voice of postwar young adults Germany. Born in 1921 to Fritz and Hertha Borchert, his early life in Hamburg was defined by theater and artistic expression. Although his home was not as opulent as Nabokov’s, his family could still afford to run in popular literary circles (Hertha

was a celebrated author who was particularly fascinated with Dadaism and Low German publications). However, when the Nazis rose to power, one of the Borcherts' neighbors filed several complaints against the family for their "anti-State" remarks (Burgess 14). These kinds of complaints would become a motif not only for Friz and Hertha, but especially for Wolfgang, who would soon become the subject of many similar investigations in his adulthood.

As a teenager, though, Wolfgang eventually found his love for the theater after watching a production of *Hamlet* with his mother. This particular iteration of the drama was brought to Hamburg from Berlin in 1937 and boasted the talent of Gustaf Gründgens (only five years after his breakthrough Mephistopheles role) as the central character (Burgess 16). Wolfgang was seemingly unaffected by the play while he was watching it, but he soon quietly began work on a prequel to *Hamlet*, which would be finished as *Yorick, the Fool!* the following year. Although the play is not directly related to Goethe or *Faust*, it was written with Gründgens in mind, as Borchert had affixed a poster of the actor to a wall in his room. His next work, *Cheese. The Comedy of Mankind* (1939) was far more explicitly affected by Goethe's masterpiece.

Characters in *Cheese* are not only caricatures of the political forces in Hamburg (the Nazi-character is a sleazy cheese salesman who aspires to rule the world and universe), but the ingenious protagonist, Wolff Günter, calls upon the forces of art and literature in order to defeat the evils around him. Lines and scenes in the play are often parodies from *Faust*, with the cheese salesman mimicking Faust's words, a "Stimme von oben" intervening and acting as The Lord, and even a scene set exactly in Goethe's *Walpurgisnacht*—in the Brocken mountain and surrounded by a league of witches (Burgess 28).

His writing and acting career would be placed on an indefinite hold, however, as Borchert was drafted into the army in 1941. During his service in Russia, he would experience several traumas not only to his body, but also to his mind. Jaundiced, frostbitten, and missing a finger, Borchert repeatedly appeared before military courts on account of his nonconformist tendencies and frustrated outbursts. After bouncing in and out of political prisons and front lines, the war eventually ended and Borchert wrote his final piece, *Draußen vor der Tür* in 1947 before finally succumbing to his various health complications the night before its first theater performance (Burgess 129).

Characters and Themes from *Faust*

In order to efficiently organize and understand the representations of Goethe's *Faust* in other contexts, it is important to define the major characters, archetypes, and motifs that appear throughout both parts. Some of these themes were already somewhat articulated in terms of the Nazi interpretation of the tragedy, but even with the risk of redundancy, it is crucial to note the individual story beats that accompany the characters and their development.

The Cast

With both halves of the story focused on him, it can be slightly challenging to compress the character of Faust into a replicable formula. However, there are several characteristics that are echoed across iterations of the doctor, which are worth listing here. First, Faust (or his imitator) is an old, learned man—so much so that he strives to break into the field of the magical (or forbidden) arts. It is this motivation, his will to keep seeking, that nearly drives him to suicide at the beginning of the drama and serves as the basis of his wager with Mephistopheles. His knowledge differentiates him spiritually as well, as his ability to reach for new heights

intellectually elevates him from his mundane peers and alters his perception of morality. These changes, of course, are checked by his female counterparts, which is a complex relationship that changes between the first and second parts.

Mephistopheles makes his intentions clear from the prologue, never faltering from his original nihilistic, cynical nature. He makes wagers with Faust, the pinnacle of mankind, and God, the ruler of Heaven and Earth, openly articulating his hatred for humanity and creation to both of them (Goethe et al. 10). In a word, Mephistopheles is an antagonist. He unravels and sabotages the lives of Faust and everyone around him in order to serve his own disgust for everything that the mortal world has to offer. Where Faust's character is focused on striving and improving, Mephistopheles seeks to stop, distract, and destroy. He is the antithesis of progress, making him an easy villain not only for Faust, but also the German National Socialist audience.

Stabilizing Faust for the first part of the drama, Margarete wields arguably more power over the doctor than Mephistopheles. It is his pursuit of *her* that keeps the doctor moving—thereby upholding his wager with the devil. Furthermore, her virginal naivete and innocence, which are subtly corroded to ruin and brought to redemption, are the emotional center of the tragedy in the first act. Her infanticide and subsequent imprisonment are curiously absent from the explicit scenes in the drama, leaving most of her anguish up to the imagination of the audience. In effect, this makes her insanity even more heart wrenching and her salvation incredibly cathartic. Through this whirlwind of emotional pathos, Margarete embodies the classic Christian ideas of chaste beauty, unyielding faith, and redemptive suffering, literally ascending to a higher existence as her time in the physical world mercifully ends.

Helena of Troy gets conjured up in the latter half of the drama and serves as Faust's second romantic interest. As opposed to Margarete, she represents modern antiquity—the unification between the Classical world and the modern German society. Her characterization is much more overtly sexual than her predecessor's, as her appearance in *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe suggests: her involvement in Faustus' life is one of the key contributions to his damnation. However, Goethe gives a nuance to Helena's character by making her aware of—even regretting—the effect of her beauty on the people around her (Goethe et al 262). It is also relevant to mention her own miniature tragedy regarding the death of her and Faust's son, as it is directly opposed to Margarete's silent spiral into madness. Almost like *Medea*, her turmoil is front and center, further highlighting the juxtaposition between Helena's Classical drama and Gretchen's Christian plight.

The Motifs

Each important character, of course, is also associated with specific developments and motifs, the most prevalent of which being that of redemption and ascension. Even without mentioning Gretchen's salvation and reappearance at the end of both parts, there are plenty of other moments that hint at this repeating concept: Faust and Mephistopheles ascend up the mountainside to attend the Walpurgis Night celebrations; Helena dissolves into a cloud of vapor and follows the soul of her son upwards after he perishes; the doctor then stands at the top of another mountain, gazing into the sky and meditating on the “godlike female form” of Helena and Margarete's “most cherished boon of earliest youth,” as it drifts to the heavens with “the best my [his] soul contains” (Goethe et al. 287). Not only is literal movement a constant in the drama, it also is deeply linked to some kind of spiritual development. Every time a body

physically ascends in the world, there is some mental or metaphysical trial. This is, of course, linked to Faust's promise to continue to strive, which directly ties into the following main motif of the drama.

Furthermore, given the Christian lens of the play, these trials are linked with redemption. Walpurgis Night, even though emotionally detrimental for Faust and Margarete, serves as the vehicle for Gretchen's recommitment to her faith, as well as the doctor's first step towards rejecting Mephistopheles, further punctuated by the shift of verse to prose in the following scene. Helena's and Euphorion's deaths are what lead Faust to scale the mountaintop and realize how enduring Margarete's figure is—especially when compared to Helena's, which dissipates almost immediately into the clouds. It is clear that the Voice from above and the league of angels that appear at the conclusion of both halves are a far more literal interpretation of this same concept. In short, one of the key features when seeking *Faust* in later works is the presence and relationship between spiritual redemption and ascension. When addressing these two notions, however, a third piece begins to appear, just a relevant but warranting its own discussion: suffering.

Every main figure in *Faust* suffers in some capacity. Of course, this fact is clearly foreshadowed in Faust's pact with Mephistopheles, as a part of his striving includes experiencing “both highest and most low” of what life has to offer (Goethe et al. 47). The highs are obvious: his returned youth, his revitalized sex life, abounding wealth and land are just some examples. On the opposite end of the spectrum, though, he is often overcome with negative feelings, even breaking the lyrical setup of the drama or having to forget entire events in order to carry on

living. In his age, he eventually goes blind and becomes entirely dependent on the devil, much to his dismay.

However, not only does his commitment to pure experience make the doctor's life tumultuous, but the chaos bleeds over directly to Margarete's, Helena's, and Wagner's as well. While these characters have often been discussed, there are plenty of smaller roles that are equally impacted. Valentine is another excellent example of this unintended destruction, as his realization about Gretchen's pregnancy not only wrecks the perception of his sister, but also leads to his dramatic death at the hands of Faust and Mephistopheles. Therefore, when considering the myth of *Faust* in other works, it is important to consider who suffers, what causes their pain, and any overarching reason for their suffering.

Nabokov's *Bend Sinister*

As previously referenced, the relationship between Nabokov and Goethe (and even more specifically, Nabokov and *Faust*) is a complex one. One of the most recurring images throughout all of Nabokov's American novels is that of Goethe's *The Elf-king*, who masquerades as characters ranging from Vivian Darkbloom to Gradus to, in the author's original argument in the first read of this work, Paduk. At the same time, the author also notes a certain characteristic that is overwhelmingly obvious for Russian readers of German literature and philosophy, *poshlost*. This concept, although not precisely articulated in German or English, is akin to "cheap, sham, common, smutty," but is a timeless concept that can apply to people and situations equally. Despite Nabokov's fascination with the poet, he still recognizes a "dreadful streak of *poshlost* running through *Faust*" in *Nikolai Gogol*, a book published while he was working on *Bend Sinister* in 1944 (Nabokov 63-64). It is very likely that this interpretation stems from both the

extremely dramatic nature of *Faust* and the characterization of the antagonist. This same streak continues in the background of *Bend Sinister* as the Party of the Average Man, the very foundation of the “Communazi” State, is similarly ridden with superficial, gaudy, and soulless creatures (Alexandrov 28). It stands to reason, then, that instead of depicting Paduk as the lustful Erlkönig, stealing away David from the arms of his father, the dictator could be viewed as the devil sitting across the doctor, constantly offering him grander funerals and unshackled *liberalishki* in exchange for his academic and moral standards.

The Cast

Dr. Adam Krug’s characterization as an echo of Faust references a few of the “themes” that Nabokov articulates in the introduction. The main point, from this perspective, is the “beating of Krug’s loving heart, the torture an internse tenderness is subjected to,” as his morals are pitted against the urge to protect his son (Nabokov *Bend Sinister* xiv). These morals are not only rooted in his personal history with the leader, but also in his extensive education in philosophy. It is his revered understanding of truth itself that sets him apart from his fellow professors—and furthermore makes him the target of the State’s interest. Compared to Faust’s multiple backgrounds (philosophy is even the first subject he mentions) and his work attracting the attention of The Lord and Mephistopheles, the superficial connections are clear (Goethe et al. 12). Deeper in the thematic aspects of the novel, there is another similarity in the relationship between Krug and the torment of his “beating heart” and Faust’s longing for emotional experience. One of the crucial departures from *Faust*, however, is how the protagonist chooses (or rather, is forced) to expand his definitions of torment and pleasure. In this retelling, Faust

never makes his wager. However, that change does little to stop the inevitable pain that all versions of the Faust myth must include.

As Krug's tormentor and the tyrannical head of the State, Paduk is a natural "Mephistopheles" for this tale. Although not as supernatural as an actual devil, his complete control of the private and public spheres of life in Padukgrad coupled with the constant offers of jobs and wealth to the professor do push the character further in that direction. One point potentially against this comparison is Krug's personal history with The Toad, as the power dynamic in their childhood was drastically different. This too, though, is echoed in Goethe's *Faust*, as the initial pact puts Mephistopheles in service of Faust, but by the end of the second part, the blind, enfeebled, aged doctor relies entirely on his diabolic servant. A shift like this was akin to Paduk's ultimate goal: to advance from a victim of physical and sexual abuse to a ruler, with the illustrious Professor Krug feeding off his State's every word.

Additionally, the homoerotic undertones of Paduk and Krug's relationship is actually reminiscent of other retellings of the Faust myth, both prior to and including Goethe's iteration. Mephistopheles, like Paduk, is extremely queer-coded in his tale, often expressing his annoyance with Faust's pursuits of Gretchen and Helena while dedicating stanzas of text to his lust for the angelic "lads" who appear to redeem Faust (Goethe et al. 334). Although much of Paduk's sexuality is obscured through the filters of Krug's dreams and memory, he recalls instances of pinching Paduk's "plump buttocks," imagines "Kiss of the Toad" while he is asleep, and insists on calling Paduk "*dragotzennyii* [my precious]" in one of the retellings of their meeting (Nabokov *Bend Sinister* 67, 88, 144). Even if Paduk is not legitimately romantically attracted

towards men, there are plenty of homoerotic associations throughout the multiple “realities” that *Bend Sinister* presents.

The youthfully naive role of Gretchen is somewhat ambiguous in a cursory read of the novel. Mariette is the standout character in description and personality, as she is far younger than Krug and meekly cares for David as she quietly takes Olga’s place in the household. This meager image is shattered, though, once her role as a spy is revealed and her overtly sexual nature is realized. It could stand, then, that this kaleidoscopic, postwar “Margarete,” *should* be the polar opposite of her predecessor. However, this analogy is rather shallow. The mysterious illness, death, and mysterious reappearances of Olga Krug fit this role significantly better than the duplicitous maid, as another key feature in finding Gretchen is her unseen nature.

Olga’s death is never *directly* described, rather refracted through Krug’s shattered recollections of her while she was alive. Most often, Olga is remembered through two primary scenes: the first where she is removing a necklace in a dressing room, and the other connecting Olga to a certain Eyed Hawk-moth from her youth (Zimmer and Nabokov). There is a curious link between Margarete, Olga, and necklaces in their respective works, and both instances herald the character’s demise. For Gretchen, it is her acceptance of these gifts that clues Faust and Mephistopheles into her potential weakness—one that leads to her eventual insanity. Although Olga’s is far less dramatic in consequence, there is an instance of her removing her head along with her necklace, a clear echo of her recent death in Krug’s grief-addled mind. There is an aspect of ascension with Olga as well, which is connected to the multicolored moth and its reappearance at the end of the novel. Despite the narrator (and Nabokov’s) insistence that the fictional characters simply cease to be after the story is over, his writing of the novel is

interrupted by a twin-spotted insect in his window, which he frees. Somehow, even against the will of the author himself, Olga escaped her own fictional world and entered the author's apartment, forever immortalized as the symbol of her childhood—another nod to Gretchen's association with innocence, transformation, and nature.

Although Mariette is locked away and continuously raped in prison after the accidental murder of David (again, somewhat echoing Gretchen's fate after drowning her child), she nevertheless misses an important characteristic for a stronger connection to the character. Much more akin to Helena, the undercover maid is far more sexualized and is punished much more explicitly by the State and the enigmatic author. Paduk showcases her cell to Krug while the narration embeds itself with the gruesome details of her "gently bleeding" body and nearby "forty satisfied soldiers" as they exchange stories about their encounter with her (Nabokov *Bend Sinister* 228, 230). Mariette is also, like Helena, aware of her sexual charm, choosing to weaponize it for Krug—ultimately damning herself, as it is her position as David's maid and kidnapper that implicates her in the tragic mix up. While this could be seen as more Marlowe than Goethe, the German tie to the character is embedded in her own speech. Her brand of the German-Russian-English language in Padukgrad is mostly genuine German, with Mariette's sister even using the German diminutive "Mariechen" instead including a Russian "Masha" or any of its equivalents (Nabokov *Bend Sinister* 198). Because the language of Paduk's State is a thorough mixture of all three aforementioned languages, Mariette's association with *only* German is reminiscent of Helena's history in ancient Greece. In both cases, their heritage comes from a long-forgotten culture: one that, through the works of the diabolic antagonist, becomes wrapped up in Faust's (Krug's) world. With all of these key features—with the detailed images of

her agony, her self-awareness, and her antique culture—Mariette emerges as one of the images conjured to distract and torment Krug while his very soul is being tested by Paduk.¹

The Motifs

Like the original *Faust*, there are additional instances of divine intervention in *Bend Sinister*. The narrator-author, who Nabokov describes as “an anthropomorphic deity impersonated by me,” not only momentarily halts the story progression to capture specific moments of emotion or tension, but also mercifully rescues Krug and his colleagues at the end of the novel (Nabokov *Bend Sinister* xviii). These moments are marked with movement: the professor crosses over a bridge; Olga gently crosses a garden with a moth in her hands; Paduk and Krug’s meeting is viewed from above; and finally Krug is stopped as he charges one of The Toad’s men. Not only are these scenes stopped, altered, or replayed by this deity, he also chooses intense scenes—those illustrating grief, love, hate, and insanity. If viewed through the lens of Faust’s *striving* and *feeling*, *motion* and *emotion*, then this Nabokovian god aligns with Faust’s Lord, similarly saving their champions through direct intervention.

The concept of redemption plays a far smaller role in this novel because Krug makes no mortal error. Despite this, however, *Bend Sinister* makes its relationship with *Faust* strong through the use of the “lever of love”—the torment that the State uses to coerce Krug into considering an agreement with the State (Nabokov *Bend Sinister* xiii). While this concept not only ties into the previous “motion and emotion” notion, it also introduces the theme of suffering to *Bend Sinister*, just as Nabokov suggests in the introduction. Like *Faust*, there is some layer of torment for all characters involved. In this case, Krug is abused at the behest of his former

¹ There is also something to be said about the Mariette-Gretchen similarities, which is elaborated further in this work.

victim, ostensibly for political gain but additionally for revenge. His son is physically tortured and killed as a misplaced “love lever.” Mariette, Mac, Dr. Alexander, and Linda are all punished far beyond the scope of their crimes out of the State’s “goodwill” in lieu of David’s death. All of these characters owe their grim fates to Paduk, whose Party of the Average Man thrives on a collective mindset. Although he is the leader of the State, Paduk was only able to find success with his Party by identifying and exploiting the everyday torments of the average person. His personal life yielded many instances of sexual abuse and social prejudice based on his mild personality and subpar appearance—traits he used to leverage his relatability. Mechanically, this suffering serves a similar purpose to that which the National Socialist interpreters of *Faust* emphasized: the pain of the individuals for the sake of the community.

Yet for Nabokov, this concept is backwards. Instead of Faust causing the detriment of others through his pact, it is Mephistopheles’ attempts to pin down this superior human that destroys those around him. This Faust, despite making the morally “correct” decision (not making a deal), still endures blow after emotional blow, eventually requiring the same salvation that the morally compromised Faust needs at the end of Goethe’s work. A nihilistic view of this alteration could highlight how little a “Faust’s” decisions matter. Regardless of their supposed moral strength or intellectual superiority, an individual will *always* be ultimately helpless to the machinations of the world (or gods) around them. Nabokov’s repeated exiles and the dour tone of *Bend Sinister* initially second this version. However, doing so would ignore an entire layer of reality in the novel, as it really only applies to the story of Krug, not necessarily including the diagenic author. This character, only one degree removed from the real Nabokov, orchestrates this performance as a demonstration of supernatural compassion. The god makes Krug’s life

entirely unbearable, but regardless offers him relief, just as Faust is allowed to ascend after The Lord allows Mephistopheles to wreak havoc. Once he deems it necessary, the relentless torment stops, the pieces are neatly returned to their box, and it is the imprint of the pain and relief itself that makes its way beyond the novel, much like how Krug's world borrows the imprint of asphalt from the author's window view.

Borchert's *The Man Outside*

The style of *The Man Outside* (and Borchert's works as a whole) seems to run in the opposite directions of Nabokov's apolitical, impersonal assertions. There is a clear connection between the author and Beckmann, the dialogue and stage direction yield no hidden acronyms or references, and the story is direct and unabashedly realistic. Borchert's grim depiction of postwar Hamburg struck a chord with many who found themselves in a similar position to the various characters of the play, as it portrayed these complex situations with the messiness and insensibility that the real world offered. However, literature and critique around the drama tease out the nuances and expressionistic notes that make an interpretation of *The Man Outside* just as dense as those of *Bend Sinister* and *Faust*, with even some thematic similarities between the three rising to the surface.

Of course, the medium differences between a novel and a play naturally lead to an innate difference in writing and description, but the content of both pieces have intriguing similarities regarding the possibility of the plot occurring as the audience sees it. Like *Bend Sinister*, *The Man Outside* presents different interpretive versions of reality, constantly playing with what could be "real" or "unreal." Some writers (despite Borchert discouraging the interoperation) assert that all of the play's events are merely the projections of Beckmann's grief-stricken mind

as he drowns in the Elbe (Burgess 157-8). Others take the whole plot at face value, accepting the personification of the Elbe, One Leg, and The Other as genuine supernatural entities that Beckmann encounters in the fictional world of the play. Most, however, write under some combination of these two polarized opinions, mixing Beckmann's dreams and reality seamlessly together. The similar structures alone are enough of a comparison to warrant the investigation of these two works, but there is more to be said about Borchert's adult treatment of the Faust theme in this work that echoes Nabokov.

As previously discussed, Goethe was no stranger to Borchert. However, there is a marked difference between the treatment of the internationally famous poet-author from Borchert's *Käse* to *The Man Outside*. His prior work lauded Goethe as a genius and a hero—someone that could save the world from the tyrannical cheese-merchant with his sheer literary power. By 1947, though, it seems that Goethe had fallen out of favor with Borchert. His name, mentioned in passing by the Cabaret Producer, is used as an example of “Art” meant to take people “out of themselves” and temporarily forget about the horrors around them (Borchert et al. 108). This “more genial, more self-assured, more cheerful” art, which has nothing to do with “Truth,” which was described by a producer who can afford three pairs of glasses but refuses to free Beckmann from his gas mask ones, seems to reek of that empty *poshlost* that Nabokov similarly contributes to the tale (Borchert et al. 111). In order to better understand the Borchert-Goethe and Borchert-Nabokov connections in this triangle, though, a more thorough look at the Faust myth in *The Man Outside* is necessary.

The Cast

Despite the fact that the *dramatis personae* describes Beckmann as simply “one of the many,” his central placement in the play begs for a comparison to Faust (Borchert et al. 81). He does, after all, act opposite a pseudo-supernatural “Other” and appears to agree to his continual defenses for life and living. The drama similarly follows Beckmann while he is emotionally tormented over and over again, even beginning with (in some interpretations) his death by suicide, just like the first part of *Faust*. Though, in essentially every other main regard, the former soldier is the exact opposite of the superhuman doctor. There is no trace of the superior education, advanced age, or higher social standing between this “Faust” and his peers. He is, in the words of the Undertaker, “one of the great grey number,” one from the faceless mass that returned to his homeland just to find it a shell (Borchert et al. 85). For this Faust, there is no Easter morning to wake him from this living nightmare. In this sense, Beckmann could be viewed as an “anti-Faust,” someone who is entirely unremarkable in every way, but still somehow, by virtue of his incredible averageness, caught between the conflict of the old and new Gods.

If Beckmann is a photo-negative Faust, then his enigmatic Other must be a reversed Mephistopheles. This concept is actually supported in the play, as the Other calls himself the “one who says Yes,” (Borchert et al. 88)—the polar opposite of Mephistopheles’ “spirit of negation” (Goethe et al. 11). Instead of trying to lead his Faust to Hell or death, The Other constantly argues with Beckmann in favor of life. Even if the legitimacy of The Other’s supernatural power varies with the opinion of authors, the role that he fulfills is constant: he keeps Beckmann striving. Curiously, this motive actually agrees with the original devil’s, but there is no ulterior reason for The Other to assist the main character. Once again, there is no

official deal between the two (or even between the Old Man and the Undertaker for that matter), but that does overall little to alter the core story. Much like Mephistopheles, The Other continues to pull Beckmann along, pointing out reasons to continue moving—the first of which, of course, is for the opportunity to meet beautiful young women and be revitalized through love (another tactic borrowed from the devil).

The woman in question, literally called “The Girl” in the stage direction, appears to Beckmann along the banks of the Elbe. Without even moving past her introduction, the similarities to Margarete are already clear. Not only are the German names superficially similar, but both emphasize the youngness and naiveté of the character (*Mädchen*, *Gretchen*). Furthermore, both are tied to rivers, which in both tales, are places of death. Finally, this Gretchen spiritually saves this Faust as well, bringing the water-logged corpse back to his feet and helping him find shelter. She even appears *again* at the end of the fifth scene to remind him of her love, which inspires the soldier to look past his first wife’s infidelity and love again. Admittedly, the drama is far more about this Faust than it is its Margarete, but during the few times The Girl appears, she nevertheless acts in an extremely similar way to the ill-fated character from before.

With all of these similarities, however, there are several important departures. This new Gretchen is not perfectly sinless or virginal—she clearly expresses immediate (albeit, playful) sexual interest in Beckmann. In a strange twist of fate, the former soldier takes on the role of his wife’s boyfriend, as he imagines The Girl’s wounded husband arriving back home to find a new man in his house. Although, once again, the actual existence of the One-Legged Man is up for scholarly debate, the parallelism is present nonetheless: Beckmann is both the victim and lover in

an extramarital affair. In Borchert's retelling, the Gretchens and the Helenas become one and the same not quite out of lust or pride, but rather as an attempt to continue to live. In this case, it makes sense that The Other immediately tries to illustrate this concept to Beckmann, who is similarly seeking any scrap of normalcy in the wake of the literal and emotional destruction.

The Motifs

Beckmann and The Girl's relationship serves as an excellent small example of the self-fulfilling apathy rampant in the world around them. Once the One Legged's clothes appear, Beckmann is appalled at The Girl's supposed promiscuity until she reveals that she has already waited years for her husband to return—exactly how the soldier's wife waited for him. Beckmann, despite having the choice to alter the narrative and leave, remains with her and becomes complicit in the story. In effect, he becomes just as inhumane and uncaring as the world he constantly complains about, creating a streak of “self-complacency” that runs throughout the rest of the scenes (Milek 332). However, his self-pity and torment is so internalized that wherever he goes, he cannot help but continue to hollowly preach his truth to whomever he meets: everything is terrible, and no one cares about it. Nevertheless, Beckmann himself does not care enough to try and *change* it.

In this view, then, the soldier's—and the city's—salvation comes from that change. Borchert, at this time, describes himself as a *Neinsager* (No-sayer), a nihilist that uses the hatred of his situation as fuel to discover a better future. The finale of the fifth act sees Beckmann standing alone on the stage and desperately begging for someone to give him any answers. While this ending is certainly a gloomy one for many, there are those who suggest that the following silence allows Beckmann to realize that he must find these answers himself, as his experiences

throughout the play have allowed him to realize the vicious cycle of inhumanity that he had been perpetuating (Engel 78). Now, in the wake of all of that suffering, the new human must clear their own path without the aid of any Others or Old Men, and they can only do so by beginning to move once again.

Discussion

One of the repeating departures from *Faust* was the treatment of deal-making. For the original doctor, his pact with Mephistopheles was born out of pride and intellectual hunger: a traditionally morally-offensive means that accentuated the magnitude of a life-changing end. At the same time, The Lord makes his wager with measured confidence based from his experience guiding humanity for millenia. In fact, it is this very promise to keep striving that protects Faust from the start, so even within the original narrative, deal-making was certainly a loaded action. *Bend Sinister* and *The Man Outside* both interpret this pivotal moment in their own ways, dismantling the key characteristics and emotions and reconfiguring them to form a completely new take on the pact.

The Damnable Pact

Bend Sinister has a similarly complicated, yet fairly literal translation of a deal in its story. Initially, Krug refuses to support the State by signing his university's endorsement or speech, only acquiescing when David is kidnapped. Here, there are important emotions that are shuffled around. The Party of the Average Man is newly-established, meaning that Krug's endorsement would legitimize their ideals not only within the country, but to the rest of the world as well. Paduk and his party's desperation for Krug grows throughout the novel, illustrated by the grander and grander offers which culminate after David's death. On the other side, Krug clearly

prides himself on his intellect and refuses to separate his childhood impressions of The Toad with the head of State, Paduk. The worldwide renown that Paduk desires can only be acquired through Krug's cooperation, and the professor knows it. That strange power dynamic gives Krug a haughty boldness that colors his first face-to-face meeting with Paduk and keeps him from fleeing Padukgrad when he had the chance. This impenetrable barrier, however, is ultimately destroyed in his son's absence. In that single moment, the emotions and powers switch. The concept of the deal also changes from an intellectual chess match to a desperate plea for a child's life, playing on one of the most basic human instincts which seems to be entirely lost to the State. Everything switches back once more, and the State is left scrambling after a clerical mix-up that resulted in the death of their single hostage, reverting everything back to Krug, who is far too distraught to agree to anything anymore.

Here, the strength of the deal is completely shattered. There is no consistent power dynamic (ie: supernatural being vs "worthy" human), instead constantly shifting to an absurd extent, equalizing imprisonments, executions, a lavish State funeral, a new job, and higher salary to a single child's life and a signature. It somehow both dismantles any moral ambiguity by making the entire situation completely absurd *and* examines the individual, eerily realistic events that all contribute to the dramatic finale. This shift from a single, damnable pact made at the beginning of a story to multiple escalating offers ranging from signing a statement to excusing a wrongful death makes the Party of the Average Man far more banally diabolic. These many moments remain in memory but fade into the background until they all come down on Krug with a terrifying and realistic vengeance.

Borchert's play does not have much in the way of *explicit* deal-making scenes, but there are plenty of implications of the deals and decisions that people have made in order to survive. Each scene features Beckmann, our Faust, interacting with someone who has already made a deal of their own. The Girl, as previously described, has given up her hope of completely returning to her prewar life, compromising this idyllic vision to include Beckmann instead of her actual husband. Beckmann's commanding officer has already forgotten the loss of his platoon and interprets the soldier's retelling of his nightmares as comedy. In return, the Colonel enjoys a warm house, good rum, and food readily available on the table. The Cabaret Director comes closest to breaking the pact he had made to the definitions of "truth" and "Art" by almost giving Beckmann a job, but he ultimately turns him away as well, continuing to perpetuate his own image of what belongs on the stage. Finally, the most banal of all of the "antagonists," Frau Kramer simply moved into a recently-vacated apartment flat, where its previous tenants—a staunch Nazi sympathizer and his wife—were found suffocated one cold morning. All of these people, each representing a postwar demographic, were faced with their own impossible questions, and they eventually listened to the "eternal optimist" in their mind, which encouraged them to somehow, *anyhow* keep living. Much to Beckmann's chagrin and angst, his own optimist pesters him with the same urge for personal advancement, but he, like Krug, ultimately refuses any of these "deals," left only to question and wait for a response that will never come.

There is, once again, thematic significance to these multiple pacts, both past and present. Borchert's dealmakers do not strive for social power or wealth like those from *Bend Sinister*; but rather their decisions are framed as a tool for survival. Here, there is no authorial deity to simply pause and end their suffering, but rather an inward presence that pushes them forward, which

ostensibly makes the moral piece of the pact far more acceptable. From this point of view, Beckmann could potentially be interpreted as a hindrance to the postwar society at large, as his complaints and self-righteousness keep him from moving forward or changing his point of view. He refuses, in short, to remove his wartime glasses. At the same time, however, those who have accepted these deals appear far too eager to ignore their past entirely—a genuinely frustrating trait to assign to the characters that are representing the surviving society, which Beckmann rightly refutes. If Beckmann were to refuse this deal, to refuse to live, there would be no one else who would point out this hypocrisy—a fact with which he cannot simply live (or rather, die). This realization is what leads Beckmann to his infamous final questions at the end of the play, and it is his following silence that heralds the realization of his predicament, which allows the audience to personally interpret if he ultimately accepted or refused the Other’s offer.

In both cases, there is a note of complacency that haunts Beckmann and Krug. These characters are illustrated as exceptions to the rule, somehow realizing the complications of their situations and attempting to grapple with their meanings. The other members of their society, by supporting the Party of the Average Man or becoming “murderers” in Hamburg, remain oblivious to the twisted morals at large, and thus mindlessly create an environment that appears to be just as harmful as their real-life counterparts.

The Feminine Influences

As an architect of the new face of humanity, Goethe made certain to include both sexes in his vision for mankind. Femininity, in fact, was just as divine as Christianity itself, as Faust was ultimately redeemed by “the Eternal Feminine” personified as an angelic Margarete, appearing right beside Mary and her host of other female angels. Her life and death became the central

story of the first act, and her rebirth bringing Faust's salvation in the second, Goethe single handedly committed one of the strongest and most autonomous female fictional characters to the page. Even beyond just Gretchen, there are still plenty of characters in *Faust* that enjoy their own agency—Marthe, the Witch, Lilith, and Helena to name a few—which were few and far between at the time of the play's release. Needless to say, it is just as important to examine the female characters within these retellings of *Faust* in conversation with their original, especially with respect to the departures from the Gretchen-model.

Bend Sinister, as the name would imply, takes this concept of youthful naiveté and adds a dark twist. Mariette appears to draw off of Margarete's example and uses her feminine powers to mask as an innocent maid in Krug's household, seemingly only there to care for David. Instead of becoming Krug's saving grace, she actually ushers in his downfall, but she attempts to exert her final control over him by propositioning Krug just before the Party's agents come into his apartment. Her power clearly comes from her sexuality and youth, and she has no issues wielding it in order to carve her way through the Party. There even seems to be a community of women who similarly use their appeal to gather information for the State as spies, moving from one partner to the next as soon as the previous one is executed for treason. As self-serving as she is, Mariette is certainly a formidable and independent force in her world, even equalling Krug in shrewdness and ambition. On the other hand, Olga, for all of her goodness and faithfulness towards her husband and son, withers away before the events of the book even begin. She is only ever defined through Krug's recollections and dreams, which are generally brief and vague. Her memory, of course, is a crucial part of the "love lever" that Nabokov describes, but she is

nevertheless splintered across the pages, left only as an imprint that occasionally appears in an ink stain or moth.

It would seem, then, that the personalities around Margarete and Helena had been reversed. However, *Bend Sinister* presents a reality where the women can exist on a kind of gradient, taking some of the characteristics from Faust's original other halves and reconstructing them to coexist with Nabokov's image of a new mankind. The traditional dichotomy between the evil and sexual versus the pious and beautiful had been torn apart, as regardless of appearance, many women were equal perpetrators of the atrocities of the times as men. There needed to be space for this ambiguity when the definitions of morality were constantly being rewritten with the appearance of a new ruling party—a phenomenon that Nabokov personally experienced twice in his life.

Borchert's female characters exhibit some of these original characteristics as well, but interpret them in a different way. The Girl, already sexualized by The Other, tantalizingly teases Beckmann, taking his glasses and referring to him with the informal *du* as opposed to *Sie*. These actions are done with equal parts care and lust, as suggested in the stage direction, but they were strong enough to temporarily pull Beckmann away from his suicidal musings by the Elbe. Of course, the undertone of infidelity appears to subtract from this loving image. However, The Girl makes it clear that she has been living on her own for years, proving not only that she can live independently, but also that there *was* a time where she practiced that blind, pious faith in her husband. That time, unfortunately, was simply past. The Elbe says something to this effect as well, as she laments that too many have sought her "salvation" from the terror in the world above, and she is now too weary of the world to heed Beckmann's pitiful tale. This reason is why

she rejected Beckmann's initial suicide attempt, as her days welcoming the wayward sob story have passed, due to the sheer number of deaths that wore out her waters.

Instead of the mix that *Bend Sinister* suggests, it seems that *The Man Outside* treats this holy version of femininity with an exhausted tone. That mysterious power of womankind has been nearly drained from the world due to guilt and trauma, leaving its conduits wistfully recalling the times that they could resurrect mankind with their will. Here, there is no more "Eternal Feminine," and its disappearance is just another reason why the world is irreparably broken.

Conclusion/Relevance

There is an undeniable connection between the works of Nabokov, Borchert, and Goethe, despite the massive void between each author's lifetimes, experiences, and cultural backgrounds. The shared underlying concept of their works—the definition of mankind in the wake of war and in the face of massive achievement—was part of a cultural phenomenon that was thrown into utter chaos by the authoritarian regimes of the 20th century. Even the works of Goethe, which were historically extremely difficult to be showcased through a National Socialist lens, were not immune to the rampant reinterpretation. His greatest work eventually became a symbol of the Nazi *übermensch*, reissued as "proof" that the "German spirit" had always called for the sacrifice for the weak for the advancement of the strong. After the Third Reich finally ended, the remaining authors gradually began to reclaim the myth, adjusting some of the finer points to more accurately reflect their world and attempt to create another kind of human—one that would hopefully avoid the monumental errors of the one previous.

This particular iteration of the new man is now nearly eighty years old. In this time, there are plenty of reasons to believe that these authors ultimately failed in creating a generation that would avoid the human vices of war, poverty, terrorism, and everything similar. However, like in the times of Goethe, Nabokov, and Borchert, humanity is standing between an era of great pain and on the cusp of even greater advancement. To that end—the end of creating a humanity that *perseveres* and *strives* despite the atrocities of before—these authors and others can proclaim success.

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