

Imagination as Poetics of Cognition

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Abstract

Our work is based on the hypothesis of an existing interconnection between symbolic-metaphoric elements of the literary text and a series of mind patterns. These compress perception and experience through the emergent process of conceptual blending triggering the semantic process during the creative act of *poiesis*. This enquiry focuses on the use of a peculiar rhetorical figure in an exemplary literary text of the famous German poet Goethe. We will try to point out the allegorical function of the scene dedicated to the «Mothers' Kingdom», in his *Faust II*, as a powerful poetical meta-reflection on imagination, cognition and poetics itself.

Parole chiave

Imagination, hermeneutics, cognition, embodiment, *Faust*.

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Art can be considered as a creative human process of experiencing, understanding and communicating reality through symbols and metaphors. Therefore no artistic work can be analysed without taking into account the complex dynamics of the human cognitive system. Literature becomes often a privileged way to meta-critically reflect upon the imaginative representation of imagination as a cognitive process. This article presents a part of our work towards a new neurocognitive hermeneutics, which points out the intertwining of the following elements: the symbolic/metaphoric level of literary texts and the cognitive patterns in charge for compression at human scale of perception and conceptualization; the emergence, at poetic level, of system-patterns of perception and of the multidimensional continuum view within the semantic peculiarity of each literary text through the processes of compression, double-scope integration and narration eliciting the imaginal construction.

In particular, the article presents a brief cognitive enquiry about the process of imagination as it is meta-critically and poetologically figured out in the exegetically controversial scene *Finstere Galerie (Gloomy Gallery)* in the second part of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's drama *Faust*.

Our aim is to point out the dynamic emergent process of imagination by newly interpreting this scene, referring to the modern sciences of the mind and to the aesthetic debate about imagination in Goethe's time. In our opinion, this scene, in which Faust has to descent to the Mothers' Kingdom, is an allegorical figuration of the mental process of imagination itself, considered as an endogenous, dynamic, emergent process involving a

cluster of cognitive faculties activated in order to construct meaning through the creation of aesthetic forms. Goethe tries here to overcome the cognitive limits of figuring the invisible, intended as a sort of pre-categorical dimension, a flurry horizon of pure, unexpressed potentiality – in Elio Franzini's words “il senso fungente dell'estetico” [the acting sense of aesthetics] (Franzini 7) –, which is to be surveyed by rewinding the process of its appearing within the symbolic dimension. The latter often transcends the empiric observation despite having its very origin in experience. Using the term *invisible* we refer to a realm of “possibility and latency” (Merleau-Ponty 44), that realm which includes all hidden elements, forcing vision to go beyond the threshold of visibility and matter.

In this perspective human imagination is able to model the invisible by creating *eidola*. The indistinct horizon of the pure unexpressed potentiality in the realm of the invisible is in direct relation to the visible, including the hidden parts of a perceived object. The image, as a whole, emerges containing also what is hidden to direct vision. These premises make it possible to analyse images by following the process of their becoming visible within an horizon of meaning that, although exceeding the empirical survey, finds its fulfilment in sensory experience. In this perspective the invisible is not the unknown, the unspeakable, and so on, but a sort of pre-categorical dimension, the source of any act of imagination.

Some literary texts represent, in our opinion, the act of imagination itself by figuratively rewinding the mental function that lets a meaningful figuration of creativity emerge out of the invisible. Such texts often present a very condensed and metaphorical representation of imagination and of cognition in flurry and metamorphic images. This happens during the above mentioned scene of *Faust*: Goethe goes beyond the limits of the human mind's sensory experience as he tries to represent this invisible, pre-noetic background of all possible forms, by imagining a dynamic, metamorphic, floating cloud full of all possible forms.

After a great allegorical parade at the Emperors palace, Faust is asked to bring on scene, in a sort of illusionary show, “Das Musterbild der Männer so der Frauen” [“the ideal form of Man and Woman”] (v. 6185), the prototype of beauty. To carry out this request Faust has to face a dangerous challenge. Mephisto warns him about the difficulties implied in getting the ideal form of beauty in front of the audience, because to do this he has to reach the pure indistinct potentiality of form itself, represented by a vortex, a turmoil of fluctuating images that perception is unable to identify and comprehend. This experience takes place in a mysterious landscape, the Kingdom of the Mothers, where no space or time exists, nor do any perceptive references. This boundless realm represents, in our opinion, Goethe's figuration of creative imagination itself. Therefore the scene puts us in front of the fundamental question expressed by Merleau-Ponty and then reformulated by Thompson: “What is the mode or manner in which form appears to mind and what is the epistemological origin of this mode of givenness?” (Thompson 81).

Before trying to give an answer to this core question, we have to give a brief account about imagination in terms of a mental process, even considering the risk of being incomplete and too brief as far as imagination is a concept more frequently referred to than explained, even by philosophers. It plays an important role for many philosophers – from Aristotle to Hume, from Kant to Husserl and in contemporary thought. This is due to its complex and multimodal character and to its playing an active role in almost every mental process that puts the subject in relation with the environment. Moreover, imagination regulates the relation between percepts and imaginal representations in the construction of the “human imagination spectrum” (McGinn 159), or the «multidimensional

spectrum view» (Thomas 7) determining the image of the world that surrounds each perceiving subject.

The hard question of what imagination is has been not only philosophically and scientifically investigated, with different, contradictory and partial results, but also meta-critically reflected upon in art and poetry. In our opinion, some literary texts metaphorically try to vividly represent the active process of figuring significant visual images out of the invisible as well as the mental imaginative and cognitive process in itself. Literary texts become, therefore, very interesting forms of virtually experiencing the imaginative process itself from a very personal and creative point of view.

As claimed by Francisco Varela:

Imagination is one of the quintessential qualities of life and of our being. Its central attribute is the manifestation of vivid, lived mental content that does not refer directly to a perceived world but to an absence that it evokes. (195)

For the central role it plays in the mind processing system, imagination is an important topic in the latest neuro-cognitive researches. So, for instance, Mark Turner has stressed many times the importance of developing the study of imagination not only in order to improve our understanding of this great mystery of the human mind, but also to explain some other core faculties of the human brain and mind system that depend on imagination (“L’imagination et le cerveau”).

Imagination can be observed and described as a sort of complex system exhibiting features that are referred to as *self organization* or *emergence*, implying the activation of multiple neural circuits that are involved in superior associative cognitive functions. These systems, which are fundamentally chaotic, or complex, have the capacity of producing patterns that are seemingly non-chaotic and predictable. Referring to Varela’s and Thompson’s work, every living organism is an enactive and imagining being, integrating a series of similar processes. Under this perspective, imagination can be considered as an integrated and dynamic flow of sensorimotor, memorial, visual and eidetic activations (Varela, Thompson and Rosch; Dennett and Kinsbourne; Pöppel and Schill; Varela and Depraz):

Mental acts are characterized by the concurrent participation of several functionally distinct and topographically distributed regions of the brain and their sensorimotor embodiment. [...] It follows that one cannot hope to find a naturalized account of imagination as some sort of cognitive module or brain region. It must necessarily correspond, instead, to a dynamic, emerging global pattern that is able both to integrate the body/brain activity at a large scale and subside rapidly, for the benefit of the next moment of mental life. (Varela and Depraz 201-202)

This means that the work of imagination is, basically and very simplified, that of reducing to form the vast and diffuse reality of our environment, in order to generate a mental-cognitive state corresponding to the constitution of an assembly, which incorporates or discards into its coherent components other “concurrent neural activities generated exogenously or endogenously” (Thompson 79).

Thanks to this dynamic, inferential, integrated process of imagination, the subject builds the imaginative figuration of the world and of his being in the world as autopoietic subject (Maturana and Varela). Imagination, like perception, memory, consciousness,

cognition and the other connected enactive functions and processes, is engaged in creating the reproductive consciousness and the multidimensional spectrum of the world:

Dynamically this entire process seems to take the form of a bifurcation from a noisy background to a transiently stable, distributed structure bound by synchrony. [...] The neural events that participate in this process of synthetic interpretation via synchronization are derived indistinctly from sensory coupling and from the intrinsic activity of the nervous system itself. (Varela 100-101)

To conclude this brief account about the complex nature of imagination we quote again a definition by Varela and Depraz, referring to the living organism in its own basic constitution as an enactive imaginary being:

Mental acts are characterized by the concurrent participation of several functionally distinct and topographically distributed regions of the brain and their sensorimotor embodiment. (Varela and Depraz 201)

Imagination works on the basis of a large-scale integration of multiple concurrent processes:

It is fair to say that imagination is emblematic, in fact, of a cluster of human abilities: imagining proper, or mental imagery, remembrance, fantasy, and dreaming. Imagination is an inexhaustible source in all these dimensions, explored and praised by human cultures throughout the world, a witness to its centrality. (Varela and Depraz 195)

In order to explain the poetic imaginative process we have isolated three basic features deriving from the above mentioned cognitive approach. Quite surprisingly these features are nearly corresponding to similar ones focussed on in the aesthetic debate in Germany during the 18th century:

1. the fundamental pattern, focussed by Fauconnier and Turner, of double-scope integration, activating the metaphoric bases of cognition and therefore the majestic allegory of imagination;
2. the act of distinction, presiding the modelling of form out of the pre-noetic background;
3. the process of narration, that organizes elements of cognition along a narrative path giving the way to conscious cognition and prevision.

As for the first feature, the process of double-scope integration controls, in Turner's idea, several complex mental processes like:

- meaning-making by compressing the complex sensory motor inputs at human scale;
- modelling of frames by comparing heterogeneous mental spaces;
- creative production of cognition by shifting heterogeneous mental spaces into a blended space where a new production of meaning takes place (Fauconnier and Turner).

Gilles Fauconnier defines mental spaces as domains of backstage cognition, abstract mental constructs that are generally set up on the basis of general scenarios. They are mental constructs of potential realities dynamically prompted as a conceptualizer listens to a string of speech or reads a text. The peculiarity of mental spaces lies in the fact that they are constructs of potential realities rather than perfect mirrors of the world. They

are linked by vital relations like: time/space, cause/effect, part/whole, identity, analogy, change, representation, role, propriety, category, intention, contradiction, primary experiences (*Mental Spaces*).

Through the process of double-scope integration, different mental spaces are projected into an integrated space giving birth to a new creation of meaning or an act of cognition of what previously lacked understanding. This happens in metaphor, which is the result of a process of double-scope integration.

Following the thesis of Lakoff and Johnson, imagination works determining “categorization, reason, propositional and non-propositional forms of thought,” “through the application of metaphor and narrative” (193). In the blended space of metaphor “categorization, reason, propositional and non-propositional forms of thought” take place. “Metaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices, and spiritual awareness” (193).

As for the second feature, imagination, by creating mental spaces of new meaning, presumes a basic non-conscious cognitive act: that of distinction. By means of this act we specify a unit as an entity distinct from a background. This implies *autopoiesis* on the side of the observer. Distinction is an essential top-down modality, which lets the pre-noetic, unconscious and pre-reflexive background take form. Following the late Husserl, this means that imagining corresponds to the act of distinction making visible the not visible and giving access to the essence of reality.

As for the third feature, narrative imagining – particularly that kind of narration using metaphor – is the fundamental function of organizing thought. “Rational capacities depend upon it. It is our chief means of looking into the future, of predicting, of planning and of explaining. It is a literary capacity indispensable to human cognition generally” (Turner, *The Literary Mind* 5).

Pointing out these three basic features, we have outlined the fundamental intertwining processes of imagination at work in our analysis of Goethe’s scene. In this perspective imagination allows us to comprehend different elements of the invisible, creating phantoms, eidola of what cannot be caught and understood with our sensorimotor system or thanks to the creation of mental spaces linked together by vital relations. Imagination is in fact one of the most important cognitive processes of the human mind, because it reduces what overwhelms our comprehension into images, representing the hidden essence of the whole. The top achievement of this process is the intuition of endlessness. At the point where cognition fails, imagination and intuition supply the subject with creative figurations of the infinite metamorphic flow of existence.

In the aesthetic reflection of Goethe’s time, we find theories about imagination focusing on three basic features. Apart from the debate about imagination in the period of Enlightenment and from the negative opinion expressed by philosophers like Jacobi and Maimon, in Goethe’s and Kant’s view, *Einbildungskraft* [Imagination] assumes the function of synthesis.

As for the first feature, the “Synthesis des Mannigfaltigen” [synthesis of multiplicity] – comparable to a function of the cognitive concept of double scope integration – was considered as:

The fundamental product of imagination, of a blind and essential function of the soul, indispensable for cognition, but seldomly conscious. (Kant § 10)

Following Kant's words:

Synthesis, in most general terms [...], brings different images together in order to comprehend their multiplicity into one single cognition. [...] [Synthesis] transforms different elements into cognition and gathers all of them around the same content; therefore it is the first process that must be studied in order to understand the origin of our cognitive power. [...] Such a productive ability to synthetize multiplicity houses in each person and we call it imagination (§ 10).

Productive imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] links different images [*Vorstellungen*] together following the rules of reason, structured on pure concepts (categories). The synthesis produced by imagination is therefore to be considered as a product of reason depending on perception. Imagination defines on one hand the process compressing multitude and multiplicity into mental images and meaningful symbols, but also, on the other hand, the faculty of expanding human experience over its cognitive and perceptive limits.

Goethe considers imagination, in a non spiritualistic way, as the faculty of comprehending the world by figuring it with all its features, even those that do not pertain directly to perception. An interesting statement by Goethe (referred by Eckermann on the 27th January 1830) defines imagination as the most important 'tool' for the natural scientific thought. He specifies that the imaginative process derives its contents mainly from perception, from the givenness of nature and the vividness of reality, further transforming these elements into concepts, into mental spaces blended together:

Basically, it is impossible to imagine a really good scientist lacking this superior faculty. I don't mean that kind of imagination proceeding into vagueness and just imagining not existing things. I mean that kind of imagination resting on the solid ground of perception and proceeding from reality and knowledge towards new unknown suppositions. This makes it possible to check if the imagined elements respond to the conditions of reality and if they contrast to other rules of consciousness. Such a kind of imagination needs, of course, a very calm mind with a wide knowledge of the living system and of their rules and principles. (Eckermann 27 January 1830)

As for the second feature, in the aesthetic theory of Goethe's friend Karl Philipp Moritz, distinction is intended as a natural development from an original magmatic flow, pervaded by what he calls *Tatkraft*, a fundamental energy that creates by destroying in order to regenerate. This energy works in two ways: on one side it becomes *Bildungskraft* [creative force], on the other *Empfindungskraft* [receptive force]. The energy of *Tatkraft* tends steadily to unity, wholeness, and the artist is able to represent beauty only by disassembling the perceptive reality and creatively rebuilding it in the new phenomenon of his work of art.

The first act of distinction corresponds to the *autopoiesis* of the subject: the self-making for an organism involving self-referential processes capable of evolution, despite an operationally-closed relationship with its undefined environment (Maturana and Varela). The relation between the subject and its environment is set by perception and ruled by narration. In fact, the German word *Einbildungskraft* [imagination] includes the meaning of modelling matter within a form.

As for the third feature, in a very interesting passage of a letter, and in many parts of his scientific work, Goethe theorizes the different steps of the imaginative process culminating in the act of *Erleuchtung* (enlightenment). This is the last step of imagination, resulting from the process of reducing the mental elaboration of perception at human scale

thanks to the narrative organisation through similes. Percepts and mental images are linked and transformed through vital relations, like space and time, cause and effect and so on, modulated and rearranged along a narrative pathway. The surprising step, which transforms the phenomenal reality into narration, takes place through an act of blending, based on linking similes:

Observation needs imagination: imagination works at first *imitating*, just replying things; then it becomes *productive*, giving life to the comprehended, developing it, expanding it, transforming it. Further we think there is another form of imagination: the *farsighted* one, looking around on evidence, capturing similes in order to confirm the defined.

Great is the power of analogy, applied by the spirit to so many important elements, and powerful the way it works by putting together what belongs together or what seems similar.

This is the way we create *similes*. The closer to the object they are, the worthier and enlightening. The best of them are those that seem to cover it up completely and to be identical with it. (Letter to Karl Ludwig von Knebel 21 February 1821- FA 2:9152)

Very interesting, but still neglected, is the third modality of imagination pointed out by Goethe, translated as *farsighted imagination*. The German term *umsichtig* refers to a sort of all around gaze, the very gaze that precedes the moment of representation through distinction. This particular faculty of imagination uses similes to provide verbal discourse with phenomenal and cognitive givenness. The simile, pointed out by Goethe, is a sort of mental integrated space. The human mind senses everything scattered in parts; in a second space the mind projects the unity of the elements by having the intuition of the whole, which is alien to perception. Similes take place in the integrated space where this reunification of the parts is possible. Thanks to its creative power, similes enlighten the physical object by recovering its noumenic essence. Surprisingly enough Goethe describes the simile as an integrated space based on the relation between objects in their phenomenal reality and verbal signs: "The closer to the object [similes] are, the worthier and enlightening." In other words, he states the possibility of putting ontologically different realities in relation.

Imagination creates mental integrated spaces mainly thanks to analogies: this makes it possible to discover relations between very different elements, like phenomenal events and verbal figurations. Both phenomenal forms of nature and verbal images of speech derive from the same infinite creative, organic and transformative power of nature (*Thatkraft*), which only metaphor and simile are able to represent (compress) at a consciousness scale.

A simile is able to intertwine phenomenal events and words, since the last ones participate of the organic complexity of existence and share the common morphological root of the whole living system. In this perspective it is possible to cognitively model a totality that the human mind is unable to realize through its logic procedures and vital relations. Both the forms of natural phenomena and those of verbal figurations share the same endless reproductive drive, which reason cannot get by its perceptive dimension. This is, for instance, what happens in Goethe's reflection about the *Urpflanze* [the archetypal plant]. Observing morphology and metamorphosis he creates a blended space in which the ideal archetypal form takes place.

Goethe shares with many contemporary poets and particularly with Novalis the idea of an organic and pervasive nature. Nature is a complex system in which every part or

element participates in common main aims and rules, and first of all in the dynamic principles of growth, reproduction and evolution:

My body does not give the idea of being a separate peculiar part of the all, but just a variation of it. To get to the cognition of the all, the mind uses the process of analogy. But analogy rests directly and completely on the absolute cognition of the parts. These two strategies of thought, put together, produce an antithetic-synthetic cognition that is immediate. Thanks to its immediate character it becomes possibly mediated, real and symbolic at the same time. Every kind of analogy is symbolic. I feel my body active and defined by itself and by the soul of the world. My body is a little all, and has therefore also a peculiar soul. In fact, what I call soul is that force that transforms the all into a whole: the principle of identification. (Novalis 131)

In his *Zur Morphologie* [About Morphology], published in 1831, Goethe wrote:

multiplicity in unity, at unity. It is no more upsetting when we say: inferior life divides itself from life; upper life becomes structured on life and here each part becomes a new living element. (Goethe, II, 6, 1831 353).

The three elements, previously mentioned as fundamental for imagination, core elements in the aesthetic thought during Goethe's time, enable us to present now a new interpretation of the scene *Gloomy Gallery* in *Faust II*, which so far has been considered very difficult and controversial.

As already pointed out and as we will demonstrate with a close-reading of the text in the light of the above mentioned categories, this part of the poem represents a narrative and allegorical figuration of the mental process of imagination attending to the creation of form out of a pre-noetic background. From a figuration of pure pre-noetic potentiality the intuitive act, becoming real in the symbol thanks to a double-scope integration, represents imagination itself.

The pre-noetic background is vividly represented in Goethe's text by the description of the Mothers' Kingdom. Mephistopheles warns Faust from facing this very dangerous challenge. The place that Faust has to reach, the Mother's Kingdom, is described as "fremdestes Bereich" ["most alien sphere"] (v. 6195), a place where no categories of space or time do exist, nor do any relations with forms, objects or percepts. There is just a vast and fluctuating cloud, full of potentiality but without form. It is impossible to describe the Mothers' Kingdom, because every element in there implies its contrary. It is dangerous for the human being because the absence of percepts puts his autopoietic faculty in trouble:

Kein Weg! Ins Unbetretene,
Nicht zu Betretende! Ein Weg ans
Unerbene,
Nicht zu Erbittende! Bist du bereit? –
Nicht Schlosser sind, nicht Riegel weg-
zuschieben,
Von Einsamkeiten wirst umhergetrie-
ben.
Hast du Begriff von Öd und Einsam-
keit?
(vv. 6222-27)

No path! Into the un-enterable,
Never to be entered: One path to the
un-askable,
Never to be asked: Are you ready?
No locks, no bolts to manipulate,
You'll drift about in solitary space.
Can you conceive the waste and soli-
tary?

With great poetic impact, Goethe presents this alien sphere denying any reference to perception (vv. 6240-48). Faust enters the sphere of pure interiority (“ins Tiefste” / “in the depths” v. 6220), the pre-categorical level, where only solitude, emptiness and desolation are to be found, the “ewig leere Ferne” [“the eternal empty faraway”] (v. 6246). The result is a sudden *Schaudern* [“shudder”] (v. 6271), because this experience exceeds his cognitive power: it is the contrary of perception and reality, it is a non-consistent reality (“der Gebilde losgebundene Reich” [“boundless realm of all forms”]; v. 6277).

It is here that the processes of distinction, compression and modelling of form take place: “Gestaltung, Umgestaltung, des ewigen Sinne ewige Unterhaltung” [“Formation, Transformation, eternal minds eternal recreation”] (v. 6288). In this pre-noetic realm of form, at the fringe of being and not being, represented as a cloudy turmoil, Faust knows that the possibility of getting to the All of creation is near. So he says to Mephisto: “In deinem Nichts hoff’ ich das All zu finden” [“In your Nothingness, I hope, the All I will recover”] (v. 6256), because he knows that this cloud contains past, present and future and all the potentialities of form.

In this vast, empty space, Faust has to look for a glowing tripod, signalling his arrival in the “Gebilde losgebundene Reich” [“boundless realm of all forms”] (v. 6277). The tripod is traditionally the symbol the prophetic power of Delphy’s Oracle and in this case it stands for the work of intuition: in other words, for the direct synchronization of the subject’s faculty of imagination with the pre-noetic dimension of reality. Memories take active part into the dynamic process of thought and of creative and poetic figuration. Intuition, on the contrary, is an act of synchronization that does not refer to linear links, like vital relations or similes, but is able to blend different and very unusual image schemas together. This is a process that seems very similar to what Moritz called *Empfindungskraft* [receptive force]. Intuition is considered part of the receptive force of the human mind and works on an emotional level, parallel to the faculty of distinction and narration.

To guide Faust in his descent, Mephisto provides him with a “little key,” growing and glowing in his hand and disclosing him magic secrets. This is the symbol of the cognitive power of the human mind transforming factual reality into metaphors, symbols, allegories through the blending process of connecting and unifying their heterogeneity: in Moritz’ terms, *Bildungskraft* [creative force]. In fact the key has already been frequently referred to the tradition of white and black magic and explicitly to the ancient *grimoire* of the *Lesser Key of Solomon* (*Clavicula Salomonis Regis*). Thanks to the force of the key Faust will be able to find the place where the tripod glows and shows the Mothers in its light:

Bei seinem Schein wirst du die Mütter
sehn:
Die einen sitzen, andre stehn und gehn,
Wies eben kommt. Gestaltung, Umge-
staltung
Des ewigen Sinnes ewige Unterhaltung.
Umschwelt von Bildern aller Kreatur,
Sie sehen dich nicht, denn Schemen
sehn sie nur!
(v. 6285-90)

By its light [of the tripod] you’ll see
Mothers,
Some sit about, randomly, the others,
Stand and move. Formation, Transfor-
mation,
Eternal minds’ eternal recreation.
Images of all creatures float, portrayed:
They’ll not see you: they only see
schemes.

These mysterious goddesses are surrounded by a moving and fluctuating cloud without form, but rich of pure indistinct metamorphic content. The cloud, symbolizing the

infinite transformation of nature, is recurring in Goethe's works (see for instance the poems *Ganymed* and *Howards Ehrengedächtnis*), but in this case it becomes an important strategy to represent, into a visible and thinkable form the power of imagination and active creation.

In the allegory of the Mothers, Goethe represents all human mental processes: the continuous dynamic processing of percepts that keeps the relation between the subject and the environment up to date and efficient ("Gestaltung, Umgestaltung" ["Formation, Transformation"]; v. 6287); the transformation of cognitive data by linking different percepts and experiences through image schemas and mental spaces (the key and the tripod), which form noetic thought and meaning ("Des ewigen Sinnes ewige Unterhaltung" ["eternal minds eternal recreation"]; v. 6288), triggering autopoiesis and consequently narration and parable in order to create the images of reality ("Bildern aller Kreatur" ["Images of all creatures"]; v. 6289).

In the abyss Faust finally finds the tripod and hooks it with the key bringing it to the emperor's court on stage. This act of hooking the tripod with the key is the allegorical representation of the process of double-scope integration giving life to a narrative figuration. This act gives form to the formless, to the fluctuating endless concept of *ideal beauty*. The pre-noetic shapelessness surrounding the mothers, as fundamental element of the unconscious human activity becomes a form thanks to the act of distinction. From the metamorphic flow of essence the poet evokes the power of the Mothers who see just «schemes» («Schemen» v. 6290). His intuition of the essence gets finally out of the cloud as form.

In this way Goethe creates a paradoxical circuit: the narrative fiction figuratively re-winds a mental process going beyond the human capacity of narratively representing the fundamental cognitive act. Activating this process he gives form to the shapeless creating images of pure potentiality (concepts, ideals, words), particles of the pre-noetic background, little defined but highly evocative. The double-scope blending, by unifying the faculty of intuition (represented by the tripod) and that of symbolization (the key), triggers an autopoietic process that, thanks to the processes of distinction and compression of pre-existing image schemas brought to consciousness, lets all forms emerge.

The whole autopoietic emerging process of imagination bases on the organic structure that nature and thought have in common. This common organic structure makes it possible to blend very different elements together – for example, images and words. In fact, in Goethe's all-unifying organic view, words are direct manifestation of the ephemeral force of transformation representing the endless potential manifestation of the world and of our mind. Words are in Goethe's opinion part of human nature, symbolic connections between the phenomenal nature and our mind. According to Louwerse and Jeuniaux, language is both embodied and symbolic, as attested by the *symbol interdependency hypothesis*, and symbols have great cognitive power; they are the basic tools of our imaginary world. Linguistic understanding is therefore the result of a mixed process, both embodied and symbolic, and words are the vehicle of symbols. They emerge from the organic nature of the phenomenal world and of the denotative universe of sign. Words are able to 'cover' – as Goethe said about the rhetorical figure of the simile – the referred object. They are able to cover up its essence, transforming it and becoming identical by the act of *Erleuchtung* [enlightening].

Back from the journey into the deepest abyss of the imaginary power, Faust will evoke the two mythological characters that the audience is waiting for:

In eurem Namen, Mütter, die ihr thront
Im Grenzenlosen, ewig einsam wohnt,
Und doch gesellig! Eur Haupt
umschwenben
Des Lebens Bilder, regsam, ohne Le-
ben.

[...]

Die einen faßt des Leben holder Lauf,
Die andern sucht der kühne Magier auf.
In reicher Spende läßt er voll Vertrauen,
was jeder wünscht, das Wunderwärtige
schauen.

(vv. 6427-6438)

In your name, Mothers, you enthroned
In boundlessness, set eternally alone,
And yet together. All the Forms of Life
Float round your heads, active, not
alive.

[...]

Life holds some fast on its sweet track,
Others the bold magician must bring
back:
Filled with faith, and richly generous,
He shows, what each desires, the Mar-
vellous.

Faust, presented as a skilful magician, *alter ego* of the artist, is said to be artful and daring; in other words, his mind is able to get beyond the pure images of nature and, following a principle claimed in the same period also by Lichtenberg and the brothers Grimm, he produces a creative symbolic integration in order to model form out of boundlessness: he imagines imagination.

After Faust's touching again the tripod with the key, a dark mist fills the room and with its swirling represents again the mental action needed to evoke the myth: again movement, compression, distinction, similarity, blending, so the cloudy mist “gedehnt, geball, verschrankt, geteilt, gepaart. Und nun erkennt ein Geister-Meisterstück!” [“Grows, condenses, shrinks, and splits in two./ And now behold a spirit-masterpiece!”] (v. 6442-43).

The mysterious “Weißnichtwie” [“who-knows-how”] (v. 6445), of becoming form and body, becomes an intangible melody pervading the scene:

So wie sie wandeln, machen sie Musik!
Aus luft'gen Tönen quillt ein Weiß-
nichtwie,
In dem sie ziehen, wird alles Melodie.
Der Säulenschaft, auch die Triglyphe
klingt
Ich glaube gar, der ganze Tempel singt.
(vv. 6444-48)

As it moves about, there's music with-
out cease.
In heavenly tones, pours out a who-
knows how,
And while it moves, all's turned to mel-
ody now.
The pillared shafts, even the triglyph,
ringing
I think that the whole temple's singing.

Paris first and then Helen emerge out of the formless smoke of the tripod bewildering the audience. But to our astonishment Goethe does not describe them. Instead, and more interestingly, he just reports the different comments and exclamations given by the audience in front of the unusual scene. This is the way in which Goethe makes it possible to let the audience see “Was jeder wünscht, das Wunderwürdige schauen” (“what each desires, the marvellous”; v. 6238). In this way the author performs the act of fruition itself: each person looking at the scene on stage recognizes not a common principle of ideal beauty, but the elements of their *own* concept of ideal beauty. The act of fruition triggers the imaginative power of the audience, which closes the hermeneutic circle by duplicating the creative imaginative act of poetry in the observer. In this way Goethe concludes the phylogenetic process of imagination by the act of fruition: imaginative features become real only through the act of subjective fruition. The subject's imagination is

triggered by the artist to follow the signed path and to fill in the proposed ideal schema with the contents of his own experience, memories, engrams, mnemonic traces of one's own latent imaginative world.

In conclusion, we have tried to put in evidence the meta-cognitive process of representing imagination itself along its ontogenetic and phylogenetic development, following the poetic representation created by Goethe in this very peculiar scene of the second part of the drama *Faust*. This has been interpreted as a poetical attempt that puts the reader (and the audience) in the paradoxical condition of 'assisting' to one of the more complex and still mysterious processes taking place in his own mind: imagination.

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