

*Pandora, Destined to see the Illuminated, not the Light*¹

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Abstract. *Pandora* is a festival drama (a “Festspiel”) written by Goethe right before he penned *Elective Affinities*. Although it is not very well known, this unfinished piece has nevertheless received attention by several thinkers. In this essay, I comment on and analyse *Pandora* drawing from the critical approach by Adorno and Benjamin to literary work. I also acknowledge the distinction between allegory and the symbolic, as Goethe conceived it. First, I review the Germanist studies on *Pandora* and take their main motives into consideration. Then, I examine the philosophical interpretations of *Pandora*, which I consider place the emphasis on its allegorical function. Finally, focusing precisely on the role of the goddess Pandora (the absent centre in the work), I show that the writing in this piece inches towards the symbolic.

Introduction

As is well known, while producing his works, Goethe meticulously reflected on different forms of writing and modes of literary expression. These reflections also addressed the variety of expressive mechanisms (of meaning, meaninglessness, novelty, temporality, and more) that every genre or style (novel, *Bildungsroman*, elegy, poetry, memoirs, fantasy tales, love letters, theatre, the epic and the dramatic, and more) could have in order to create vastly different effects from one another. In his

1 This article was possible thanks to the R&D Project of the Spanish National Programme for the Promotion of Excellence in Scientific and Technical Research “Gender, woman and femininity in the philosophical and literary references of the 18th and 19th century studied by Walter Benjamin” (FFI 2015-70273-P). It was originally published in Spanish in *Res Publica: revista de las ideas políticas* 22 n°3 (2019): 701-719.

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radical experimentation with writing, Goethe's fidelity to poetic language at the expense of the communicative led him to explore the idea of a type of writing –which he called “symbolic”– that consisted of a text that can be read and has meaning, but of which nothing can be interpreted, a product of the imagination that inches towards the infinite...³

In his essay “On the Final Scene of Faust” (1959) Adorno analyses down to the smallest detail how this scene was written and provides an account of this experimentation that Goethe took to the limit in relation to what could be called the crisis of communication and interpretation: that of the search for possible meanings or intentions in literary works. Yet, Adorno also warns against nihilism or the total negation of meaning, as this can easily morph into its opposite, in other words, into a mere affirmative message and the illusion of substance. Adorno claims that the interpretation of a text should be oriented by a kind of “neither-nor”, a type of “neither deny nor believe”⁴: not from a sceptical position, but rather by approaching the profane text as if it contained something of the holy within it, something transcendent albeit profoundly hidden. Language as such thus has pre-eminence over communication.

Goethe's late style does not radically break with communication, nor does it aspire to the idea of pure and autonomous language (for example, with respect to the language of commerce). What it does is convert sullied language into poetic language. It is in this precise transformation where that hidden transcendent element lies. Adorno speaks of how writing can “catch fire” when a run-down expression that has been turned into a metaphor by repeated use can once again be read literally⁵.

3 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1968), 124: [1113]: “Symbolism transforms an object of perception into an idea, the idea into an image, and does it in such a way that the idea always remains infinitely operative and unattainable so that even if it is put into words in all languages, it still remains inexpressible”.

4 Theodor Adorno, “On the Final Scene of Faust”, in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 123.

5 Adorno, “On the Final Scene of Faust”, 124.

He also writes of how Goethe turns banal or sorrowful expressions –such as, for example, “Blitz, der flammend niederschlug, / Die Atmosphäre zu verbessern, / Die Gift und Dunst im Busen trug” (lines 11876-81) [“the lightning that struck, flaming, / to improve the atmosphere / that harbored poison and fumes in its bosom”]⁶– into sublime images of a transformative nature, as close to catastrophe as to the possibility of blessing and glory. “The extremes meet”⁷, writes Adorno. He also mentions the way in which specific pejorative slogans and expressions (for instance, in Goethe’s time “Weichlich” could mean femininity as effeminate) are elevated until they once again become literal, relying both on adverbs that point to the erotic, as well as words about divine love.

Adorno writes about the way in which Goethe managed to eliminate the illusion of natural discourse from his writing, using archaic forms of words, for instance, by inserting the vowel “e” after the particle “ab” or “mit” of an adjective. This recourse cannot be explained merely from a philological standpoint by claiming that Goethe was employing “Middle High German”. Adorno reads these additions as marks of the minute distance that lies between the sublime and the ridiculous. Goethe traversed an extremely narrow path that stands between good and bad writing, always just about to fall into the latter. According to Adorno, it is precisely that “about to fall” without ever doing so, that placement at the edge of the abyss, that is the key to Goethe’s poetic mastery. The redemption of writing is found precisely in that moment of danger⁸. Adorno also notes how Goethe, for example, removes the “h” from the word “Abraham”, thereby transforming this Old Testament name into one of a nomadic tribal chieftain, thus uprooting it from the tradition, turning the promised land of the patriarch into a prehistoric world that is also our present at the same time⁹.

6 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, verses 11876-81, 448, *apud.*, Adorno, “On the Final Scene of Faust”, 126.

7 Adorno, 127

8 Adorno, 128.

9 Adorno, 126.

Why does this all turn out so beautiful? Adorno writes: “Perhaps it resembles most closely the feeling of breathing freely in fresh air. It is not an unmediated sense of the infinite but rather arises where it goes beyond something finite, limited. Its relationship to the finite keeps it from evaporating into empty cosmic enthusiasm”¹⁰. Adorno points to Goethe’s critique of Romanticism, though in a highly precise manner he also indicates Goethe’s aspiration to transcendence, his aim to overcome the natural limits by means of highly specific expressions. This enterprise is similar to what Hegel conceived of as the Idea: “Limitation as a precondition of greatness”¹¹.

The final scene takes place in the undefined space of a “forest, cliff, and desert waste”, a countryside taken from a mythical context said to be sacred. This space is home to animals, angels, blessed children, spirits and other characters. The scene is divided hierarchically and ascendingly as if there were successive levels. Water falls abundantly – “a thousand brooks” – between the rocks, and nature is depicted anthropomorphically as a figure of movement itself. The forest sways, the waves jump, the cavern protects, and lions are friendly. Goethe writes about eternal love, the infinite creation that flows and overflows all boundaries. Love however can become a flood and end up in a deep abyss. Rising above this picture is the Queen of Heaven, the Supreme Sovereign of the world, like a mystery. Here, Adorno sees a landscape that expresses “its own creation story allegorically”, that is, as a fixed image, as “this becoming, enclosed within the landscape”. This is the language of natural history that names fallen existence as love, and by doing so, it catches “a glimpse of the reconciliation of the natural. Through remembrance of its own natural being, it rises above its submission to nature”¹².

10 Adorno, 127.

11 Adorno, 128. Also, Adorno, 127: “Greatness itself becomes experienceable in what it surpasses; this is not the least of the ways in which Goethe is a kindred spirit to Hegel’s Idea”.

12 Adorno, 127.

Pandora and Faust's final scene

Based on Adorno's reflections on poetic language and the parallels that he sees between Goethe's stylistic greatness and the Hegelian Idea in the final scene of *Faust*, below I want to focus on the "Festspiel" or festival drama of *Pandora*¹³. To do so, I will draw inspiration both from Adorno as well as from Benjamin's approach to the critique of a work of art as he outlined it in the first pages of his essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities*. Here, Benjamin claims that in every great work of art, the material or objective content is intimately intertwined with its truth content. The former is accessed through careful commentary on the text, its infinite details, and its central motifs. When the text is alive for us, when it involves, in short, a work of immortal art, then the literary critic's reading can make its truth content spring forth among the material content. This is what is revealed with each successive approach to the work of art thanks to historical perspective, as there is more "moving truth than resting truth, more the temporal effect than the eternal being"¹⁴. Benjamin uses an image that very likely inspired Adorno's notion of interpretation:

If, to use a simile, one views the growing work as a burning funeral pyre, then the commentator stands before it like a chemist, the critic like an alchemist. Whereas, for the former, wood and ash remain the sole objects of his analysis, for the latter on the flame itself preserves an enigma: that of what is alive. Thus, the critic inquires into the truth, whose living flame continues to burn over the heavy logs of what is past and the light ashes of what has been experienced¹⁵.

13 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Pandora", in *Werke. Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden*, Band 5. Dramatische Dichtungen III, (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1998), 332-365.

14 Walter Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*", in *Selected Writings, Volume I. 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 298.

15 Benjamin, "Goethe's *Elective Affinities*", 298.

Following Adorno and Benjamin's orientation, I will begin this reading with a detailed commentary on Pandora in light of some Germanist studies that have become relevant in the interpretations of this fragment. These will bring us closer to the central motifs of the work. Then I will review the philosophical analyses conducted on Pandora. In this case the goal is to take note of the main conceptual connections which, according to philosophers, run throughout the work, endowing it with a unitary form and a certain aspiration to wholeness. If we were to adhere to Goethe's terminology, the thesis that I will defend is that the philosophical approaches tend to make an allegorical reading of the work. As Goethe writes in [1112]: "Allegory transforms an object of perception into a concept, the concept into an image, but in such a way that the concept continues to remain circumscribed and completely available and expressible within the image"¹⁶. In [435] the author provides greater detail into the difference between allegory and the symbolic:

There is a great difference between a poet seeking the particular for the universal, and seeing the universal in the particular. The one gives rise to Allegory, where the particular serves only as instance or example of the general; but the other is the true nature of Poetry, namely, the expression of the particular without any thought of, or reference to, the general. If a man grasps the particular vividly, he also grasps the general, without being aware of it at the time; or he may make the discovery long afterwards¹⁷.

Finally, I will conclude with possible pathways towards the truth content that continues to shine for us today between the lines of this enigmatic work of art. This truth content surely escaped Goethe's intention, however it is clearly revealed to us today thanks to historical distance. If Goethe sought to sketch the allegorical and unitarian image of the reconciliation of humanity, hope or freedom in *Pandora*, what today appears to us is instead something of the order of the symbolic, that is, also following Goethe's terminology here, an inexhaustible poetic expression, one that

16 Goethe, *Maximen und Reflexionen*, 124.

17 Goethe, 124.

cannot be reduced to a single meaning, a “lebendig-augenblickliche Offenbarung des Unerforschlichen” (“a vivid, instantaneous revelation of the Inscrutable”)¹⁸. My thesis will be that the symbolic strength of this festival drama springs precisely from Pandora, the main character as goddess and woman who remains absent from the composition. Next, from philological commentary to philosophical analysis and beyond, from the allegorical to the symbolic, we will traverse through the successive and necessary layers that we must enter in order to reread *Pandora* today and thus touch the “transcendent but profoundly hidden” element that it contains.

Goethe started writing *Pandora* in the autumn of 1807 –it is thus at the same time as *Faust I* and prior to *Elective Affinities*– a moment that scholars have traditionally deemed as inaugurating his post-classical period due to the level of difficulty and linguistic experimentation that characterise it. The *Festspiel* was a piece commissioned by three of Goethe’s friends for the recently founded journal *Prometheus*. Benjamin refers to this moment of Goethe’s writing in the following fashion: “There came that direction of classicism which sought to grasp not so much the ethical and historical as the mythic and philological. Its thought did not bear on the evolving ideas but on the formed contents preserved in life and language”¹⁹. *Pandora* has been undervalued by some scholars, but over time more and more have come to appreciate it. As evidence of the former, in Spain for instance, Carlos García Gual has written the following about it: “It is not difficult to share the opinion of scholars who have noted the minimal dramatic interest in the work. As a tragedy *Pandora* is ‘a drama without merit’”²⁰. As evidence of the high esteem that others have for *Pandora*, I can cite two highly convincing quotes by Karl Kraus: “the greatest German poem, and the most unknown”; “a primordial forest of the creation of language”. Of

18 Goethe, 79.

19 Benjamin, “Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*”, 298.

20 Carlos García Gual, “La reivindicación de Epimeteo en ‘El retorno de Pandora’ (1808) y su significado en la obra de Goethe”, in *Homenaje a Pedro Sainz Rodríguez. Tomo II. Estudios de Lengua y Literatura*, (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1986), 289.

all Goethe's production, in fact, Karl Kraus only paid attention to *Pandora* and to *Faust II*. He considered the disinterest of the German culture of his time for *Pandora* as a clear sign of its lack of refinement²¹:

Ich führe Sie in den Urwald der Sprachschöpfung, denn ich lese Goethes *Pandora*, das größte und unbekannteste deutsche Gedicht, und ich möchte der Hoffnung Ausdruck geben, daß seine schwere Herrlichkeit es mit dem Mißklang des Zeitalters aufnehmen werde, um das solcher Sprache entwöhnte Gehör zu überwältigen²².

The renowned translator of *Pandora*, Michael Hamburger, also praised the work: "The true legacy of Goethe's career in the theater is not to be found in his own time or even in the century following his death, but rather in more recent experimental productions of modern and post-modern theater, especially where performances of *Faust II* have been achieved with genuine popular success"²³. Adorno did not write directly about *Pandora*, though he alluded to it in different places. The title of this article is the epigraph of his text "The Essay as Form"²⁴.

In June 1808, Goethe brought the first part that we preserve today to be printed, and at the beginning, just after the list of characters, he left the following note: "Der Schuplatz wird im großem Stil nach Poussinischer Weise gedacht" ("The scene is designed in the grand style of Poussin"). He never managed to write the continuation, that is, the second act that would represent Pandora's happy return together to her husband: *Pandores Wiederkunft*. Goethe was already nearly sixty years old and in the midst of an unhappy time in his life, after Schiller's death and Napo-

21 Wilma Abeles Iggers, *Karl Kraus: A Viennese Critic of the Twentieth Century*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 65.

22 Karl Kraus, *Vorlesung, Goethe-Feier, Theater Der Dichtung*, Programme of 8 May 1932: <https://www.kraus.wienbibliothek.at/content/vorlesungsprogramm-karl-kraus-goethe-feier> [consulted: 11 March 2019].

23 Michael Hamburger, "Preface", in *Verse Plays and Epic, Goethe's Collected Works*, Vol. 8, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), xi.

24 Theodor Adorno, "The Essay as Form", in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 29.

leon's invasion of Weimar.

As Dora and Erwin Panofsky remind us in their classic book on the successive incarnations of the myth of Pandora in Western culture, *Pandora's Box*, Goethe had already written about Pandora previously, in 1773, at age 24, in a dramatic fragment dedicated to Prometheus that was only published in 1833²⁵. Prometheus is an artist who defies God and creates mankind. He had two sides, one as a prolific genius and another as a rebel who faced off against the gods and criticised moral orders and established values²⁶. Pandora features prominently in this piece. She is a child who one day witnesses her friend Myra in a sensual embrace with her lover Arabar. She runs home, both exhilarated and horrified, to tell her father. Prometheus tells her that "the cause of love is certainly death", a phrase that summarises the proximity between intensity and the extinction of life. A bit more than thirty years later, however, this child has been transformed into *Pandora*, into a symbol of rejection. Meanwhile, Prometheus has gone from being the most exalted representative of the mankind the creator to become that which is only concerned by action and utility. This was the moment in time in which Goethe met Amalia in Karlsbad. Amalia was the mother of Ulrike von Leveztow, who at the time was only two years old. Goethe was attracted to Amalia, and in his diaries, he wrote about her as if she were the reincarnation of the goddess Pandora. But Amalia disappeared furtively and Goethe, in despair, started writing the "*Festspiel*" that concerns us. In the work, Pandora abandons her lover after a time of shared happiness, leaving behind a profound sadness only mitigated by the hope of her return. The idea is that Pandora will gloriously return, something that never took shape on paper.

25 Dora Panofsky and Erwin Panofsky, *Pandora's Box. The Changing Aspects of a Mythical Symbol*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 122-123. According to Gadamer, the work was published without Goethe's consent by Jacobi. In their opinion, the work made a great impression on Lessing, because it confirmed his pantheistic vision of the world.

26 Henri Lichtenberger, "Pandore", in *Goethe: études publiées pour le centenaire de sa mort, Faculté de Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg*, (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres"), 358.

Pandora unfolds in a series of opposite pairings. First are the contrasting gods (Epimetheus and Prometheus), then the two daughters that Epimetheus had with Pandora (Elpore and Epimeleia) along with Prometheus's son, Phileros. There is also of course Pandora, who lends her name to the title of the piece and of whom it speaks, yet who never appears. We know that Prometheus rejected Pandora in the past, that Epimetheus later married her, that they had two daughters, and that afterwards Pandora –while still his wife– eventually left taking Elpore along with her, who appears to her father in the form of the morning star. Epimetheus has been yearning for Pandora ever since. We also know that Pandora opened her box when they were still together, and that it was only full of wonders (not of evils), which left Epimetheus hopelessly intoxicated and enamoured with his wife forever.

Indeed, the goddess Pandora never appears in the piece. This could suggest the following formal and narrative composition in a highly schematic fashion: like a pyramid from far away to close up, from top to bottom, Pandora is at the peak, she is named but she is not there. In the distant background we find Epimetheus and Prometheus, while the rest of the characters appear in a closer position, as if the entire ensemble were a stream of life that springs forth from the summit. At this lower level we are witnesses to Epimeleia's love for her cousin Phileros. Epimeleia is raped by a shepherd and Phileros takes revenge. Yet Phileros is jealous and nearly kills Epimeleia in one of his explosive outbursts. Phileros's father urges him to throw himself off a cliff, but he is saved in the midst of his fall by the action of Eos, the dawn, the messenger of Helios and the herald of the will of the gods. Dolphins bring him to the beach, and he ultimately emerges as a young Dionysus surrounded by a retinue. As to Epimeleia, she is saved from the flames into which the shepherd had thrown her. She reunites with her lover; the two represent the overcoming of the sorrowful conflicts that had devastated the previous generation. Eos bids Prometheus farewell with words that hint that the gods are the ones who ultimately grace humans with gifts.

The verses continue in a strange, artificial non-communicative language, as if they were in free fall. Goethe mixes classic metric forms with

modern rhythms, iambic trimeters and choral odes, dactylic and trochaic verses, extreme lyricism, and simple chants. The formal composition of the piece, if we were to take into consideration the part that ultimately was not written, would have had the structure of a Romantic-style tripartite myth: a time of a lost past, a fall, and a subsequent salvation that rises up higher than the starting point. However, as we do not have that second part, one could argue that the existing structure runs in parallel with the structure of the last scene of Faust as analysed by Adorno, as both have a cascading layout²⁷.

Antithesis and unity in *Pandora*

In the tradition of the Germanist studies on *Pandora*, attention has typically been paid to how the text unfolds in layers that appear as central in the work, and also to the figure of the goddess and the final element that unifies everything. The opposition between the titans has been interpreted in vastly different ways, summarised as such by one of Goethe's biographers, John Williams:

It can be, and has been, read in cultural terms as the tension between the progressive ethos of the Enlightenment, the technological optimism of the *philosophes* with their dictionary of *arts et métiers*, and the passive sentimentalism of Rousseauistic *Empfindsamkeit*. It might be seen prophetically in terms of a proto-Marxist doctrine of alienation, of the enslavement of labour and the exploitation of a workforce in the name of a ruthless 'Promethean' work ethic, the only present alternative to which is an existence of futile quasi-aristocratic inactivity and idleness. It has been deciphered more specifically as the historical confrontation between Napoleonic military aggression and the passivity of Prussia before and after the Battle of Jena: the play was written in the years immediately following the nadir of Prussian history in 1806.²⁸

27 For a connection between Pandora and Goethe's beloved idea of the metamorphosis, cf. Julia S. Happ, "Goethes Pandorengeschenke: «Gestalten Umgestalten» oder Metamorphosen der Pandora", *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 127, (2010): 70-81.

28 John R. Williams, *The Life of Goethe. A Critical Biography*, (Oxford: Blackwell,

The more classic interpretations of *Pandora* focus on the conflict between Epimetheus and Prometheus: between the one who looks to the past and reminisces (Epimetheus) and the one who always casts his gaze with anticipation on the future (Prometheus). Epimetheus is nostalgic and inactive, he neither takes decisions nor lives in the present. He always has a memory to anchor himself to, the memory of the happiness he experienced in the past alongside Pandora. He also feels anxious for the lover's impending return. He wonders about what might have been yet has not come to be, and he is afraid of the future. He is sorrowful both on Earth and in the heavens.

Along this same interpretative line, the poetic character of Epimetheus (his sentimentality) is contrasted with Prometheus's practical-minded nature (his industriousness and his unlimited drive for expansion)²⁹. This series of contrasts is repeated in various characters at different times throughout Goethe's oeuvre: Werther and Albert, Egmont and Orange, Orestes and Pylades, Tasso and Antonio. (Goethe himself told his friend Zelter in June 1811 that he felt divided like the gods in the piece between one poetic side and another more utilitarian side)³⁰. Yet the characteristic element of *Pandora* is that the contradictions in it give the essential shape to how the piece itself is crafted: the two characters are placed on the stage one in front of the other, splitting it in two. On Epimetheus's side nature is harmoniously tended by human hands, its gardens and orchards contribute to a delicate, orderly beauty. The people live in homes and practice horticulture. On Prometheus's side nature has been altered

1998), 181. Within this series of curious interpretations, it would be important to include a recent one, which is not sufficiently well-founded in my opinion, that claims that *Pandora* represents the international world order of Goethe's time, the transformation of the political world into aesthetic appearance: Chenxi Tang, "Literary Form and International World Order in Goethe: From *Iphigenie* to *Pandora*", in *Goethe Yearbook*, 25, (2018): 183-201.

29 Herbert Lindenberger, "Goethe's Pandora: An Interpretation", *German Life and Letters* 8, (1955): 111-120.

30 Rüdiger Zafransky, *Goethe: Life as a Work of Art*, (New York: Liveright, 2017), 784-5: "Alas, I seem to myself a double herm, one of whose masks resembles Prometheus, the other Epimetheus, and neither of them ... able to smile."

and dominated by industry; nature is only viewed through the lens of its ability to serve as a provider of raw materials. The inhabitants of this part of the world –mostly warriors and blacksmiths– live in grotesque spaces, stripped of symmetry. There is no place for beauty here, only for labour dedicated to useful things.

Epimetheus is introspective, he does not distinguish between sleep and wakefulness, and he yearns to reach the state of grace and the happiness he lost after Pandora's departure. He is untethered from reality, instead he continually sees how his imagination overflows, becoming mere daydream and delusion. Prometheus, on the contrary, is the *homo faber* who acts on nature and aspires to material progress. He has employees whom he supervises. He is fascinated by craftsmanship and work. For Prometheus, imagination is secondary compared to creation, but his vision of the world is also quite partial and restrictive.

Both in the figure of Epimetheus, as well as in that of the piece in its entirety, the Germanist studies have paid attention to the fact that imagination is considered the most fundamental power. Epimetheus allows himself to be swept away by his imagination, but is overwhelmed by the memories of the past; he suffers, but he does not manage to transform his distress into something beautiful and elevated by means of art, in images and symbols: "he possesses potentially the imagination of an artist, without ever being able to cure the malady of his soul by creating an objective work of art and thus to come to terms with himself and the world"³¹.

Imagination is also split into opposite extremes. The two daughters of Epimetheus and Pandora, Elpore (hope) and Epimeleia (care, concern) are the two aspects into which imagination is divided. Imagination consists not only of creating images and artistic forms, it also resides in the capacity to transcend existence, whether reminiscing about scenes from

31 Heinz Moenkemeyer, "Polar Forms of the Imagination in Goethe's «Pandora»", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 57, no. 2, (April 1958): 281. See also the connection between imagination and memory in: Gerhart von Graevenitz, "Erinnerungsbild und Geschichte. Geschichtsphilosophie in Vicos «Neuer Wissenschaft» und in Goethes «Pandora»", *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, 217, (2010): 70-81, esp. 79-81.

the past or anticipating future moments. In this sense, the two sisters represent two attributes of dislocation with regard to the present brought on by the power of imagination. Epimeleia has inherited her father's tendency to dwell too much about the past, often with despair. Like him, she also suffers from the discordance she perceives between the overflowing and unlimited world of the imagination on the one hand and the limitations of the real world on the other. Sometimes, however, she manages to free herself from those limits through poetic creation. For her part, Eupore moves freely between heaven and Earth and is always restless. As to hope, it has an illusory point that can occasionally turn into disillusionment. Though luminous and full of life, this other form of imagination is associated with her sister: sometimes, when it is active, it is the best remedy to combat worry, but it can also be hollow and fleeting.

Pandora never ends up appearing, yet her absence fulfils an essential function to the structure, giving shape to the main motifs of the piece: "Providing a form for the transitory flow of experience, she manifests herself upon earth in nature, art and music; and on her return to earth she will institute a «golden age»"³². Located at the apex of all the oppositions that occur in the lower levels, Pandora reconciles them as a final synthesis or unity of the composition. The world becomes poetic thanks to her. Pandora would be pure and absolute imagination, that which neither falls short due to its dependence on the prosaic, nor gets swept away in delirium. She is a figure that represents the humanitarian ideals of a better future³³, and embodies art and aesthetic appearance, the elevation of humanity from a purely materialistic level (where we find workers following Prometheus's orders), up to the highest level of the configuration of images³⁴. She is also associated with the erotic and with harmonious forms. The culmination of *Pandora* by the goddess who gives the piece its name does not consist of passively contemplating the image, but rather of the active creation of beautiful forms and orders.

32 Lindenberger, "Goethe's Pandora: An Interpretation", 116.

33 Lindenberger, 116-117.

34 Lindenberger, 116-117.

In her book *Goethe's Allegories of Identity*, Jane K. Brown puts forth the central thesis that Pandora is an allegory of identity: a series of encounters, conflicts, and misunderstandings between opposite beings who, over time, end up discovering and recognising each other. This is a Hegelian process through which the two titans initially face each other in an unconscious state to later awaken to consciousness, to a higher synthesis and a complementary relationship between them³⁵. Dora and Erwin Panofsky highlight the notes that Goethe left concerning Pandora's return which never came to be. The second act would have started with a mysterious urn that descends from the sky, and Pandora herself would have fought against those who incite violence and brought with her joy and happiness. Afterwards, a kingdom of tranquillity would have been inaugurated under the aegis of Beauty. The box would finally have been opened with science, art, and more springing forth, while Epimetheus would have ascended to the sky in the company of his beloved³⁶. The Panofskys place these traits of Goethe's *Pandora* within the long tradition that dates back to the ancient world: in the times of Aeschylus, Pandora had represented the arts required to make life more pleasant on Earth. They also highlight that according to Plutarch the gifts that Zeus gave to Pandora were synonymous with the myriad blessings (love, wealth) needed for a happy life. Finally, they recall how Pandora personifies pleasure in Porphyry.

Pandora and philosophy

Delving deeper into the infinite layers of *Pandora*, next I will review what different philosophers have written about the work. I will try to show that all of them, whether or not they explicitly state it as such, share the thesis that, in Goethe's writing, the traditional myth of Pandora becomes a dark and strange philosophical allegory, overloaded with symbolism that bears little relation to the original myth. In other words, in *Pandora* the essential

35 Jane K. Brown, *Goethe's Allegories of Identity*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 75-76.

36 Panofsky and Panofsky, *Pandora's Box*, 129.

role given to the image is realised in favour of the search for the general and the concept. The concepts in play would be: the manifestation of the Neo-Platonic One (Cassirer), the portrayal of hope (Bloch), humanity's reconciliation with itself (Gadamer), and modern freedom (Wellbery).

Ernst Cassirer penned a highly influential essay on *Pandora*. In it, he takes Goethe's idea –held precisely starting from the point of his literary journey in which he conceived the "*Festspiel*" – that one must write with an orientation "mehr in Generelle" ("more in general") instead of doing so in relation to "Varietät und Individualität" ("variety and individuality") as the key for approaching the text³⁷. The general in Goethe, however, does not mean abstract, nor is it a merely theoretical point of view. Instead, it is an orientation towards the entirety that the sentiment of life expresses in a highly specific sense: life with its infinite contradictions and its diverse stages, the attention to the senses and images, and decision and action. With this premise, Cassirer differentiates two different levels in *Pandora*: on the one side, an allegorical level featuring the two titans Prometheus and Epimetheus, and the absent figure of Pandora; and another dramatic side centred on the figures of Phileros and Epimeleia. By allegorical, Cassirer precisely understands this writing of the general in the Goethean sense, and that is the level I will focus on for a moment.

Since his youth, Goethe's literature was populated by contrasting characters, and he himself was characterised in life for having split into opposites with masks that he could put on and take off: the young and the old, the poor and the rich, the intellectual and the sensitive, the indecisive and the resolute, and more. Cassirer situates *Pandora* with regard to the entirety of Goethe's work, and in reference to his particular world, simultaneously emphasising that one must avoid any type of theoretical approach that seeks to find a unified meaning in it. *Pandora* is situated between two eras: crafted as the zenith of his classicist period, yet it simultaneously points to when Goethe surpasses this period. In it, as the inauguration of the elder Goethe's style, according to Cassirer, all these

37 Ernst Cassirer, "Goethes Pandora", in *Idee und Gestalt. Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin, Kleist*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), 9.

oppositions and disguises that run throughout his previous works are framed within an allegorical totality through which they are represented as symbolic images elevated to the powers of life in general: "dies alles sind für Goethe jetzt keine bloß begrifflichen Sonderungen mehr, sondern es sind selbst beseelte und gefühlte Einheiten"³⁸.

How did Goethe manage to portray unity? Cassirer considers the formal structure and symbolism of the piece as expressions of Neo-Platonism. Pandora never appears, but she is the One from whom the two lower levels (the gods) emanate: the level of Prometheus and Epimetheus, first, and that of their children, later drawn in the midst of a free fall. Cassirer justifies his reading based on the fact that in 1805 Goethe had started to read the *Enneads* by Plotinus –whom he referred to as the "old mystic"– and in particular he had delved into the sections that deal with the intelligible Beauty: V, book viii, cap. 1. What interested Goethe from these passages is the Idea. The Idea provides matter with form and makes it indivisible with respect to beauty. Yet at the same time the Idea remains untouched as eternal and one, to the extent that its essence never unravels into multiplicity: "So behält das Urbild stets die unendliche Vollkommenheit gegenüber dem sinnlichstofflichen Abbild; als das Zeugende gegenüber dem Gezeugten"³⁹. In Cassirer's judgement, Goethe translated the externalisation or alienation of the self ("*Selbstentäußerung*") from the One, its fall from intelligible essence, into the necessary development and self-revelation⁴⁰. Here, where Plotinus gave priority to the transcendence of the absolute, Goethe exalted the immanence of his vital poetic sentiment and the image of the world.

As Cassirer also notes, Schelling himself claimed that Goethe had managed to realise in life –with his literature and his research on nature– what Plotinus had conceived in philosophy⁴¹. Thus, in *Pandora*,

38 Cassirer, "Goethes Pandora", 30.

39 Cassirer, 15.

40 Cassirer, 15.

41 Cassirer also claims that Schelling's doctrine on "intellectual intuition" ("*intellektuelle Anschauung*") is the attempt to bring to the philosophical and con-

the form of the goddess does not belong to a supracelestial orbit, rather she is found “mitten in der Dynamik des Lebens, in der Gestaltung und Umgestaltung der Natur, im Rauschen der Welle und im Wandel und den sichtbaren Umrissen der Körper”⁴². Pandora is the eternal that takes shape between the things that happen, not only those of nature, but also those produced and aspired to by human beings, the things that make us grieve and those that make us happy. Her image is in line with that life-affirming orientation that Goethe imposed on himself, as he confessed in *Poetry and Truth*: that everything that made him happy, but also everything that worried him, or which kept him busy in some way, had to be converted into an image or a poem, in order to reach an agreement with himself through them. Concerning Goethe’s life mission, Cassirer takes note of the phrase that lends the title to this article: “Erleuchtetes zu sehen, nicht das Licht” (“To see the illuminated, but not the light”), an allusion to Pandora’s immersion in the becoming. The complete verse, recited by Prometheus, in reference to the dawn, reads:

So tritt sie lieblich hervor, erfreulich immerfort; Gewöhnet
Erdgeborner schwaches Auge sanft, Daß nicht vor Helios Pfeil
erblinde mein Geschlecht, Bestimmt Erleuchtetes zu sehen,
nicht das Licht⁴³.

Moreover, Cassirer also emphasises that terrible feeling of loss, longing, rupture, and yearning for recovery that permeates Epimetheus, and impregnates the “*Festspiel*” in its entirety: “Einzelne schafft sich Blum’ und Blume Durch das Grüne Raum und Platz. Pflückend gehe ich und verlöre das Gepflückte. Schnell entschwindet’s. Rose, brech’ ich Deine Schöne, Lilie, Du bist schon dahin!”⁴⁴. Indeed, for Epimetheus everything in this world lacks value unless it serves the “höchste Gut”.

ceptual plane that which he had glimpsed as effective in Goethe’s life and poetry. Cassirer, 16.

42 Cassirer, 17.

43 Goethe, “Pandora”, verses 956-7, 362.

44 Goethe, verses 149-154, 337

In *The Principle of Hope*, Ernst Bloch compares Hesiod's demonic *Pandora* with the subsequent Hellenistic version (of which Goethe is heir) in which Pandora becomes mysterious and her box is only full of gifts. In his judgement, this is the only truth, to the extent that "hope is the good thing that remains for men, which has in no way already ripened but which has also in no way been destroyed"⁴⁵. According to Bloch, Pandora is like philosophy: the perspective of opening to change, the latency in the world of something better, the belief in the world as something inconclusive. Bloch justifies this comparison by noting that the box is opened after the dark of the night storm had passed with the clear clouds of day following on the horizon.

Georg Gadamer also writes a few pages to *Pandora* in an article dedicated to Goethe's unfinished dramatic works presenting the notion that

"Everything unfinished points beyond itself to that which is still missing, to that which alone could confer meaning on the completed work"⁴⁶.

Even fragmentary art represents an experience that aspires to a meaningful whole. Gadamer claims that we have to approach the fragmentary work *Pandora* as if its expression of the poetic spirit contained a hidden secret that gives us the key to its wholeness. He suggests that what Goethe aimed to:

show that the constant hidden presence of the titanic element, the continual threat to man's spirit by the darkness of elemental forces belongs to the very essence of human destiny. There is no direct path to enlightenment that can lead man to his high calling. What human beings struggle to free themselves from is precisely themselves⁴⁷.

45 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope, Volume I*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), 335.

46 Georg Gadamer, "On the Course of Human Spiritual Development: Studies on Goethe's Unfinished Writings", in *Literature and Philosophy in Dialogue: Essay in German Literary Theory*, (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1993), 41.

47 Gadamer, "On the Course of Human Spiritual Development", 41.

According to Gadamer, what remains of the piece should give us a clue about what the final development could have been. Unlike Cassirer, Gadamer claims that there are no traces of Neo-Platonism in *Pandora*, but rather a representation of humanity in its elevation towards the loftiest ideals. He also highlights that the central figure of the piece is Epimetheus who, despite his misfortune, takes the first step on the path to self-discovery. Gadamer also highlights that the gift of science and art that the box will bring to humanity represents the ultimate achievement of overcoming the vulgar prehistoric world of the conflicts between the titans, the ultimate reconciliation of all polar opposites: “But this happens not by revealing some secret or other; they are themselves the mystery where all truth is hidden”⁴⁸. This ascension towards the summit is possible not thanks to Prometheus’s industrious activity, but rather due to the festival and celebration that give shape to the entire piece, as well as through the transformation of the past into an image. Goethe is the creator par excellence of poetic expression, which, in Gadamer’s judgement, includes the expression of personal experience. Gadamer’s hermeneutic presupposes that “the being of text and reader are fused in the experience of a circular dialogue between them, a dialogue circumscribed by the hermeneutic circle”⁴⁹, and through which the reader approaches the text with a series of questions and prejudices, and the text provides responses⁵⁰. The last verses recited by Eon are the culmination of this representation of human culture and suggest the “response to the entire work”⁵¹:

Was zu wünschen ist, ihr unten fühlt es;
Was zu geben sei, die wissen’s droben.
Groß beginnet ihr Titanen; aber leiten

48 Gadamer, 45.

49 John Pizer, “Gadamer’s Reading of Goethe”, *Philosophy and Literature* 15, no. 2, (October 1991): 271.

50 Gadamer uses one of Goethe’s terms to synthetically explain the hermeneutic procedure: “This is of course the hermeneutic *Urphänomen*, that there is no possible statement that is not understood as an answer to a question”. Cf. Georg Gadamer, “Weiterentwicklungen”, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 2, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 226.

51 Gadamer, “On the Course of Human Spiritual Development”, 46.

Zu dem ewig Guten, ewig Schönen,
Ist der Götter Werk; die laßt gewähren⁵².

Recently, David Wellbery has argued in favour of a strong connection between Hegel and Goethe's *Pandora* that will help us address Adorno's note from another angle with regard to this piece. According to this viewpoint, one can establish connections between the aspiration to the poetic image of classic and post-classic Goethe and the Hegelian Idea. According to Wellbery, the parallels occur due to the fact that both authors portray the concept of freedom: while Goethe realises it through the imagination, Hegel does so in conceptual terms through a dialectic development⁵³. Thus, Wellbery delves into several of Goethe's works, from the unfinished *Prometheus*, to *Egmont*, *Hermann und Dorothea*, until reaching *Pandora*. In all of them he finds a constant concern to seek out the image and proper form of freedom. In fact, Wellbery partially criticises Cassirer's reading of *Pandora* asking: "What was the purpose of those cascades of verse that the bereft Epimetheus brings forth from out of his sorrow? Is he just fixated on a philosophically naïve concept of the Idea such that it could coincide with or be seized in «a single image?»"⁵⁴. Wellbery argues that if we adhere to the language and internal coherence of the work, what we find is not only an abstract image of the Idea, but rather a manner of expression of the dialectic of freedom, in the style of Hegel. Form and content, composition, and theme, are indivisible in Goethe. As in Hegel, *Pandora* highlights that freedom is the unity of the universal and the particular, of concept and existence. The goddess Pandora is thus the incarnation of this unity. She is the One who gives unity to the world and who grants beauty to an ideal, but only in that Pandora is self-divided.

According to Wellbery, the two titans are incarnations of historical structures of the consciousness: that of Prometheus, directed towards

52 Goethe, "Pandora", verses 1083-1086, 365.

53 David Wellbery, "The Imagination of Freedom: Goethe and Hegel as Contemporaries", in *Goethe's Ghosts: Reading and the Persistence of Literature*, (Rochester, New York: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 217-238.

54 Wellbery, "The Imagination of Freedom", 225.

industrial and instrumental production, and that of Epimetheus, consumed between nostalgia and longing “Goethe offers [...] something like a mythic account of modern consciousness in its characteristic diremption”⁵⁵. Pandora is the modern Idea torn asunder between two opposite, insufficient and partial conceptions of freedom.

In terms of Pandora, the brothers also maintain opposite relationships. Prometheus rejects Pandora and, in doing so, he refuses the substantive beauty and the wholeness that she symbolises, obsessed as he is by the tangible, the useful, and boundless expansion. This is freedom conceived here as an expansive force and brute imposition; of a rationality channelled towards the instrumental and, ultimately, towards war. Epimetheus for his part affirms the infinitude, the ideal, the substantive beauty of Pandora, as such he not only loves and yearns for her, but he also takes part in her essence. His nostalgia, by not allowing himself any consolation, and by insisting on rejecting the finite empirical world and mundane experiences, becomes something pathological. The celebration of love for Pandora is his only *raison d’être*, but she is not a real being of flesh and blood, but rather the metaphysical idea of infinitude:

We might call it metaphysics after metaphysics; or melancholia as metaphysics; perhaps even a negative theology of love. But whatever term we choose, the point is that Goethe diagnoses this as a position within the dialectic of modern consciousness, the elegiac counterpart to Prometheus’s robust finitism, and thus as a misconstrual, falsification, or distortion of the Idea⁵⁶.

Pandora and courtly love

Pandora’s general tone, as we have indicated, is tinged by Epimetheus’s disconsolate longing. Pining for a lover is a frequent motif throughout Goethe’s work, starting with *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, of course. Wellbery mentions this aspect of *Pandora*, the “celebration of the beloved in the cult of her absence”, and places it in the long tradition of European

55 Wellbery, 226.

56 Wellbery, 231-232.

poetry that dates back to the troubadours, and to the *dolce stil novo* of Cavalcanti and Dante, until reaching the phenomenon of Petrarchism⁵⁷. In *Seminar 7. Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan provided a solid account of that discourse that began in the 12th century, that of courtly love, which was subsequently employed in European literature until reaching, we would say, Goethe. In it, the beloved is inaccessible, as an obstacle is always built around her that surrounds and isolates her: “The object involved, the feminine object, is introduced oddly enough through the door of privation or of inaccessibility”⁵⁸.

Epimetheus languidly and eternally longs for Pandora’s return. Pandora is unreachable as a desired object and in her perfection, she is elevated to the highest pedestal by her lover. We know almost nothing of her. She is a “feminine object [...] emptied of all real substance”⁵⁹, but in the end we only know of her because she brings the gifts of science and art. It is important to recall here that, in his later years, Goethe produced a marvellous series of courtly love poems in 1823 after his marriage proposal to the young Ulrike von Levetzow was rejected: *Marienbad Elegy*, which ends with an intentional allusion to the myth of Pandora:

Mir ist das All, ich bin mir selbst verloren,
 Der ich noch erst den Göttern Liebling war;
 Sie prüften mich, verliehen mir Pandoren,
 So reich an Gütern, reicher an Gefahr;
 Sie drängten mich zum gabeseligen Munde,
 Sie trennen mich – und richten mich zugrunde⁶⁰.

I believe that this vision of courtly love also partially underlies what Rolf Tiedemann has written about *Pandora*, although in his case he never openly states it. In any case, Tiedemann takes note of Goethe’s saying according to which “*Pandora* sowohl als *die Wahlverwandtschaften* drü-

57 Wellbery, 231.

58 Jacques Lacan, *Seminar Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959- 1960* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), 149.

59 Lacan, *Seminar Book VII*, 149.

60 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Elegie”, in *Sämtliche Gedichte. Zweiter Teil*, (Nördlingen: München, 1961), 117.

cken das schmerzliche Gefühl der Entbehrung aus"⁶¹. He reads the work drawing inspiration perhaps too heavily from certain famous aspects of Adorno and Benjamin's philosophies. Above all he criticises Gadamer's interpretation, as he believes it is absurd to appeal to the return of a redeemed humanity in a country where the horrors of Auschwitz had just taken place (Gadamer published his text in 1949).

First, Tiedemann analyses the dualism between Epimetheus and Prometheus in light of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and considers that if Goethe resorts to myth, it is because the modern subject is covered by a mythical or fatal layer (destiny) that restricts him in his longing for freedom. Second, he takes the Adorno's idea that in both Hegel and in Goethe the subject comes not through a narcissistic relationship with oneself, but rather through "*Entäußerung*", the externalisation –the stripping away of something, and the surrender to something that is not oneself. This refers to an entire series of polar opposite and embodied categories of Goethe's thinking– for example, "inhale" and "exhale", "contraction" and "distension", "systole" and "diastole" –which allude to a series of physical rhythms that the subject has to experience in the arduous process of maturing⁶². Third, he outlines an interpretation of *Pandora* in light of the philosophy of history, but a history that is not fated to progress, but rather plagued by ruins:

From the outset, it has been recognised that this piece addresses the process of the constitution of culture; yet in reality it does not deal with a separate sphere such as culture, but rather with society as a whole in its objective laws. As long as a meaningful structure that points to a certain progress could be ascertained in history, a notion which both Hegel's idealism and Marx's materialism presuppose, the march of history was appropriately expressed with the theme of *Pandora*. However, what must have contributed to turning *Pandora* into a philosophy of history *contre cœur* by its author was the historical skep-

61 Rolf Tiedemann, "Pandora oder Mythos als Aufklärung", in *Abenteuer anschauender Vernunft. Essay über die Philosophie Goethes*, (München: Edition text + kritik, 2014), 117.

62 Tiedemann, "Pandora oder Mythos als Aufklärung", 116-117.

ticism that characterised Goethe throughout his life, nourished in no small part by his own experiences as a resolute politician in a small late-stage absolutist state, but even more so by the bloodshed during the French Revolution and the nascent formation of German nationalism, which would prove far more bloodthirsty than all the Jacobin guillotines combined, a fact that neither its adversary Goethe nor its supporters, from Kleist to Arnim, could have suspected⁶³.

Prometheus is the man of action, the one who dominates nature and deems it antagonistic to mankind: "He seems to be a kind of prehistoric neoliberal", who "has read his Hobbes, and understands social life in all instances as *bellum omnium contra omnes*"⁶⁴. For him, all goods are exchangeable, to the extent that he is only interested in their value for exchange, not use. Tiedemann places Goethe on the side of Epimetheus, someone who does not seek to dominate objects, to make them identical to himself, but whose contemplative relationship with the world and with the past makes him impotent.

What about Pandora? Pandora, Epimetheus's wife, is the realisation of the Idea of Beauty and of the unity that would unite subject and object. She is the happiness that Epimetheus had in the past, something lost forever. She only exists in a prehistoric time. Epimetheus's memory of Pandora and the love that he still feels for her, foretells something of the messianic status. Pandora is just a memory, a lost Paradise whose return is desired but never achieved. "She represents, as an incarnation of Beauty, the aesthetic image as such"⁶⁵. She points beyond the concept and philosophy to the advent of the final salvation: "Goethe conceptualizes in *Pandora* the utopic in the constellation of hope and love"⁶⁶. Finally, concerning this utopian component, Tiedemann takes into consideration that Pandora is not just another character in the drama, and consequently she could never truly return. She is a "symbol of art itself", and the

63 Tiedemann, 119.

64 Tiedemann, 121.

65 Tiedemann, 133.

66 Tiedemann, 131.

“myth of paradise regained”⁶⁷, but she can never be realised as such. She must remain merely as the image of something that would be possible and that would confront the real, an image of freedom versus necessity, the illusory and always uncertain reparation of history’s catastrophes. Tiedemann also cites a reference by Adorno to Pandora: “Adorno calls this image of utopia «the rush, the drive to the most extreme heights, like Pandora»”⁶⁸.

Pandora and the impossibility of reconciliation

Let us now return to what Adorno wrote about the final scene of *Faust* concerning that possible connection between Goethe and Hegel that we previously saw about the Idea. Adorno highlights the aspiration to transcendence or infinitude based on the experience of the limited and the finite. He writes that “limitation as a precondition of greatness has its social aspect, in Goethe as in Hegel: the bourgeois as mediation of the absolute”⁶⁹. Here he highlights the expression in *Faust* –which Goethe wrote in quotation marks– “He who makes an effort, striving, we can redeem”⁷⁰, in other words, bourgeois asceticism. Immediately afterwards, Adorno also underscores another sentence by Goethe “And if indeed love has partaken of him from above, the blessed host will meet him with a hearty welcome”⁷¹. The bourgeois is mediation of the absolute, in fact, but with an important nuance, that is, that “the number of nights of love is not computed in heaven”⁷². The world, our world, is bourgeois (the world in which everything can be computed abstractly, the world of calculation and profit), yet Goethe’s viewpoint from which he writes

67 Tiedemann, 134.

68 Tiedemann, 137, *apud.* Theodor Adorno, *Nachgelassene Schriften*, I/1: Beethoven, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 55.

69 Adorno, “On the Final Scene of Faust”, 128.

70 Goethe, *Faust*, verses 11936-7, *apud.*, Adorno, “On the Final Scene of Faust”, 128.

71 Goethe, verses 11938-41, *apud.*, Adorno, “On the Final Scene of Faust”, 128.

72 Adorno, “On the Final Scene of Faust”, 128.

is not bourgeois, as he speaks from the perspective of a non-computable or exchangeable love. Here resides the “humaneness” (“*Humanität*”) of Goethe’s writing (and also Hegel’s): indicating that a “world beyond exchange would be one in which no one participating in an exchange would be cheated of what belonged to him”⁷³. The Hegelian Idea implicit in Goethe is bourgeois mediation, but he also simultaneously leaves the “non identical”⁷⁴ alone through love, that is, by means of the non-computable nights of love.

Adorno’s text concludes with certain reflections on *Faust* as a figure which at this point in the work is no longer the one who was previously in the piece, but rather someone who has become non-identical to himself. “Perhaps Faust is saved because he is no longer the person who signed the pact; perhaps the wisdom of this play, which is a play in pieces, a “*Stück in Stücken*,” lies in knowing how little the human being is identical to himself, how light and tiny this “immortal part” of him is that is carried off as though it were nothing”⁷⁵. Hence, Faust no longer remembers the erstwhile Faust or the horrors that he had to face. The only thing that remains in his memory is Gretchen, the incomparable. Adorno writes dizzily: he places her as a *Mater gloriosa*, a mother; immediately after, however, he contradicts himself by claiming that this feeling of being protected (by a mother) has also vanished in the piece.

Now we return to *Pandora*, and we seek inspiration in the “infracture” and “violence of logic” captured by Adorno in the final scene of *Faust*, to discern whether they also occur in the “*Festspiel*”. This would involve seeing whether in Pandora there is something of that thematised Idea as the non-identical, that which “is carried off as though it were nothing”, the return from the forgotten. This would also involve seeing whether Pandora only has the status of an allegory, or if, as Tiedemann suggests, it also transfigures into the symbolic. Pandora is everywhere, she is spoken of incessantly, but she is not there. The striking aspect is that her

73 Adorno, 128.

74 Adorno, 129.

75 Adorno, 130.

presence and absence do not constitute a series of episodic appearances and disappearances of comings and goings, for example, like those of the main character of Goethe's story *The New Melusina* included in *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*. Pandora's presence and absence coexist. The being of Pandora in fact violates logic. She is the one who ensures that the piece is not merely an expression of Neo-Platonism, as Cassirer had claimed. Nor can we say that *Pandora* is only a sign of hope, as Bloch does. Nor does Gadamer's proposal, i.e., *Pandora* as a response to the question of human destiny as an aspiration to aesthetic ideals, seem to be the final word on *Pandora*. We could say the same of Wellbery's reading concerning Goethe's Hegelianism as an articulation of the modern concept of freedom. All these interpretations do not grasp that Pandora gives a name precisely to the inconsistency of philosophical knowledge, of *all* philosophical knowledge.

We know that Pandora is Epimetheus's wife, that one day she disappeared, and that she is outside the piece, yet at the same time she is felt everywhere. Pandora is rejected by one titan (Prometheus) and loved by another (Epimetheus). Epimetheus places Pandora as a desired and impossible object, and furthermore as a mother (as Adorno does somewhat with Gretchen at the end of his text). In fact, Pandora is a mother, but maternity no longer concerns her. Why did she leave? Why does she not appear? Taking these questions seriously involves going beyond Pandora as an object desired by Epimetheus, it involves thinking of her from another perspective that is not Epimetheus's standpoint, in other words, from a point of view that is not only that of courtly love, which is always aimed towards the past or towards the future.

The play does not explain the reason why Pandora is not there, but the most fundamental aspect –about which no one has written– is that no one wonders why. She shares in the properties (the famous box), but we also do not know whether or not the gifts remain of interest to her. We only know of her what we are told, but something in her remains outside all those statements. In fact, when they refer to Pandora, they are speaking of themselves.

To conclude, perhaps, we would have to take the fact that Goethe could not finish the piece very seriously. It is said that it was due to a conflict among the publishers of *Prometheus*, the journal in which it was to be published. In my opinion, this was rather proof of the insurmountable difficulty that he encountered, the impossibility to give form to reconciliation. He possibly sought to write an allegory that brought together and put an end to the oppositions running throughout the piece, yet unwittingly, by leaving it unfinished, what he did is turn his piece into a symbolic one⁷⁶. How did that happen? By placing Pandora –a woman– between the “centre and absence”⁷⁷ of the piece, inexorably inching her towards the infinite.

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76 Machosky explains the difference between symbol and allegory in Goethe in Brenda Machosky, “Reconsidering Allegory and Symbol: Benjamin and Goethe”, in *Structures of Appearing: Allegory and the Work of Literature*, (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2012), 155-180.

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