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Offenbares Geheimnis (Open Secret)

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The phrase “offenbares Geheimnis” (open secret) is central and unique to Goethe’s thought. This was indicated for the first time by the Grimm dictionary (<https://woerterbuchnetz.de/?sigle=DWB&lemid=G04862>), which labels it “ein Göthen beliebter unentbehrlicher begriff” (a concept that is dear and indispensable to Goethe) and quotes several occurrences of it in Goethe’s corpus. Linguistically, it is an oxymoron, that is, a syntagm juxtaposing two contradictory ideas. It comprises “offenbar” (open, evident), an adjective qualifying what is to the highest degree open, evident, clear —“ein verstärktes offen” (a reinforced open), according to the Grimms (<https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=O00980>)—and “Geheimnis,” a noun referring to something hidden, inaccessible, mysterious (the term translates “mysterium” in Luther’s Bible). “Open secret” thus refers to the paradoxical condition of what is simultaneously concealed and unconcealed. Goethe employs this phrase and other ones closely connected to it —“öffentliches Geheimniß” (public secret), “offenbares Räthsel” (open mystery), “geheimnißvoll offenbar” (secretly open)—in two primary senses: (1) “offenbares Geheimnis” indicates a secret that can cease (or has already ceased) to be a secret—a secret that is actually accessible to someone under certain conditions; (2) in a second, more radical sense, “offenbares Geheimnis” denotes a secret that cannot be definitively removed from its secrecy. Schematically, it could be said that this phrase can indicate either (1) an “*offenbares* Geheimnis” (*open* secret) or (2) an “offenbares *Geheimnis*” (*open secret*). The first meaning can refer to two rather distinct situations in Goethe’s writings. What provisionally prevents something from fully manifesting itself can be either (1.a) a deliberate act of concealment (a dissimulation, an encryption, an effort to keep something and/or someone in the dark) or (1.b) the opaque nature of what is hidden, which requires effort to be definitively brought to light. According to all these different meanings, “offenbares Geheimnis” can assume an epistemological (1.a), phenomenological (1.b) or ontological (2) value.

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Introduction

In the lyric *Harzreise im Winter* (1777; Winter Journey in the Harz), the mountain top of Brocken is defined as “geheimnißvoll offenbar.”¹ It is the first oxymoron of this kind to occur in Goethe’s texts. The reference is to its uncharted veins of metal, as Goethe makes explicit several years later (FA 1.21:137–38). From that first appearance, “offenbares Geheimnis,” together with its rarer synonymms, became a relatively common phrase in Goethe’s texts, with more than thirty occurrences up until 1831. This phrase is particularly crucial to the so-called *Spätwerk* (late work), as witnessed by the fact that the only essay extensively examining it with a historical-critical approach is limited to this period.² In the following entry, some coordinates will be provided about how this phrase may have entered Goethe’s vocabulary. Secondly, the several meanings attached to it will be distinguished. As will be shown, a certain evolution is visible between the earlier and the later Goethe, especially with respect to “open secrets” in the realm of nature. Around the years of his first Italian journey (1786–88), Goethe speaks of “offenbare Geheimnisse” mainly to indicate inconspicuous phenomena that require careful consideration on the part of the observer but will—or at least potentially can—manifest themselves fully (1.b). In the later years, conversely, the same phrase refers to something that, while manifesting itself to some degree, still remains inaccessible (2). In fact, this shift occurs in parallel with a broader change in tone in Goethe’s scientific thought, which increasingly registers that “idea” and “experience” can only harmonize symbolically.

The Origin of the Phrase “offenbares Geheimnis” in Goethe’s Writings

While little attention has been paid to this phrase in general, even less has been devoted to the circumstances of its inception in Goethe’s vocabulary. The first time Goethe speaks *verbatim* of an “offenbares Geheimnis” is in a letter to Charlotte von Stein dated October 1, 1781. On that letter, he reports having seen a show with this title in Leipzig in the previous days: “In Leipzig hab ich das Offenbaare Geheimniß gesehen” (WA 4.5:199; In Leipzig I saw the Open Secret). Goethe transcribes the title incorrectly (it should have been “Das öffentliche Geheimniß”), which refers in either case to Friedrich Wilhelm Gotter’s adaptation of the Italian comedy *Il pubblico segreto* (1769; The Public Secret) by Carlo Gozzi.³

The hypothesis that this title could be the source of Goethe’s phrase is questioned by the Grimm dictionary, which points out that the poem *Harzreise im Winter* chronologically precedes his attendance of the show.⁴ In a 1958 article, however, Joseph Slater tried to support this thesis once again on the basis

that the comedy's title could have been known to Goethe in at least two other ways. He may have known about it either in 1776 through the *Gothaische Gelehrte Zeitung*, which "announced the projected publication in five volumes of a German translation of Gozzi," including *Das öffentliche Geheimnis*, or on October 25, 1777, when, according to his *Tagebuch* (FA 2.2:107), he spent an evening at Herzog Carl August's house with "Spiel und Vorlesen von Gozzi" (play and readings from Gozzi), possibly involving excerpts from that comedy.⁵

In any event, conjecturing a derivation of the phrase from the title of Gozzi's work, albeit possible, is not indispensable. Goethe often resorts to paradoxes in his writing, and thus, he could well have combined these terms on his own initiative—the same way he combined "ernst" (serious) and "Scherze" (joke), "willig" (willing) and "gezwungen" (forced), "eins" (one) and "doppelt" (double) elsewhere.⁶ Moreover, if a source is to be pinpointed at all costs, at least another one could be considered. Long before it became the core idea of a comedy, the idea of a mystery which is at the same time manifest is the core of Christian theology. In the Lutheran translation of the Pauline epistles, in particular, the semantic fields of the "Geheimnis" (secret, mystery) and that of the "Offenbarung" (revelation) are oxymoronically juxtaposed on several occasions.⁷ The hypothesis that "offenbares Geheimnis" may have a biblical inspiration, albeit a purely suggestive one, could be corroborated by the fact that, in a passage from *Faust II* in which this phrase occurs (FA 1.7/1:393.10093–94: "ein offenbar Geheimnis wolverwahrt / und wird nur spät den Völkern offenbart," I have disclosed a mystery, one long concealed and only recently revealed to all the world),⁸ Goethe explicitly references Eph. 6:12; in fact, a few verses later, Paul invites us to pray so that he will "fearlessly make known (*kundmachen*) the mystery (*Geheimnis*) of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19).

Regardless of the philological question of the precise origin of this phrase, some interaction arguably exists between the Christian revelation of the divine mystery and Goethe's 'open secret,' as demonstrated by Goethe's frequent use of this phrase to speak of the manifestation of the divine.⁹

“Offenbares Geheimnis” as Deliberate Concealment (1.a)

What is ordinarily meant by "open secret" corresponds to the meaning that has been labeled "1.a": it refers to the epistemological condition of something that is (or can be) known, despite someone's will to hide it. This meaning (which is perfectly captured by the Italian phrase "segreto di Pulcinella" [Pulcinella's secret]) is the one implied in Gozzi's comedy and is rather common in Goethe's writings as well. In this sense, *offenbare Geheimnisse* can describe the precarious secrets between Adelaide and Weislingen in *Götz von Berlichingen* (1804; WA 1.13,2:301), the announced siege of Mainz of 1792 (FA 1.16:582), as well as the anticipated marriage of Princess Augusta to Prince Wilhelm von Preussen (FA 2.11:73). In the drama *Die natürliche Tochter* (1803; The Natural Daughter), Goethe attributes to the figure of the Count very lucid words on the stubborn human love for dissimulation, which is often at the root of this kind of *Geheimnis*:

Es ist einer grillenhafter Zug,
Daß wir durch Schweigen das Geschehene
Für uns und andre zu vernichten glauben. (FA 1.6:308.187–92)

It is a curious and absurd conceit
That we through silence can annihilate
For others or ourselves the deeds we do.

Even when the truth emerges or is about to emerge, lying (or maintaining silence) enables the liar to live in a reassuring "as if" situation, which can easily substitute for an unbearable reality. In the drama, this is the case when the Duke desperately tries to keep the "offenbares Geheimnis" of his illegitimate daughter Eugenia in the dark. Treating what is patent as a secret makes it less threatening—its distance from manifestation, in a way, is perceived as distance from effectiveness.¹⁰

However, deliberately concealing something can also have different psychological or even sociological implications. In addition to being a form of consolation for a truth that one does not want to accept, it can be an occasion for a divertissement, as Goethe does not seem to ignore (FA 1.28:136–137), as well as an expression of modesty or discretion.¹¹ Anything that manifests itself in full sunlight risks being trivialized or, even worse, appearing trivial. Dissimulation is in this respect the virtue of lovers, such as Lenardo and Lieschen in the second version of the *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1829; Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years). Both are fearful of words or signs "wodurch der glückliche Fund nur allzubald in's Gemeine offenbar werden könnte" (FA 1.10:701; by which the happy discovery might all too soon be revealed to be something vulgar)¹² and therefore hesitate to put "das offenbare Geheimniß" (FA 1.10:708; the open secret) of their love into words. After all, as the character of Supervisor states in the same novel,

[g]ewissen Geheimnissen, und wenn sie offenbar wären, muß man durch Verhüllen und Schweigen Achtung erweisen, denn dieses wirkt auf Scham und gute Sitten (FA 1.10:416)

[c]ertain secrets, even if they could be explained, must be shown respect through veiling and silence, for this promotes modesty and good morals.

“Offenbares Geheimnis” as Inconspicuousness (1.b)

Not all provisional "open secrets" (1) imply an active attempt to veil or silence something (1.a). In some cases, an "offenbares Geheimnis" refers to something that manifests itself elusively or incompletely and can only be brought to light with an appropriate observational effort (1.b). In this case, "offenbares Geheimnis" no longer concerns (at least directly) the way that something is known but relates to the inconspicuous way that things themselves appear. Accordingly, it is not an epistemological concept but a phenomenological one. Sometimes, as far as this inconspicuousness is believed by Goethe to produce aesthetical pleasure, "offenbares Geheimnis" even takes on an aesthetical significance. In the latter case, an "offenbares Geheimnis" can refer to the successful symmetry of a painting (FA 1.15/1:488–89) or a work of architecture (FA 1.20:76). Of course, both a painting and a building are presented before one's eyes; yet, the way their forms are structured is not immediately legible to the onlooker. In nature, as well as in the art that skillfully imitates it, the relationships between the forms are so organic to the whole they compose that they remain "verheimlicht" (FA 1.15/1:488–89; hidden). Such inconspicuousness contributes to our perception of the work of art as faithful to the *logos* of nature and hence, at least in Goethe's terms, as beautiful.

As a matter of fact, this kind of "open secret" refers, first and foremost, to the world of natural phenomena. While constantly manifesting itself in an inexhaustible multiplicity of forms, nature does not readily reveal the laws governing them from the inside. That is why a *morphology* is primarily needed, whereby *logos* is always to be heard in close connection to *legein* (gathering, putting together). It is up to the morphologist to grasp these laws through careful and patient observation. Goethe very incisively compares the nature that is the object of his *theorein* —a nature similar to that of

Heraclitus in its love of “hiding” (DK B123)—to a treasure chest that can be uncovered by purifying experiences and bringing them together (FA 1.23/1:602). On the one hand, it can be said that the treasure chest is already there, and indeed, Goethe’s ideal of science shuns any abstruseness and abstraction according to the famous maxim, “man suche nur nichts hinter den Phänomenen; sie selbst sind die Lehre” (FA 1.13:49.I.308; let us not seek for something behind the phenomena: they themselves are the theory). On the other hand, this treasure chest is not fully manifest until it has been brought to light. From a Goethean perspective, conducting science means accessing the layers of the phenomenon that, precisely in their being the most intimate (*heimlich*) and fundamental, are inconspicuous (*Geheimnis*), and, therefore, must be dis-covered.

In the enthusiasm that accompanies the first decisive insights into the *Urpflanze* (original plant) during his first Italian journey and in the years immediately following that event, the metaphor of a “secret of nature” that has been revealed (or is about to be revealed) becomes particularly recurrent. In 1787, Goethe conveyed to Herder that he was “dem Geheimniß der Pflanzenzeugung und Organisation ganz nahe” (very close to the secret of the production and organization of plants) and that “es das einfachste ist, was nur gedacht werden kann” (FA 1.15/1:346; this was the simplest thing one could think of). Even more triumphantly, in 1790, he wrote in his diary that nature has “kein Geheimniß, was sie nicht irgendwo dem aufmerksamen Beobachter nackt vor die Augen stellt” (FA 1.17:20; no secrets that it does not somewhere present nakedly before the eyes of the attentive observer). In a similar vein, he wrote the following epigram in the same year:

Ist denn so groß das Geheimniß, was Gott und der Mensch und die Welt sei?
Nein! Doch niemand hört's gerne; da bleibt es geheim (FA 1.2:222.66)

Is it such a big secret what God, the human being and the world are?
No! But nobody likes listening to it, so it remains secret

As his notorious discussion with Schiller about the primordial plant shows (FA 1.24:436–37), the perspective of an “ideal” that would remain beyond the reach of our intellect is completely foreign to the younger Goethe. He sees the human senses and the objective world as fully congeneric. Thus, he considers the hiddenness of phenomena as a consequence of our insufficient attention to them or, at most, of the limits of the individual researcher (see FA 1.25:28–29). Potentially, nature is always wide open before the observer.

Later, Goethe increasingly admits irreducible elements of mystery within the phenomenal realm (see below). Even in a few later contexts, however, the phrase “offenbares Geheimnis” retains this reference to (mere) inconspicuousness. For instance, Goethe speaks of the “manifest secrets” of agriculture, of which farmers are said to be the keepers (FA 2.4:515). Moreover, he employs this paradoxical phrase to define two natural phenomena manifesting themselves in a particularly elusive way: that of atmospheric pressure, made visible by the barometer (WA 2.12:233), and that of entoptic colors, which occur only when light is polarized (FA 1.2:505–06; WA 4.49:348).

Writings as “offenbare Geheimnisse”

The “offenbares Geheimnis,” in the sense of inconspicuousness (1.b), thus concerns *nature* and its successful mimesis, that is to say, good *art*. In both cases, forms, despite being visible as such, do not immediately reveal their immanent lawfulness. The latter remains in a sort of latency that requires effort to be accessed. Before examining the sense in which Goethe can also speak of an “offenbares Geheimnis” in a way that leaves the *Offenbarung* (revelation) of the *Geheimnis* an endless task, another problematic category of objects sometimes labeled with this phrase must be considered, namely, that of works and texts. According to Goethe, “offenbare Geheimnisse” are his scientific observations (FA 1.25:89; FA 2.7:561), as well as the *Wahlverwandtschaften* (Elective Affinities; FA 2.6:459), the *Farbenlehre* (Theory of Colours; FA 2.8:123), the third part of the *Italienische Reise* (Italian Journey; WA 4.50:60), and *Faust* (FA 2.11:396–97). Ultimately, the entirety of his work must be considered an open secret, as stated in a letter to Friedrich August Wolf dated September 28, 1811: “Was ich treibe, ist immer ein offenbares Geheimniß” (FA 2.6:704; What I do is always an open secret). This particular—poetological—use of this expression deserves an attentive focus.

First, writings can be “open secrets” in the “1.a” (epistemological) sense. The author may want to deliberately make them less intelligible (or even completely unintelligible) to an audience that is considered unworthy of receiving them. This applies not only to Goethe but also, for instance, to Galileo Galilei, who resorted to an ingenious strategy to preserve the priority of a discovery that he did not want to disclose. Specifically, as recalled in the essay *Erfinden und Entdecken* (1817; Inventing and Discovering), Galileo hid “seine Erfindung anagrammatisch in lateinische Verse, die er sogleich bekannt machte um sich im Falle ohne weiteres dieses öffentlichen Geheimnisses bedienen zu können (FA 1.25:38; his invention anagrammatically in Latin verses, which he immediately publicized to be able to use this public secret without further ado if needed). As for Goethe himself, Marlis Helene Mehra has shown not only that he was always reticent in disseminating his works but also that he used to hide multiple references and reading plans within them—the exemplary case being that of the *Wahlverwandtschaften*.¹³ After all, a certain degree of elitism was (notoriously) not foreign to Goethe, who explicitly dreams about a world where the truth remains closed in academic circles (FA 2.6:708). In the *Nachträge der Farbenlehre* (1822–23; Supplements to the Theory of Colours), he even transcribes a long reflection from Roger Bacon’s *Epistola de secretis operibus artis et naturae* (Letter on the Secret Works of Art and Nature) on why the intellectual should hide the fruits of his/her genius from most people. “Rerum minuit majestatem, qui divulgat mystica” (He who divulges the mysteries diminishes the majesty of things). Indeed, “vulgus deridet et negligit secreta sapientiae, et nescit uti rebus dignissimis” (WA 2.5/1:401–2; the common people have always ignored and laughed at the secrets of wisdom, and they do not know how to use the worthiest things). Although Goethe notes that this warning may sound strange in a time when “nichts geheim bleiben, sondern alles öffentlich ausgesprochen und verhandelt werden soll” (WA 2.5/1:403; nothing shall remain secret, but everything is to be spoken and discussed publicly), he still deems the distinction between an “esoteric” and an “exoteric” discourse of paramount importance (FA 2.6:708).

Thus, the *obscuritas* of writing that Goethe proudly claims in calling his works “offenbare Geheimnisse” is in a first sense related to his desire to protect them from the profanations of the hasty and occasional reader. However, something different and deeper is also at stake, as the quote from Bacon suggests. Delivering the mysteries to a dimension of publicity and transparency means “diminishing the majesty of things.” The latter does not demand for itself religious silence, which would close the intellectual enterprise in a sort of agnosticism, but still a saying of a particular kind, that recognizes obscurity and silence as its integral parts. From this perspective, producing “open secrets” does not so much mean deliberately encrypting content that could be said plainly but striving to say what is great and in itself mysterious in the only way that is appropriate to it. “Manches unserer Erfahrungen,” writes Goethe in a letter in 1827, “[läßt] nicht rund aussprechen und direct mittheilen” (FA 2.10:548; Some of our experiences cannot be expressed roundly and communicated directly).

The language of narrowly conceived prose, aiming to provide unambiguity and plain understandability, cannot aspire to reveal the majestic mystery of

things. Elsewhere, Goethe states this explicitly, establishing a dualism between everyday language, which serves ordinary purposes and always remains on the surface, and a language of depth, which he does not hesitate to define as “poetic” and which could well be called the language of the “open secret”:

Im gemeinen Leben kommen wir mit der Sprache nothdürftig fort, weil wir nur oberflächliche Verhältnisse bezeichnen. Sobald von tiefern Verhältnissen die Rede ist, tritt sogleich eine andre Sprache ein, die poetische. (FA 1.13:193.II.62.4)¹⁴

In everyday life, we barely get by with language as we only describe superficial relationships. As soon as deeper relations are at stake, another language enters: poetic language.

By “poetic language,” Goethe refers not to a literary genre punctuated by verses and rhymes but to a creative (*poietic*) form of expression that relinquishes any aspiration for transparency without, at same time, closing itself off in abstruse mysticism and apophysis. Beyond the open secrets that are Goethe’s works, this language—one that relies on hints, evocations, and allusions—speaks in texts by authors such as Calderón and Shakespeare (FA 2.9:259; FA 1.19:639; FA 2.7:29). The inexhaustibility of meaning that emanates from their pages corresponds to the *Unergründlichkeit* (FA 2.7:29; unfathomableness) of the world they strive to penetrate. Far from being only the outcome of a claimed elitism, the obscurity of language is for Goethe—at least from a certain point on—also a constitutive expressive need. The renunciation to univocity is urged by the encounter with a secret that can never stop being such—with an “open secret,” therefore, in the sense labeled “2.”

“Offenbares Geheimnis” as Ultimately Impenetrable Phenomenon (2)

A soliloquy by Faust in *Faust I* suggests that nature, however manifest (“am lichten Tag,” in broad daylight), is impenetrable in its essence:

Geheimnisvoll am lichten Tag
Läßt sich Natur des Schleiers nicht berauben,
Und was sie deinem Geist nicht offenbaren mag,
Das zwingst du ihr nicht ab mit Hebeln und mit Schrauben (FA 1.7/1:43.672–75)

Nature, mysterious in day’s clear light,
lets none remove her veil,
and what she won’t discover to your understanding
you can’t extort from her with levers and with screws.

These words have a clearly different intonation from those entrusted to the diary of 1790, according to which nature has “kein Geheimniß, was sie nicht irgendwo dem aufmerksamen Beobachter nackt vor die Augen stellt” (FA 1.17:20; no secrets that it does not somewhere present nakedly before the eyes of the attentive observer). The rediscovery of the “lost enchantment of nature”¹⁵ that resonates in them and is constant throughout Goethe’s scientific research is colored with a sense of failure and impotence that might initially be attributed to the peculiarity of Faust’s character.

Upon closer inspection, the idea that nature hosts ultimately impenetrable secrets recurs in Goethe’s later work, and perhaps it is no coincidence that the above-cited verses make their first appearance in the 1808 Cotta edition.¹⁶ As a matter of fact, since 1790 and increasingly clearly until the *Hefte zur Morphologie* (1817–1824; Notebooks on Morphology), Goethe’s deepening theoretical reflection on natural science—not secondarily stimulated by the confrontation with Kant’s philosophy—leads to a change in the general tenor of his view of nature. The encounter between man and nature, which he had previously taken “mit unbewußter Naivetät” (FA 1.24:443, with unconscious naivety), starts to appear more and more problematic. A text like *Bedenken und Ergebung* (1818; Doubt and Resignation) is paradigmatic in this regard:

Endlich finden wir, bei redlich fortgesetzten Bemühungen, daß der Philosoph [d.h., Kant] wohl möchte Recht haben, welcher behauptet, daß keine Idee der Erfahrung völlig congruiren, aber wohl zugeht, daß Idee und Erfahrung analog sein können, ja müssen. (FA 1.24:449)

Finally, with honestly continued efforts, we find that the philosopher [i.e., Kant] may well be right when he claims that no idea is completely congruent with experience but admits that idea and experience can, indeed must, be analogous.

While not denying their fundamental communicability and analogy at all, Goethe begins to think of subject and object as two “infinities” that exceed each other (FA 1.24:389). From this new perspective, nature is no longer simply the immediate and familiar dimension in which the subject is immersed. Instead, it becomes something that indefinitely resists understanding. Accordingly, the “open secrets” of nature are no longer inconspicuous phenomena that can be progressively cleared by a sufficiently careful and trained gaze (as they were at the time of the Italian journey) but become mysteries that must be “calmly revered” (FA 1.13:240) in their impenetrability.¹⁷

Goethe thus comes to speak of open *secrets* (2) in a more radical, ontological sense. During a conversation with Johann Peter Eckermann in October 1827, right after defining the cuckoo “eine höchst problematische Natur, ein offenbares Geheimniß” (a highly problematic creature, an open secret), he suggests what it is that eludes human comprehension despite being in some way manifest in the phenomenon:

Wir stecken in lauter Wundern, und das Letzte und Beste der Dinge ist uns verschlossen. [. . .] Alle diese äußern Dinge liegen klar vor uns wie der Tag, aber ihr inneres geistiges Band ist uns verschlossen (FA 2.12:640–41)

We are surrounded by wonders, and the ultimate and best part of things is inaccessible to us. [. . .] All these external things are before us as clear as day, but their inner spiritual bond is inaccessible to us.

This crucial reference to the inner spiritual bond of things becomes clearer when juxtaposed with another conversation with Eckermann on August 2, 1830. On that occasion, Goethe defines the inability to feel (*empfinden*) “das Athmen des Geistes” (FA 2.12:727; the breath of the spirit) as the supreme lack of the modern scientific method. The spirit, which can only be felt (*empfunden*), coordinates the *disiecta membra* of nature in that it “jedem Theile die Richtung vorschreibt und jede Ausschweifung durch ein inwohnendes Gesetz bändigt oder sanktionirt” (prescribes to every part its direction, and orders, or sanctions, every deviation, by means of an inherent law). As Goethe significantly adds, feeling this spirit is like casting a glance (*Blick*) in the “geheimnisvolle Werkstatt Gottes” (mysterious workshop of God).

The two conversations concurrently indicate that, for the late Goethe, the dimension that is both hinted at and withdrawn in every manifestation is that of the divine unity of phenomena. If the more or less conventional Spinozism of the young as well as mature Goethe embraced the principle *Deus sive natura* and, therefore, conceived the divine as something whose inconspicuousness is revealed along with every natural phenomenon, the Spinozism of the later Goethe inclines towards an increasingly marked form of pantheism, according to which God, while still revealing himself in phenomena, keeps himself behind them (FA 2.12:308). God is the unifying principle from which phenomena proceed (FA 2.12:308), the “ewige und einzige Idee”

(eternal and singular Idea) that manifests itself in everything but that nobody can fully become aware or speak of (FA 1.13:124.II.14.1). As Goethe writes in 1825 at the very beginning of his *Versuch einer Witterungslehre* (Essay on Meteorology),

Das Wahre, mit dem Göttlichen identisch, läßt sich niemals von uns direct erkennen, wir schauen es nur im Abglanz, im Beispiel, Symbol, in einzelnen und verwandten Erscheinungen; wir werden es gewahr als unbegreifliches Leben und können dem Wunsch nicht entsagen, es dennoch zu begreifen. (FA 1.25:274)

The True, identical to the Divine, can never be recognized directly by us; we see it only in the reflection, in the example, in the symbol, in single and joint appearances; we become aware of it as elusive life and we cannot give up the desire to grasp it anyway.

A *terminus ante quem* to mark this change of intonation in Goethe's philosophy of nature—which, as stated, starts with the philosophical problematization of the subject-object nexus in the last decade of the 18th century—is arguably the conversation with Friedrich Wilhelm Riemer on August 2, 1807 (FA 2.6:217–18). Here, Goethe alludes to an “Einen an sich” (FA 2.6:218; One in itself) that the human being, anchored in the irreducibly anthropomorphic perspective of multiplicity, would be completely unable to talk about.

Alle Philosophie über die Natur bleibt nur Anthropomorphismus [. . .] Was er [d.h., der Mensch] von der Natur ausspricht, das ist etwas, d. h. es ist etwas Reales, es ist ein Wirkliches, nämlich in Bezug auf ihn. Aber was er ausspricht, das ist nicht alles, es ist nicht die ganze Natur, er spricht nicht die Totalität derselben aus. [. . .] Wir sollten nicht von Dingen an sich reden, sondern von dem Einen an sich. Dinge sind nur nach menschlicher Ansicht, die ein verschiedenes und mehreres setzt. Es ist alles nur Eins; aber von diesem Einen an sich zu reden, wer vermag es? (FA 2.6:217–18)

All philosophies of nature remain mere anthropomorphism [. . .] What man expresses of nature is something, that is, it is something real, it is an actual reality, and it is so in relation to him. But what he expresses is not all, it is not all of nature; he does not express the totality of nature. [. . .] We should not speak of things in themselves but of the One in itself. Things are only according to the human point of view, which posits difference and multiplicity. All things are only One; but who is able to speak of this One in itself?

This inexpressible “One in itself” possesses a peculiar phenomenological status. On the one hand, it is not a completely unattainable mystery. This makes it unlike the God of the monotheistic traditions and, most importantly, the God hidden by nature (FA 1.17:246) described by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, against whose *Von den Göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung* (1811; On Divine Things and Their Revelation) Goethe had bitterly polemicized.¹⁸ At the same time, it is not a mystery that can reveal itself once and for all. The One is delivered to the realm of finiteness and transiency in the form of an *Abglanz* (reflection—a keyword both in *Faust* [FA 1.7/1:206.4727] and the *Divan* [FA 1.3/1:99–100]) or a *Gleichnis* (analogy; a crucial term at the end of *Faust II*, FA 1.7/1:12104–5).

In the double sense of the word, the phenomenal world “betrays” the One: it is invariably different from it and, therefore, invariably inadequate to express it fully, and yet it opens to it and reveals it to the only extent in which this is possible. In this specific sense, the late Goethe considers the divine manifesting itself in the manifoldness of nature as an “open secret.”

Probably no occurrence attests to this meaning of “offenbares Geheimnis” as succinctly as the one of the *West-östlicher Divan* (1819; West-Eastern Divan). Here, the phrase figures as the title of a lyric dedicated to the Persian poet Šamsu al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfeẓ (FA 1.3/1:32–33), whose *Dīwān*—translated by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall¹⁹—was the fundamental stimulus of Goethe's *Divan*. In this lyric, Ḥāfeẓ, “ohne fromm zu sein, selig” (FA 1.3/1:33; blissful, without being pious), is praised by Goethe for his experience of the divine, which is profoundly in tune with his own:²⁰ he is a mystic not in the sense that he seeks his God in an ascetic flight from the world, but rather in the sense that he finds his peculiar path to Him in an intense, ecstatic immersion in the “majesty” of sensuousness. His polychrome universe, made of wine, banquets, and earthly loves in which God suddenly and fleetingly glimmers, is placed on that border between the sensuous and supersensuous that is so dear and familiar to the late Goethe. As Friedrich Gundolf observed, in Ḥāfeẓ's poetry, “die Erscheinungen, wie sehr immer Gleichnisse, [waren] für ihn nicht entwertet und aufgehoben”²¹ (the phenomena, while remaining images of something else, [were] not devalued or overcome). On the contrary, they were valued as the place of manifestation of a divine whose face remained in itself unreachable.

“Offenbares Geheimnis” thus identifies the experience establishing a sympathetic link between the two poets: the paradoxical experience of phenomena in which something that cannot be fully seen announces itself. In the lyric that bears this title, however, “offenbares Geheimnis” is also a reference to a precise way of writing in which this experience is reported, which leads us back to the poetological implications of this concept in its late usage.

Ḥāfeẓ's poetry is an “open secret” in that it is ambiguous, oblique and offers multiple levels of reading and understanding. His *obscuritas*, like that of Goethe's later works, is not an extrinsic stylistic preference. Preserving the original richness of the words is rather a necessity for a language wishing to preserve the original theophanic richness of phenomena. “[E]in Wort [gilt] nicht einfach” (FA 1.3/1:33; A word is not valid univocally), reads the lyric that immediately follows *Offenbar Geheimnis* in the *Divan*, significantly titled *Wink* (Hint). The notion of “hint” vividly epitomizes the transformation of language that theophany calls for: the word must give up any conventional rigidity to open up to something as elusive and unobjectifiable as the *offenbares Geheimnis* of the divine in nature.

To invoke a conceptual pair very dear to the late Goethe, the language of the “open secret” relies on the symbol much more than on the allegory. It is an *essentially enigmatic* language in which every ambiguity corresponds (as in the allegory, see FA 1.13: 207.II.72.1) not to an arbitrary and always decipherable diffraction but to the infinite effectiveness and ultimate unattainability of what is intended in it: “Die Symbolik verwandelt die Erscheinung in Idee, die Idee in ein Bild, und so, daß die Idee im Bild immer unendlich wirksam und unerreichbar bleibt und, selbst in allen Sprachen ausgesprochen, doch unaussprechlich bliebe” (FA 1.13:207.II.72.2; Symbolism transforms the appearance into an idea, the idea into an image, and does so in such a way that the idea always remains infinitely operational and unattainable in the image and that even if it was expressed in all languages, it would still remain inexpressible). As Goethe puts it in the *Farbenlehre* (1810; Theory of Colours) when speaking of the ancient Greeks' recourse to poetry, the symbolic language provides a convenient and useful “dritte[r] Ort außerhalb des Gegenstandes” (FA 1.23:597; third place outside the object) whereby the observer is somehow allowed to chase the “Unerklärliche” (inexplicable). However, the chase of the symbol is endless: “was man ergreifen will, sogleich wieder entwischt” (what you want to grasp immediately slips away again).

Eventually, the peculiar link between “the majesty of things” and the “offenbares Geheimnis” of writing becomes visible. The inexpressible experience of the “offenbares Geheimnis” as an ultimately impenetrable phenomenon (B) *grounds* and *claims* the “open secret” of a symbolic, inexhaustibly significant writing. The infinite effort to say corresponds to the call of the infinitely (un)sayable.

In the many studies juxtaposing Goethe’s understanding of nature to 20th-century phenomenology,ⁱ the notion of an “open secret” has received barely any attention. Still, it could be argued that the paradoxical entanglement of appearance and non-appearance captured by this phrase is precisely what makes phenomenology both possible and necessary. This is pointed out particularly clearly by Martin Heidegger in some quasi-Goethean lines at the beginning of *Being and Time*:

Essentially, nothing else stands “behind” the phenomena of phenomenology. Nevertheless, what is to become a phenomenon can be concealed. And precisely because phenomena are initially and for the most part *not* given phenomenology is needed. Being covered up is the counter-concept to “phenomenon.”ⁱⁱ

Heidegger’s insistence on the intertwining of concealment and unconcealment is remarkable and constant throughout his entire intellectual path. As a matter of fact, Husserl’s pupil remained strongly committed to this idea even after abandoning the title of phenomenology for his own thinking in the 1930s, as witnessed by his effort to recover the Greek comprehension of truth as *a-letheia* (un-concealment). To some extent, it was in fact a more radical (ontological) understanding of the “open secret” of phenomena—“[w]o Offenbarkeit, da zugleich Verborgenheit”ⁱⁱⁱ ([w]here there is evidence, there is also concealedness)—that urged him to leave behind the way of phenomenology (at least temporarily).

His famous “Kehre” (turn) to the meditation on Being can indeed be read as a transition within his conception of the “inapparent” (for which Heidegger has many names: die Verdecktheit, das Verborgene, das Unscheinbare) from what I have labeled “1” (epistemological, phenomenological) to “2” (ontological). Whereas his early phenomenological/transcendental approach could aim at a progressively complete dis-covering of it, his later intuition of Being involved the renunciation to any anthropocentric faith in the definitive grasp of phenomena. From this point of view, Heidegger’s thought has an evolution similar to that of Goethe.

To observe his later position, it is particularly instructive to look at those few passages in which the later (i.e., post-*Kehre*) Heidegger resorts to the notion of “open secret.” The most important of them may be the 1943/44 lecture course on Parmenides. Here, polemizing against the modern “will toward the unconditional ‘residuelessness’ of all procedure and all organizing,”^{iv} Heidegger restates the importance of “letting the concealedness alone in its appearance”:

The secret in the mystery is a kind of concealment characterized by its insignificance in virtue of which the mystery is an open one. We readily misuse the term “open secret” or “open mystery” and apply it to the situation where there is precisely nothing secret or mysterious at all but where what is already known by everyone is not supposed to be brought into the open [1.a]. The “open mystery” in the genuine and strict sense, on the contrary, occurs where the concealing of the mysterious is simply experienced as concealedness and is lodged in a historically arisen reticence [2]. The openness of the open mystery does not consist in solving the mystery, thus destroying it, but consists in not touching the concealedness of the simple and essential and letting this concealedness alone in its appearance. (Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 63; notes in brackets are mine)

By adopting the phrase “offenbare Geheimnisse” for the matter of his thinking, Heidegger is rejecting what he views as the ordinary interpretation of it—namely, that which has so far been labeled “1.a”—and instead is advocating the idea of a mystery that cannot be touched, precisely in the sense so far named “2.” The movement from the domain of the ontic, in which the long tradition of Western metaphysics dwells, to that of the ontological, which he is trying to bring back to light, is precisely the movement from the preoccupation with the causal interrelatedness of phenomena—which is always, at least potentially, accessible—to the wonder before the appearing of phenomena in itself—which is and remains mysterious.

In the words of his two texts on Johann Peter Hebel from 1956, in which two more mentions of the phrase occur, it is a matter of restoring the “Berechenbarkeit und Technik der Natur in das offene Geheimnis einer neu erfahrenen Natürlichkeit der Natur”^v (calculating and technological approach to nature into the open secret of a newly experienced naturalness of nature), that is to say, of establishing the “Ortschaft, an der alle Bezirke des heutigen Vorstellens und Sagens [. . .] vom offenen Geheimnis dessen durchwaltet wird [sic], daß das Seiende ist und nicht nichts”^{vi} (place in which all the regions of today’s representing and speaking [. . .] are dominated by the open mystery, that there are beings and not nothing). Heidegger makes very clear that accepting this kind of thinking involves a jump out of the metaphysical/technical account of the world (which essentially refuses ultimate boundaries) into a different *Stimmung*, which he calls “openness to the mystery.”^{vii}

Before the *Dasein*, this mystery can then appear either unsettling, overwhelming, and towering or reassuring, welcoming, and embracing. Accordingly, the type B “offenbares Geheimnis” could be further specified into two subcases: the “unheimliches” (B.1) and the “heimliches” (B.2) “offenbares Geheimnis.” The last Heidegger was more inclined to see the latter, whereas the Heidegger of the 1930s and 1940s is more familiar with the former. But this is beyond the scope of the current analysis.

What is much more interesting to note here is that this striking convergence between Goethe and Heidegger in their way of looking at the recesses of phenomena remains mostly implicit in the philosopher’s writings to the point that Heidegger does not mention his precursor’s name even when resorting to the notion of “open secret.” As a matter of fact, not only was he hostile towards Goethe as a poet—arguably the epochal opposition between Goethe and Hölderlin played a role in this—but, even more surprisingly, in the central years of his thought (ca. 1930–1950), he also showed some distrust towards Goethe as a scientist, whom he linked to the tradition of metaphysical thought.^{viii}

It was almost only the last Heidegger (1950–1976) who learned to appreciate Goethe—notably, through his confrontation with the *Maximen und Reflexionen* (1833; Maxims and Reflections) and the *Farbenlehre* (1810; Theory of Colours). In these years, Heidegger finally realizes and admits that Goethe’s delicate, non-subjectivist and non-representational way of seeing was in many respects in harmony with his own. Expectably, many of the passages where the figure of Goethe is re-evaluated deal precisely with the belonging together of appearance and non-appearance.

In the *Black Notebooks* of the 1950s, for instance, Heidegger quotes a few verses from *Pandora* about this belonging together (WA 1.50:343.1049–51; Worthy and beautiful things descend, / First hidden, to become apparent, / Apparent, in order to hide themselves again) to show that Goethe “glimpsed something of the movement of the Event.”^{ix} In some unpublished notes of the 1970s, moreover, he even goes so far as to credits Goethe’s concept of *Urphänomen* (primordial/original phenomenon) with having pointed out the threshold of the phenomenal world and having allowed a glimpse of appearance itself in its bordering on *lêthe*.^x

Finally, during the Zähringen seminar of 1973, Heidegger mentions Goethe and Parmenides as heralds of a tautological thinking capable of seeing the inconspicuousness of Being shining through the shining of beings themselves.^{xi} Right after this mention, Heidegger seems to rehabilitate the notion of phenomenology, which he had abandoned for a long time, rephrasing in very Goethean terms:

[P]henomenology is a path that leads away to come before [. . .], and it lets that before which it is led show itself. This phenomenology is a phenomenology of the inapparent. (Heidegger, “Seminar in Zähringen 1973,” 80)

If the phenomenology of the early Heidegger seemed to implicitly speak the language of the “open secret,” the return to the phenomenology of the very last Heidegger occurs precisely, perhaps not by chance, under the sign of Goethe. In a way, it could be said that Goethe’s presence in Heidegger is itself an “offenbares Geheimnis.”

i. The first attempt in this direction was made by Fritz Heinemann, “Goethe’s Phenomenological Method,” *Philosophy* 33 (1934): 67–81. His conclusions on the similarities and dissimilarities between Goethe’s and Husserl’s methods have been thoroughly reassessed by Eva-Maria Simms, “Goethe und die Phänomenologie. Weltanschauung, Methode und Naturphilosophie,” in *Morphologie und Moderne*, edited by Jonas Maatsch (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014): 177–194). See also Hennigfeld, *Goethe’s Phenomenological Way* and Laurent Van Eynde, *La libre raison du phénomène* (Paris: Vrin, 1998).↵

ii. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 31.↵

iii. Heidegger, “Die Gegenwärtige Lage und die künftige Aufgabe der deutschen Philosophie,” in *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000): 316–334: here 327.↵

iv. Heidegger, *Parmenides*, translated by André Schuwer and Richard Rojchewicz (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1992), 63.↵

v. Heidegger, “Rede auf Hebel (9. Mai 1956 in Lörrach),” in *Reden und andere Zeugnisse*: 534–45, here 544.↵

vi. Heidegger, “Zu Hebel. Der Hausfreund (Entwurf, nicht vorgetragen, Mai 1956),” in *Reden und andere Zeugnisse*: 546–48, here 548.↵

vii. Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, by John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1996), 12.↵

viii. For a general overview of Heidegger’s *Auseinandersetzung* with Goethe, see Sebastian Kaufmann, *Heidegger liest Goethe: Ein vielstimmiges «Zwiesgespräch» (ca. 1910-1976)* (Heidelberg: Schriften der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2019).↵

ix. Heidegger, *Vigiliae und Notturmo. Schwarze Hefte 1952/53 bis 1957* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2020), 220.↵

x. See Heidegger, *Auszüge zur Phänomenologie aus dem Manuskript “Vermächtnis der Seinsfrage”* (Jahresgabe 2011/12 der Martin-Heideggers-Gesellschaft, 2012). I have commented both this text and the passage from the *Black Notebooks* at length in my Alberto Merzari, “Sulle soglie dell’apparente: l’ultimo Heidegger (1950-1976) lettore di Goethe.” *Heidegger Studies* 39 (2024) [forthcoming].↵

Conclusion

The oxymoron "offenbares Geheimnis" may have entered Goethe's vocabulary through the German adaptation of Carlo Gozzi's comedy *Il pubblico segreto*, even if more or less direct biblical echoes must have also played a role. In its relatively numerous occurrences in Goethe's corpus, this phrase takes on two distinct fundamental meanings. On the one hand (1), "offenbares Geheimnis" points to a secret that is secret only temporarily or from a specific perspective. This is the case for secrets that are voluntarily kept out of disdain or modesty (1.a), but this is also the case of those inconspicuous phenomena that need to be carefully examined to fully come to light (1.b). In the latter sense, the phrase gains phenomenological significance and epitomizes Goethe's conception of nature in the years immediately following his first journey to Italy. On the other hand (2), "open secret" can ontologically refer to a secret that, albeit manifest, is destined to remain at least partly impenetrable. It has been said that the late Goethe tends to conceive nature in these terms, notably as far as the presence of God in it is concerned, and that this account of the God-Nature nexus led to his poetic twinship with Ḥāfez in the *Divan*.

Finally, some attention has been devoted to Goethe's poetological definitions of some of his works as "offenbare Geheimnisse." This case has been partly traced to meaning "1" and partly to meaning "2." His works are "open secrets" both in the sense that he aristocratically despises a too-open and immediate disclosure of his material and in the sense that—especially as regards the *Spätwerke*—his writing resorts to an obscure symbolic language to speak of truths that manifest themselves elusively.

All these meanings and constant re-significations present a complex picture of Goethe's intellectual journey. From the first naive steps in which the communion between man and nature is taken for granted, up to that old age which he eloquently defines as a "stufenweises Zurücktreten aus der Erscheinung" (FA 1.13:270; gradual receding from appearance) and which becomes more inclined to see the infinite depth of knowledge, Goethe always relies on the phrase "offenbares Geheimnis" to express his ways of seeing the paradoxical world of phenomena.

A scene of the cryptic and variously interpreted story entitled *Das Märchen* (1795; Fairytale)—which also chronologically lies on the border between these two phases—beautifully pays tribute to the centrality of this concept to Goethe's meditation:

Indessen sagte der goldne König zum Manne: Wie viel Geheimnisse weißt du? — Drei, versetzte der Alte. — Welches ist das wichtigste? fragte der silberne König. — Das offendenbare, versetzte der Alte. (FA 1.9:1089)

Meanwhile, the gold King said to the Man, "How many secrets do you know?" "Three," replied the old Man. "Which is the most important?" asked the silver King. "The open one," replied the old man.

The open secret is "das wichtigste" (the most important). Even if the story's context does not provide arguments for this claim, what has been said so far makes it easy to guess why. Between the secret that does not manifest itself at all and the crystalline phenomenon that has no secret to hide—two situations characterized by a symmetrical, albeit opposite, barrenness—"offenbares Geheimnis" defines that ridge between appearance and non-appearance that represents, throughout its length, the natural place of Goethe's contemplative thinking.

1. Whenever it is possible, works by Goethe are cited according to the Frankfurt edition (hereafter: FA): Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, eds. Hendrik Birus, Dieter Borchmeyer, Karl Eibl, et. al., 40 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987–2013), 1.1:324. Texts that are not in this edition are cited according to the Weimar edition (hereafter: WA): Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Goethes Werke*, ed. im Auftrage der Großherzogin Sophie von Sachsen, 4 Abteilungen, 133 vols. in 143 parts (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1887–1919). ↵

2. See Marlis Helene Mehra, *Die Bedeutung der Formel 'Offenbares Geheimnis' in Goethes Spätwerk* (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz Akademischer Verlag, 1982). ↵

3. The Italian comedy was an adaptation of an earlier Spanish comedy by Calderón de la Barca titled *El secreto a voces* (1640; The Secret in Words). ↵

4. See entry for "Geheimnis" in *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 5: columns 2360 ff. <https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=G04862> (<https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=G04862>), accessed September 26, 2023. ↵

5. See Joseph Slater, "Goethe, Carlyle and the Open Secret," *Anglia* 76 (1958): 422–26. ↵

6. On Goethe's paradoxes, an on the paradox as a fundamental structure of his thinking, see Robert Ellis Dye: "'Unmöglich ist's, drum eben glaubenswert:' Paradox in Goethe and Heidegger," *Seminar* 50 (2014): 413–35. ↵

7. See e.g., Eph. 3:3; Col. 1:26; 1 Tim. 3:16. In his theological writings, Luther places great emphasis on the paradoxical coincidence of the "deus revelatus" (revealed God) and the "deus absconditus" (hidden God). See e.g., Luther, "De servo arbitrio," in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 136 vols. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883–2009), 18: 685. See also Sasja Emilie Mathiasen Stopa, "'Seeking Refuge in God against God:' The Hidden God in Lutheran Theology and the Postmodern Weakening of God," *Open Theology* 4 (2018): 658–74. ↵

8. Translations from *Faust* are taken from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust with the Urfaust*, translated by David E. Wellbery (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994). ↵

9. A connection between Goethe's "offenbares Geheimnis" and the Christian concept of "geheime Offenbarung" is attempted by Martin Thurner, *Gott als das offenbare Geheimnis nach Nikolaus von Kues* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), in particular 15–19, as well as to some extent by Christian Clement, "'Offenbares Geheimnis' oder 'geheime Offenbarung'? Goethes Märchen und die Apokalypse," *Goethe Yearbook* 17 (2010): 239–57. ↵

10. In a way, this equation between manifestation and effectiveness can be traced to Goethe's (proto-)phenomenological thinking: "Man suche nur nichts hinter den Phänomenen; sie selbst sind die Lehre" (FA 1.13:49; Let us not seek for something behind the phenomena—they themselves are the theory). Here and elsewhere, translations from the scientific writings, unless otherwise noted, are taken from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Scientific Studies*, edited and translated by Douglas Miller (New York: Suhrkamp, 1988). See also Iris Hennigfeld, "Goethe's Phenomenological Way of Thinking and the Urphänomen," *Goethe Yearbook* 22 (2015): 143–67. ↵

11. In his dissertation on the notion of "offenbares Geheimnis," Kremer distinguishes between three different kinds of "discretion," according to whom/what it is oriented to: *Takt* (tact) (i.e., discretion towards others), *Scham* (shame) (i.e., discretion towards oneself) and *Behutsamkeit* (carefulness) (i.e., discretion towards things). See Paul Kremer, *'Offenbar Geheimnis': Ein Leitwort in Goethes Werken* (Düsseldorf, Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades der philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Düsseldorf, 1973), 2–3. ↵

12. Translations from *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years* are taken from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe: The Collected Works*, vol. 10: *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years, or The Renunciants*, translated by Krishna Winston (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989). ↵

13. See Mehra, *Die Bedeutung der Formel 'Offenbares Geheimnis'*, 24–33. ↵

14. See also the letter to Riemer of October 28, 1821: "Ich werde selbst fast des Glaubens, daß es der Dichtkunst vielleicht allein gelingen könne, solche Geheimnisse

gewissermaßen auszudrücken, die in Prosa gewöhnlich absurd erscheinen, weil sie sich nur in Widersprüchen ausdrücken lassen, welche dem Menschenverstand nicht einwillen” (FA 2.9:215; I myself almost believe that poetry alone can perhaps succeed in somehow expressing secrets that usually appear absurd in prose because they can only be expressed in contradictions that do not agree with human understanding). ↵

15. To borrow Frederick Amrine’s phrase, see Frederick Amrine, “The Unconscious of Nature: Analyzing Disenchantment in *Faust I*,” *Goethe Yearbook* 17 (2010): 117–32, here 128. ↵

16. See Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust. Eine Tragödie*, Konstituierter Text, bearbeitet von Gerrit Brüning und Dietmar Pravida, in *Faust. Historisch-kritische Edition*, herausgegeben von Anne Bohnenkamp, Silke Henke und Fotis Jannidis, Version 1.3 RC (Frankfurt am Main / Weimar / Würzburg: 2023), http://v1-3.faustedition.net/print/faust.4#scene_1.1.1 (<https://www.faustedition.net/print/faust.4>), accessed September 26, 2023. ↵

17. In this regard, it may be asked whether “open secret” is a good translation for this meaning (2) of “offenbares Geheimnis,” or if (much more than its German counterpart) the English phrase tends to be intended in the first sense (1). Although less idiomatic, an alternative translation closer to German could be “evident secret.” ↵

18. See, for example, FA 1.17:246; FA 2.7:23; FA 2.7:58–59. On this issue, see Andrew Fineron, “Goethe’s Response to Jacobi’s *Von den Göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung* and the Influence of Hamann,” *German Life and Letters* 50 (1997): 283–306. ↵

19. Šamsu al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfeẓ, *Der Dīwān von Mohammed Schemseddin Hafis, aus dem Persischen zum ersten Male übersetzt*, 2 voll., übersetzt von Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, (Stuttgart-Tübingen: Cotta, 1812–1813). ↵

20. As I have tried to show elsewhere, see Alberto Merzari, “La forma e il Divino: una prospettiva estetica sull’incontro di J.W. Goethe con M.Š. Ḥāfeẓ,” *Quaderni di Meykhane* 11 (2022): 1–26, http://meykhane.altervista.org/QMEY-11_MERZARI.pdf PDF, accessed November 27, 2023. ↵

21. Friedrich Gundolf, *Goethe* (Berlin: Bondi, 1920), 641. ↵

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