

"Obstinacy and opposition diminishes the noblest position"

## Donald Trump performing Goethe's Faust in Scotland

It is rather unlikely that the controversial American tycoon and now president Donald Trump deeply explored the literary work of German author Johann Wolfgang Goethe. And yet there are some indications that he has been working on a performance of Goethe's most famous drama for the last ten years. In a picturesque setting. *By Arne Eppers*

At the end of the second part of his play *Faust* Goethe, for one last time, assigns another new role to his title figure: he makes him a literary prototype of a modern tycoon: riches from war business, global player and entrepreneur with his own commercial fleet, strong ties with political leaders, activities in all sorts of business fields with profits in astronomical dimensions, even if not always above-board: *War, trade, and piracy, allow/As three in one, no separation*. How could it be any different with Mephisto as his managing director who in case of a problem sends *the three mighty warriors*.

At the beginning of the fifth act Faust is occupied with completing a large-scale project: on a coastal strip he wants to build numerous real estates. The area has been drained and a new harbour is ready to unload ships arriving from all over the world. Where once *wave on wave, foaming wildly*, washed the dunes, there is a *paradisial view* of blooming gardens, *meadow bordering meadow/Field and garden, wood and town*.

The last stage of construction is planned and staked, the project supposed to be completed quickly, but there is some resistance: one couple refuses to leave their home and give up their property. The two live there for long in their hut with a small chapel, surrounded by a lime grove, painted by Goethe as an idyllic scene of old age. Their mutual relation resembles their relation to nature: organically grown, shaped by love and reverence, a symbol of tradition and harmony. Goethe names them *Philemon* und *Baucis*, an allusion to the eponymous couple in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* who were rewarded by the ancient Gods for their hospitality with being allowed to stay together forever and therefore transformed into trees.

Anyone who wants to become a presidential candidate in the US has to publish his assets. Donald Trump stated his at ten billion dollars, and even if *Forbes Magazine* considered this an exaggeration and assumed 'only' four billion, this is an unconceivable amount of money. Trump, the embodiment of a tycoon, is head of a multinational company employing more than 20,000 people. The largest part of his profits is earned from luxury real estates. To build them he sometimes allegedly fell back on the help of people with names like Anthony 'Fat Tony' Salerno or Paul 'Big Paul' Salerno.

For about ten years Trump has been involved in a large scale project in Scotland, the motherland of his mother: near Aberdeen, right at the north coast, he wants to build a compound with two golf courses, a luxurious hotel and several hundred houses. The first course was opened in 2012 and all experts are enthusiastic about the sea view and the fairways as they are beautifully meandering through the dunes.

However, only a small part of what was planned has been finished, and this is due to some resistance since the project started. The natural dune landscape is a sensitive dynamic habitat, and for Trump's project it had to be fixed and transformed into an artificial landscape. Initially, the local authorities reject the plans, but Trump flexes his muscles and in the end he gets the green light. A problem much more serious than the Scottish politicians are some residents, above all farmer and fisherman Michael Forbes and his neighbour David Milne. Forbes has been living in the dunes for more than forty years and he persistently refuses to give up his home and sell his land. 'No golf course' is painted on his barn in big letters.

But in Goethe's play, Philemon and Baucis do not always agree with each other. He, due to his age a little powerless, credulous and trusting in the political authority of the emperor: *Clever Lords set their bold servants/Digging ditches, building dikes,/ To gain the mastery of ocean,/ Diminishing its natural rights.* His wife, on the other hand, is wise and critical, and has her doubts concerning the real estate project. *Then its whole nature, surely,/Was peculiar, in its way.* And the tycoon, too, is suspicious to her. *He's a godless man: he'd steal/Our hut, and our few acres:/But like subjects we must kneel,/When we boast such neighbours.* Philemon would probably have accepted his offer to give up their home and property for another holding, */ on his new-won land* – with potential benefits as may be supposed – but his wife calls him to reason: *Never trust what's built on water,/ On the heights maintain your stand.*

This is exactly how the story went on. The couple insists on their property rights and rejects the offer. Faust is furious: *My realm's laid out there, endlessly,/ But, at my back, this vexes so,/ Proclaiming, with its jealous sound:/ My great estate is less than fine,/ The old hut, all the trees around,/ The crumbling chapel, are not mine.* The managing director in charge receives his just deserts: *The old ones up there should yield,/ I want the limes as my retreat, The least tree in another's field, / Detracts from my whole estate. / There, to stand and look around,/ I'll build a frame from bough to bough,/ My gaze revealing, under the sun,/ A view of everything I've done,/ Overseeing, as the eye falls on it,/ A masterpiece of the human spirit,/ Forging with intelligence,/ A wider human residence.*

Faust acts like a god-like world designer filled with arrogance and pride, deeply convinced of the righteousness of his action. He considers any opposition as an insult of his genius. *And so the greatest work may stand,/ One mind equal to a thousand hands.*

The resistance of the old couple to whom their small piece of land is more important than the economically gigantic real estate project leaves Faust in despair. *Such obstinacy and opposition/ Diminishes the noblest position,/ Until in endless pain, one must/ Grow deeply weary of being just.*

When Trump started his project in 2006, initially there is support: the local business owners welcome the growth impulse announced by the tycoon, Scotland's First Minister McConnell declares him a *Global Scot* and he receives an honorary degree by a local university. Fisherman Michael Forbes is not impressed by all this. And not even by Trump's offers. The sums being offered to him for selling his property exceed the usual by far. But he refuses the money as well as a job at the golf course with a – probably easy-earned – salary of 50,000 pounds. The higher the offerings of Trump for Forbes' property, the greater becomes the resistance that Forbes and a growing number of supporters develop.

Forbes does not sell. And some others neither. They want to protect their natural habitat from being destroyed by the plans of their unpopular neighbour. Trump gets angry and insults Forbes as a village idiot. *His property is terribly maintained. It's slumlike. It's disgusting. He's got stuff thrown all over the place. He lives like a pig.* The tycoon considers himself a victim of some activists who ignore the benefit of his economically ingenious and ecologically perfect investment. *If we build a 300 or 400 million dollar hotel, I don't think you want the windows looking down into a slum.* For Trump, this is intolerable: *I don't want to see the houses. And, nobody has a problem with that, I guess, maybe the people that live in the houses have.* But he does not care about them.

Trump acts like a god-like world designer filled with arrogance and pride, deeply convinced of the righteousness of his action. He considers any opposition as an insult of his genius. *I am going to build for the people of Scotland the greatest golf course anywhere in the world.* And he believes to be supported by the Scottish People. Addressing the opposition to his large-scale project, he replies: *One of the papers had headlines 'Trump met by protesters.' Two people and a dog. The dog was the one I was afraid of.* But he shows, how angry those people make him.

And so, the assignment to the managing director is aggressively renewed: *Then go and push them aside for me!* Mephisto delegates the matter to the *three mighty warriors*, with the expected outcome: *They heard nothing, hid their faces:/ But we commenced without delay/ To drive the stubborn folk away./ That pair knew scant anxiety,/ They died of terror, peacefully.* House, chapel and lime grove are burnt down, the correspondent, who describes to the audience what had happened, can only give a sad comment: *What used to please my eyes, below,/ Has vanished with the centuries.*

Of course the tycoon immediately dissociates himself from the immoral doings of his employee: *I wanted them moved, not dead./ This mindless, and savage blow,/ Earns my curse: share it, and go!*

However, Goethe does not let him get away with it. In the end, he shows the ridiculousness of Faust's project-making zeal. Equipped with all earthly and unearthly means, Faust considers himself immune to any harm, obviously nothing can frighten him. But then, as his large-scale project is nearly finished, something gains power over him he had not expected and cannot shake off: *Sorrow*. He fights it, wants to get rid of it, tries to ignore it, but in the end, *Sorrow* lets him go blind.

Even this cannot stop his ambition. *The night seems deeper all around me,/ Only within me is there gleaming light:/ I must finish what I've done, and hurry.* Henceforth reduced to acoustic perception and being close to death he misinterprets any sound as a sound of progress: *How the clattering of shovels cheers me!/ It's the crews still labouring on.* And obviously his conscience is not enduringly affected by the death of the old couple, for in the next instance, another dubious instruction is given to Mephisto: *Any way you can/ Bring crowds of labourers together,/ Spurred by force or hope or pleasure,/ By pay, enticement or press-gang!*

And, of course, he asks to be informed about the status of the project at all times: *Report to me on progress every day,/ The depth of earth and gravel dug away.*

And the harsh tone is followed by action. Live on camera, the tycoon gives order to an employee: *Sarah, I wanna get rid of that house!* On her remark, that this cannot be done without turmoil, he replies: *Who cares?* Trump sends lawyers threatening with expropriation and questioning old land registers, and he sends workers blocking access roads, cutting water pipes and electricity, tearing down fences and heaping up mounds around the houses blocking the view. The residents have to watch the dune landscape in front of their doors transformed into a huge construction site.

Trump denies any harm to the environment. On the contrary, he considers himself a preserver: *Well, I've stabilized the dunes and that means, the dunes will be with us forever and that's good.*

How arrogant the tycoon is shows when he points at the surrounding coastal landscape and declares in his delusional zeal: *It is beautiful, but I make it more beautiful.* And to achieve this aim he would not even need the house and property of Forbes, he boasts on David Letterman. This is because he found a new and greater opponent: the Scottish Government. It had given permission for an offshore wind park, right in front of Trump's golf course. This brings him over the edge.

With all legal and public means Trump tries to prevent the wind park. *I want to see the ocean; I don't want to see windmills,* he complains. In the end, the Supreme Court confirms the decision of the Scottish Government, and Trump rages: *History will judge those involved unfavourably and the outcome demonstrates the foolish, small minded and parochial mentality which dominates the current Scottish Government's dangerous experiment with wind energy.* He would continue the fight.

Not even the busy presidential election campaign does keep him from visiting Scotland for a couple of days in order to get first-hand information.

Mephisto does not even bother to lower his voice, but says half-aloud: *Reporting it to me the word they gave;/ Was not quite gravel, it was more like – grave.*

The tycoon does not die without having summarized his great vision of life behind the dike: *Let me make room for many a million,/ Not wholly secure, but free to work on./ Green fertile fields, where men and herds/ May gain swift comfort from the new-made earth./ Quickly settled in those hills' embrace,/ Piled high by a brave, industrious race./ And in the centre here, a Paradise,/ Whose boundaries hold back the raging tide,/ And though it gnaws to enter in by force,/ The common urge unites to halt its course. [...] I wish to gaze again on such a land,/ Free earth: where a free race, in freedom, stand.*

Goethe does not tell, how the story on the coast continues. And in the end, Faust goes to heaven.

But the Scots do not want him anymore. Following his disrespectful remarks about migrants and Muslims he loses the title of a Global Scot as well as his honorary degree.

But he sticks to his large-scale project, unshakably, and praises the already completed parts of the site to the skies: *The people love what we are doing. They love that I'm spending hundreds of millions of pounds on doing it. They love the fact that I'm creating a lot of jobs.* In the meantime the British Parliament debated a petition signed by more than half a million British people, asking to henceforth ban Trump from entering the United Kingdom.

How the play at the Aberdonian coast continues is up in the air. And now, Donald Trump is US president.