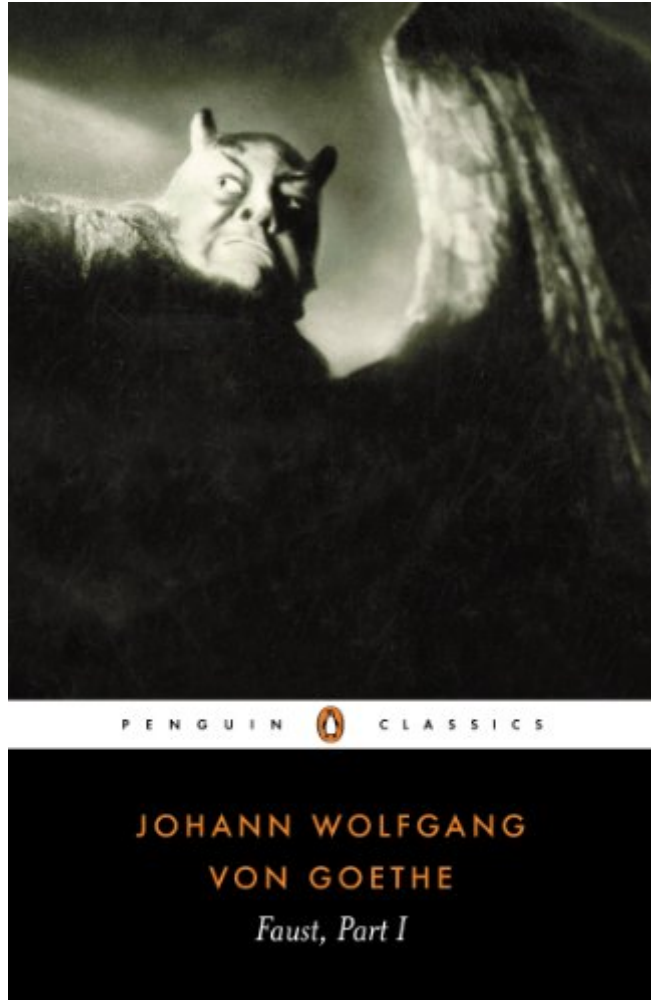


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Faust, Part I: The First Part Of The Tragedy Pt. 1 (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Goethe's Faust reworks the late-medieval myth of Dr Faust, a brilliant scholar so disillusioned he resolves to make a contract or wager with the devil, Mephistopheles. The devil will do all he asks on Earth and seek to grant him a moment in life so glorious that he will wish it to last for ever. But if Faust does bid the moment stay, he falls to Mephisto and must serve him after death. In this first part of Goethe's great work the embittered thinker and Mephistopheles enter into their agreement, and soon Faust is living a life beyond his study and - in rejuvenated form - winning the love of the charming and beautiful Gretchen. But in this compelling tragedy of arrogance, unfulfilled desire and self-delusion, Faust, served by the devil, heads inexorably towards destruction.

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Criticism

Customer Reviews

Looking at some reviews by other reviewers, I realized that not everybody has heard of Faust or of Goethe, and I was pretty shocked. The first part of what I'm saying is about this translation. As Luke so graphically showed in his "Translator's introduction", there are many things that pull at the translator's central agenda: rhyme, metre, primary meaning, nuance, and so on, and the translator

has to achieve a balance. Among the translations I've read and from snippets of what I've seen of other translations, Luke's translation is the most accurate of the ones I've read, in many ways. In other words, the compromises that Luke himself details have been executed here with near-perfection. It comes down to what you like. Luke's translation is the closest among all attempts so far to being dubbed a "universal" translation. But just as we cannot have a universal programming language, we cannot have a translation that will please everybody. The positives for this translation are of course the extraordinary faithfulness to the original while maintaining rhyme. The negatives are of course what one would expect; the translation does not read smoothly on the line level. To clarify, a line carries over to the next line in too many cases to make for a "smooth read". An example: "Refreshment! It's your own soul that must pour / It through you, if it's to be anything." This "pour it" example situation occurs too often, and is jarring for those who "grew up" with Arndt's or Wayne's translations. The second part of what I'm writing is about Faust itself, the Masterwork: as any German will tell you, Faust is one of the centrepieces of literature, and it is worthwhile learning German JUST to read Faust.

A lot of people (not only Germans) consider German literature as the finest in the world. Although I don't completely agree, I willingly admit it has its "stars" that could reach the level of World Literature. I offer just a few names of such novelists or playwrights: Grimmelshausen, Lessing, Schiller, Thomas Mann, Grass, Boll, and of course Johann Wolfgang Goethe with his famous play in two parts "Faust". The play is based on a true story of a medieval scientist (alchemist) whose methods of research were considered magic. The story was so much exaggerated by every generation that in 1587, as the original "Faustus" book appeared, it maintained that its primary character Faust has established an alliance with the devil himself, that it was the absolute evil that helped him making his discoveries. The Englishman Christopher Marlowe was the first to write a play based on "The tragical History of Doctor Faustus". In the 18th century, the young Goethe picked up the subject of Faust and began transforming it into a play that would eventually become the flag of the entire German literature. "Faust 1" was published for the first time in 1805 with great success. In 1832, just after the author's death, the continuation of the tragedy appeared. Since "Faust 2" didn't have any dramatical plot, it was presumed as unplayable on the stage and was more or less forgotten. Since its publishing, particularly "Faust 1" has played an important role in German culture. Many proverbs frequently used in German language originate in this play. Before beginning his work, Goethe read the original story and made some artistic adjustments in the plot that should help him explain the themes he wanted to have explained.

I am very glad to have been exposed to this classic and am definitely pleased to have read this particular translation of it. Though the rhythm was occasionally jarring (see review below), Luke's EXTENSIVE introduction (50 pages or so!) and explanatory notes helped me get so much out of this piece. I received glimpses of insight on German history, the Germanic culture, witchcraft, superstition, how 18th century "geniuses" viewed Shakespeare, traditional church customs, etc. For those who don't know, the basic premise of this story is based on a German folk legend. In that legend from the 16th century, a learned man named Faust sold his soul to the Devil in order to gain more knowledge and understanding. As that legend grew and became incorporated in the Germanic culture, so did its appeal to many artists. There have been apparently many writers and such who have used this legend as a foundation for their works. However, of all the Faust tales, Goethe's appears to be the preeminent one today. Why? Well, for one thing, he worked on this intermittently from 1770 to 1808 with 3 main versions cited. Goethe became quite famous for many of his other works, and this one apparently gives great insight to his personal philosophies at different stages. Thus, many find it worth studying. Also, as Goethe was a central figure in Germany's emergence from the Enlightenment era into the Romantic era, his work - and especially this piece - was celebrated by those trying to usher in a new way. While the number of submovements is slightly tricky to keep track of, the main thrust is that the young intellectuals idolized Goethe and championed his cause. His version of Faust became the source for many plays and even an opera which I think is still performed today.

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