

PARCELSUS AS A THEME IN GERMAN AND EUROPEAN LITERATURE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies
and Research
The University of Manitoba



In Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Michael Llewellyn Hadley

April, 1964

TO

DR. K. -W. MAURER

IN GRATITUDE

Wie jede Blüte welkt und jede Jugend
Dem Alter weicht, blüht jede Lebensstufe,
Blüht jede Weisheit und jede Tugend
Zu ihrer Zeit und darf nicht ewig dauern.
Es muss das Herz bei jedem Lebensrufe
Bereit zum Abschied sein und Neubeginn,
Um sich in Tapferkeit und ohne Trauern
In neue andere Bindungen zu geben.

- Hesse

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to develop an interpretation of Erwin Guido Kolbenheyer's novel trilogy Paracelsus by examining the literary perspectives of the Paracelsus theme in representative works from Germany, France, and England. The central concern is that the literary representations of the theme are compound symbols of organic human growth or Bildung, and that these works give expression to the mysteriously magnetic quality of a human destiny conceived as both symbol and myth.

Due to the great number of literary works in which this theme has been handled it has been necessary to follow selective rather than comprehensive principles. The scope of this study is thus limited by the principle that a judicious selection of literary works serves to demonstrate the significance of the theme without disturbing the thematic pattern. This principle is based on the understanding that 'Paracelsus' and 'Faustus' represent essentially interchangeable themes and that the works so selected represent the theme in a crucial way. The study proceeds from historical considerations to those of legend, myth, and literature.

The design of the study consists in developing the eventual interpretation of Kolbenheyer's work in four stages: a representation of the historical figure

of Paracelsus and an examination of his myth; a study of the perspectives of the Faust theme as handled by Christopher Marlowe, Goethe, and Paul Valéry; a study of the perspective in Robert Browning's treatment of the Paracelsus theme; a study of the perspective of Arthur Schnitzler. In method and approach the study is concerned with literary and comparative considerations which must take precedence over the claims of either history, psychology, or philosophy. It asks as much "how" a work is as "what" it is, and has therefore given preference to active rather than passive forms of definition.

While it has to be acknowledged that Kolbenheyer's work is biographical, the thesis endeavours to show that it is also the culmination of the literary interpretations of the theme which have preceded it, and that it takes its rightful place within the thematic pattern so that each work complements the other. The key to this culmination is seen to lie in the convergence of the principles of Entwicklung and Bildung. The interpretation moreover represents a defense of Kolbenheyer against criticism which is informed and activated by political bias.

In conclusion it is suggested that the Paracelsus trilogy represents a genuine response to the timeless personal challenge of the theme, and that its contribution to the literary tradition is its expression of an extraordinary assurance in man's ever-widening and thus enduring identity.

PARACELSUS AS A THEME IN GERMAN AND EUROPEAN LITERATURE

Preface i
Introduction 1
Chapter I: Sources of the Study 12
 A) The Man and his Mission
 B) Paracelsus and Faustus as historical figures
 C) Literary treatment versus historical data
Chapter II: Paracelsus; the Man and the Alchemist . . . 30
 A) The Quest
 B) The Four Pillars of Medicine
 C) Alchemy and Magic
 D) Legend and Myth
Chapter III: Three perspectives of the Faust theme
 A) Marlowe 53
 B) Goethe 67
 C) Valéry 82
Chapter IV: Three perspectives of the Paracelsus theme
 A) Robert Browning 90
 B) Arthur Schnitzler 105
 C) KOLBENHEYER. 113
Appendices 170
Notes 177
Bibliography 193

PREFACE

The theme of Paracelsus in European literature first suggested itself as a topic for study in a seminar on the nature and meaning of the term Bildung in the German Bildungsroman, for which the central novel under consideration was Erwin Guido Kolbenheyer's Paracelsus. The Bildungsroman, a major art form within the genre of the novel, has a long and memorable tradition which can be traced to the Middle Ages. It represents an outstanding achievement of German literature and a major contribution to World literature, concerned as it is with the expression of man's struggle to find himself and his place in the universe.

The early period of this tradition begins with Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival, and lays stress upon the principle of Entwicklung, that is, a continuing development and growth in the course of which the disparate forces inherent in the fabric of the human personality should be resolved. The religious orientation at this stage is markedly Christian. In the eighteenth century, however, the art form gains new impetus and takes on perspectives hitherto unknown. Goethe's novel Wilhelm Meister has become its unsurpassed model and prototype. Emphasis is now placed upon Bildung as a principle, that is, the organic formation and transformation of man in relation to himself, to society,

and to humanity as whole. Within its extended scope, which takes us from Goethe's novel to such contemporary works as Thomas Mann's Der Zauberberg and Hermann Hesse's Glasperlenspiel, Kolbenheyer's work is distinguished by giving expression to the response of the whole man who commits himself totally to this maturing and redemptive process. Paracelsus thus stands out in sharp relief from the despairing milieu of the novel of extreme situations. Kolbenheyer's novel owes its vigour to the way an engrossing and timeless theme has been treated, and not less so to the courageous acceptance of its challenge to our own age.

The relationship between the historical Paracelsus and the legendary and myth-enshrouded Dr. Faustus provides the key to the present study. Interest in Paracelsus made it natural to see both figures within the context of a widening tradition. The Paracelsus-Faustus theme, which has proven inexhaustible, has not lost any of its relevance and meaning in our time in that the purpose and values of human existence are as much to the fore as ever. With its rich combination of fact and fiction, the source material never ceases to make its compelling appeal to the creative imagination.

The protean nature of the Paracelsus theme has

made it such a powerful symbol of man's striving for knowledge. The contact with a human being struggling towards a breaking through the limitations of his own self, society, and age remains at the root of its irresistible attraction and challenge. The various personal means by which authors have handled this theme compound the symbols of the Promethean flame of knowledge and the alchemic fire.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to examine the literary perspectives of the Paracelsus theme with due attention being given to representative works from Germany, France, and England. The origin of the theme demands that emphasis be placed upon German literature, yet the comparison with works from England and France serves to establish its universal appeal. The work under principal consideration is Kolbenheyer's Paracelsus, a German novel written in this century for contemporary readers, which both in language and theme takes one back to the century concerned.

It is central to this study that the literary renditions of the theme are essentially compound symbols of organic human growth or Bildung. The German word for symbol, Sinnbild (picture or image of meaning), suggests the timeless quality of the message which continually takes on new meanings commensurate with the understanding brought to bear upon it. The life-force of the works is their symbolic value, and as Paracelsus himself wrote:

"...the more accomplished an artist would be, the more necessary it is that he master the art of signs..."¹

The scope of this study will be limited by the principle that a judicious selection of literary works will serve to demonstrate the significance of the theme without any detrimental result. This principle is based on the understanding that 'Paracelsus' and 'Faustus'

represent essentially interchangeable themes, and that the works so selected represent the theme in a crucial way. The study shall proceed from historical considerations to those of legend, myth, and literature.

The treatment of the historical Paracelsus and his thought does not represent an attempt to suggest a rigid source from which the literary renditions of the theme have been derived. Rather it is intended to serve as a background against which the lines of artistic expression will be revealed. It is beyond the scope and purpose of this study to attempt a re-appraisal of all the biographical details and philosophic patterns which the figure of Paracelsus invites. Yet had such an evaluation been included, the result would most certainly have evaded the fundamental concern, namely, that of the mysteriously magnetic quality of a human destiny conceived as both symbol and myth.

The name of Faustus has long been identified with the name of Goethe, yet it is nonetheless important to note that his work represents a peak in the face of a wide-spread concern with the idea of man's insatiable search for the ultimate truth in life, his ventures into the occult, transcendental perception and his purported league with the devil. This latter charge is symbolic of man's breach with the mores and so-called absolute knowledge of his society -- or else with his own soul which

has become alienated. A review of the literature inspired by this concern will illustrate the point.

As early as 1599 a Swabian by the name of Georg Rudolf Widman recast the Faustbuch (Volksbuch) of 1587, to be followed in 1674 by a Nürnberg physician called Nikolaus Pfilzer. The English dramatist Christopher Marlowe based his drama The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus (1588?) upon the German Volksbuch which had reached England, and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing had sketched a fragmentary scene entitled Faust und Sieben Geister in his seventeenth Literaturbrief of 16 February 1759. That the popularity of the Faustbuch was not confined to Germany is seen not only in this reference to Marlowe, but also in the fact that the Spies book of 1587, or one of its variants, was translated into English, French and Dutch before the end of the century. Only eleven years lapsed between the publication of the original folk-book and the last contemporary translation, for the Dutch translation of Karl Batten dates from 1592, and the French of Victor Palma Cayet from 1598. The earliest edition known in the English language is dated 1592.²

This interest continued unabated with Paul Weidmann's allegorical drama Johann Faust (1775) and Friedrich Muller's (Maler Muller') Situation aus Fausts Leben (1776)

and Fausts Leben 1. Teil (1778). Mention may also be made of the novel by Ferdinand Maximilian Klinger

entitled Fausts Leben, Taten und Höllenfahrt (1791).

At this point one may well agree with Eckermann that books have their fate even while they are in the process of being written:

"Die Bücher haben ihre Schicksale schon während sie entstehen." 3.

In later years the Faustian character was also accepted in Germany by Christian Dietrich Grabbe (1829), Nikolaus Lenau (1836), Arthur Schnitzler in his one-act play Paracelsus (1897) and Thomas Mann in his novel Dr. Faustus (1947). Of these, the latter is noteworthy for its emphasis upon the inner sickness of man which prevents his transcendence, and indeed foredooms him to failure. Kolbenheyer's trilogy (1917-25) is the direct antithesis of this.

Another work, which is contemporary with that of Lenau, is Robert Browning's poem Paracelsus (1835), completed when the poet was just twenty-three years of age. Despite Browning's youth, one feels very conscious of the fact that he too has seen the challenge of the theme and has submitted himself to it. What is important to note with regard to the development of the theme beyond its originally German birth-place is that, as so often

happens, both the idea and the theme came to England via France. It was suggested to Browning by Count Amédée de Ripert-Monclar, a private agent in England between the Duchesse de Berri and her royalist friends in France.

The final work which has attracted the attention of this study is the French 'Comédie' Mon Faust (1944) by Paul Valéry. The title itself suggests the personal acceptance of and involvement in the theme which becomes heightened when it is realised that the work was directly influenced by sympathetic contact with the mind and works of Goethe, as well as by Valéry's concern with the present condition of man.

The recurrence of the theme up to the present day suggests that the myth of the magus is a necessary element of human expression; indeed the theme has a life of its own. Perhaps the most startling contemporary witness to this is Lawrence Durrell's recent poetic drama An Irish Faustus which had its premiere in Hamburg as recently as last fall (1963). Here once again the theme has turned back to its source.

It is impossible in this study to give an exhaustive account of available witnesses when one is reminded that Alexander Tille, in his study Die Faustsplitter in der Literatur des 16. bis 18. Jahrhunderts, has gathered

together some 450 items of Faust-literature, the details of which he published between 1898 and 1901. Almost ninety additional references have been discovered since Tille's collection was published. 4.

In an appendix to his study on the development of the Faust figure from the 16th century to 1946, Karl Theens has listed 94 musical, literary, and dramatic renditions in the German, English, Latin, French, Italian and Spanish languages. He has also mentioned important analogies in the works of Lord Byron, Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, the Hungarian Emerich Medoch, the Czech Jaroslav Vrchlisky, and Thornton Wilder. Perhaps it is both revealing and noteworthy that Kolbenheyer's Paracelsus-Trilogie, carried out as it is on the grand scale, is not even mentioned.

Goethe's creation of Faust suggests the view that each re-creation is a mask for an author's confession. After all, it took Goethe over sixty years of personal experience and literary endeavour before he felt equal to completing his work. The analogy with the historical Paracelsus is here too close to pass unperceived for he wrote:

"If you are called to write a book, you will not fail to do so, even if it is delayed for sixty years or even longer." 5.

"Bistu beruft ein Buoch ze machen, es wird nit versäumbt werden, ..sulls sechzig und siebenzig Jahr anston und länger." 6.

And again:

"The right path does not consist in speculation, but leads deep into experience." 7.

It will be apparent from the preceding outline that the 'Faustian' or 'Paracelsian' theme is very much like a diamond diffusing light in all directions, and that its subtleties, by conscious design or not, might easily appear in literary works which do not claim affinity. Examples of this would be Bertolt Brecht's Leben des Galelei and Ibsen's Emperor and Galilean.

Due to the great number of literary works which have handled the Paracelsus-Faustus theme, and also to the great variety in style and form, it has been necessary to follow selective rather than comprehensive principles in this study. The utilization of a larger percentage of representative works to cast light upon Kolbenheyer's Paracelsus would only blur the aim and cloud the result.

The design of this study will be to develop the eventual interpretation of Kolbenheyer's novel trilogy in four stages:-

(1) A representation of the historical figure and an examination of his myth.

(2) A study of the perspectives of the Faust theme in the earlier mentioned works of Marlowe, Goethe

and Valéry.

(3) A study of the perspective in Browning's treatment of the theme.

(4) A study of the perspective of Schnitzler. This approach will permit the most fruitful interpretation of Kolbenheyer's work as the method will illustrate the varying mutations of the character Paracelsus-Faustus, and will moreover emphasize the validity of the theme beyond German literature.

Our procedure confronts us with two postulates:

(1) Each work of art establishes its own terms of reference to which the critic must submit.

(2) A genuine work of art constitutes an artistic whole.

If we remain mindful of these postulates, the besetting danger of critics -- and not only German -- lessens, by which the philosopher becomes engaged in warfare with the artist within him. All too often the struggle brings with it the triumph of the philosopher over the artist. The creative artist will not become a victim of this dangerous trap and the responsible literary critic will never cease to be on his guard in the face of this basic conflict.

It is not to be denied that such disciplines as psychology and philosophy, philology and history are useful implements to an understanding of a work, but what is

said is that these at best only offer a one-sided exegesis. When Goethe spoke to Eckermann on 18 September 1823 he pertinently stated that reality should be the basis which provides the themes and the crux of the subject which is to be expressed, but that it is the task of the poet (Dichter) to form these into a finely wrought and living whole.

"Die Wirklichkeit soll die Motive hergeben, die auszusprechende Punkte, den eigentlichen Kern; aber ein schönes belebtes Ganzes daraus zu bilden, ist Sache des Dichters." 8.

In Goethe's sense the word "whole" (ganz) becomes a critical yard-stick which is charged with meaning. It implies that all component parts must stand in a meaningful relationship to one another.

The exact opposite of this wholesome approach can be seen in a critical method as used by Franz Koch who, in his defense of Kolbenheyer, has examined the author as poet (Dichter) and thinker. Drawing heavily upon Kolbenheyer's Philosophie der Bauhütte he attempts to explain the man and his works in such terms as "biological aesthetics", "philosophic naturalism", "natural and biological ethos", "naturalistic ethics", "inhaltsslogisches Denken", and the "logical conscience". This throws little or no light upon Kolbenheyer's literary and artistic achievement. In this context it is again

revealing to turn to one of Goethe's conversations with Eckermann wherein he exclaims at those Germans who make life so difficult by the depths of the thoughts and ideas which they seek everywhere and superimpose wherever they can. Goethe's challenge leaves us with the injunction to submit courageously to the impressions (Eindrücke) of art and to permit ourselves to be delighted and elevated.⁹ Here again one must take words back to first meanings with Goethe, for the "impressions" of art are those indelible marks which impress themselves upon us and bind a relationship.

Yet another unhelpful approach is exemplified in Henry Pachter's biography of Paracelsus which often decries the idolators of Paracelsus who continue to raise the historical figure to an expansive human symbol. What such a critic fails to realise is precisely that a historical "truth" may be artistically valid without necessarily adhering to historical "fact". What is important for the artist is the inevitability of a human situation. This re-creation of the inescapability of a historical theme is seen in the works chosen for discussion, in Kolbenheyer's work no less than, for example, in Schiller's Maria Stuart. Thus the tradition is well established and need only be recognized.

Although not a man of letters, Paracelsus grasped

the implications of the creative process when he wrote:

"When a man undertakes to create something, he establishes a new heaven, as it were, and from it the work he desires to create flows into him". 10.

In method and approach this study is therefore both literary and comparative, a study which asks as much "how" a work is as "what" it is. This means that preference has been given to an active rather than to a passive form of definition.

CHAPTER ONE

SOURCES OF THE STUDY

Human history is marked by the phenomenon of a break-through whereby men of genius and insight rise above the current of their contemporaries to point the way toward new eras. Perhaps more than any other epoch this is true of the apocalyptic age of Paracelsus which boasts the names of Luther, Machiavelli, Ignatius Loyola, Columbus, Magellan, Michaelangelo, Erasmus of Rotterdam, and Copernicus. It was a time when new discoveries and concepts clashed vigorously with the more accepted and venerated ones, and when the known world, suddenly and startlingly opening up new perspectives, was called upon to re-examine its beliefs.

Philippus Aureolus Bombastus Theophrastus ab Hohenheim called Paracelsus, who was to challenge the medical supremacy of Avicenna and Hippocrates and arouse the indignation of the humanists, was born on 1 November 1493 on St. Philip's Day in Einsiedeln/Schweiz. The son of a country doctor and a bondswoman of the Benedictine Abbey in Einsiedeln, his recognition of an emphasis upon the chemical and biological basis of living organisms was to pave the way for a new type of medicine. His conviction that man was a microcosm in the universal macrocosm was to guide his steps through an inner revelation of the significance of human existence.

Paracelsus was impatient of experience, and hence it was to be his mission to fight cloistered learning and the spread of petrified untested theories. That we recognize him at all in these terms is due more to the autobiographical and confessional parts of his books than it is to his teachings. ¹.

Just as the alchemists insisted upon the organic nature of plant-like growth as the essence of creation, so it may be said that Paracelsus continued to grow through maturity to death. Yet despite the significance of this analogy, it would be in error to suggest that his development proceeded unchecked and without the turning-points brought on by conditions of crisis. His life was marked by trial and error, disillusioned groping, and success followed by set-back. The analogy, then, is valid not as it applies to the turmoil of the individual amidst the external conditions of his existence, but rather to the development of the inner man. This dichotomy is the first indication of the principle of polarity which so pervades Paracelsus' alchemy -- and indeed alchemy at large.

Polarity, the contrasting pairs of opposites, finds expression throughout his works, and is a powerful agency in the attainment of harmony; it explains the multitudinous discrepancies in his life. A glance at some of his writings

will illustrate this most clearly:

"Die Generation aller natürlichen Dingen ist zweierlei: Als Eine, die von Natur geschieht, ohn alle Kunst, die Ander geschieht durch Kunst, nämlich durch Alchymiam." 2.

(De generatione rerum naturalium)

"Denn zweifach ist der Leib: Firmamentisch und erdisch." 3.

(Volumen Paramirum)

"Also wisset, dass der Mensch auf zwei Teil gestellt ist: der ein Teil ist von den Elementen, das ist Fleisch und Blut worden, der ander Teil seind die Sinn und Gedanken, welche aus dem Gestirn zogen sind.

"Also ist der Mensch gesetzt in zween Leib, das ist, in den sichtbaren und unsichtbaren, das ist in den elementischen und himmlischen." 4.

(Philosophia Sagax)

"Der Mensch hat zwo Art an ihm, die limbisch, und die seelisch...." 5.

(Liber artis praesagore)

In his writings on the preparation of remedies Paracelsus wrote that "We have experience, but it is not complete;...." 6. hence the gaining of complete experience and knowledge became his aim and mission. His fulfilment meant nothing less than the resolution of the polar forces which converged within him. Several documents, and his works too, attest to his travels; some witnesses suggest his path led him as far as the Orient, whereas others restrict him to Western and