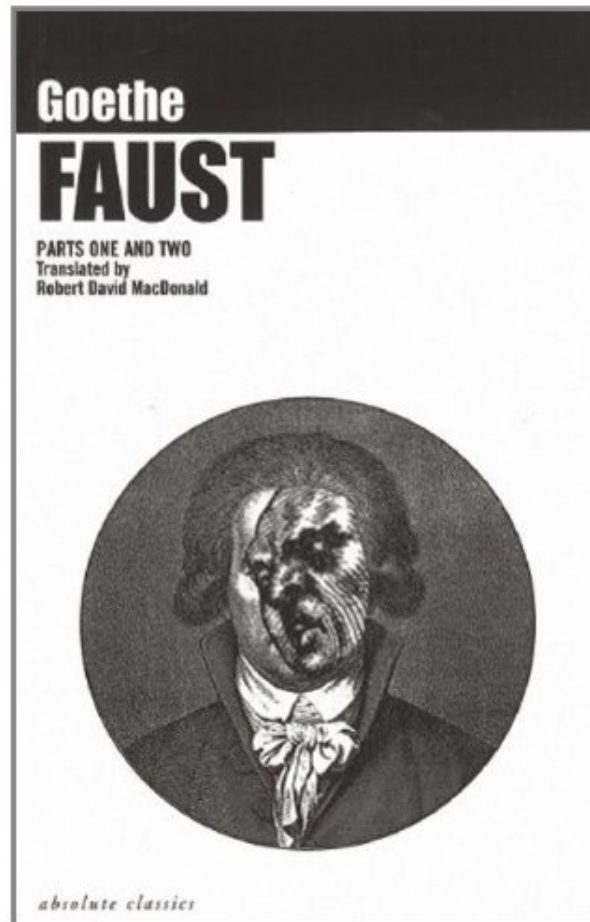


# FAUST: PARTS ONE AND TWO: PTS. 1 & 2 BY GOETHE, ROBERT DAVID MACDONALD



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**Goethe**

# **FAUST**

**PARTS ONE AND TWO**  
Translated by  
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From Publishers Weekly

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The power and magic of the Faust story, the man who, in a pact with the Devil, trades his soul in return for a period of total knowledge and absolute power, is one of the most potent of all European myths. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) worked on this poetic drama in burst from his twenties until the end of his life. He reshaped the perpetually fascinating legend, probing the nature and process of human striving and questioning the assumed divisions between the forces of good and evil. His Faust has become a landmark in world literature.

Robert David MacDonald's translation of Faust, used in acclaimed productions in Scotland (Glasgow Citizens) and England (Lyric Hammersmith), offers access to the play in the English language for readers and playgoers alike and opens up the extraordinary range and pace of Goethe's language, rhythms, imagery and ideas, without sacrificing any of the play's humour. The Open University has adopted the translation as a set book for the course entitled 'From Enlightenment to Romanticism'

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#### Review

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

116 of 121 people found the following review helpful.

Five bright stars.

By fblaw6

"Vainly in the day time labored, pick and shovel, clink and strike." Goethe worked on Faust for much of his career, but composed some of the best of Part II in a time of life when most are in their rocking chairs or in the intensive care ward of the local nursing home. Goethe in his late seventies and early eighties would rise in the early dawn and compose some of the best poetry written. "I would elevate my mind to a kind of productivity which brought all this forth, in a full state of consciousness and which pleases me still, even though perhaps I could never swim again in such a river." It has been said that German poetry is difficult to translate or untranslatable, and this seems true with some translations of Faust, but the Norton contains a superb effort by Walter Arndt which appears always so on the mark that one suspects Arndt actually embellishes the German, but, rather than quibble over accuracy, it is all so good you will hardly care. Goethe builds upon the medieval Faust legend as a skeleton for his own writing in epic-poem style with various meter fashioned to fit the subject. Faust, weary of the ways of the world (one can almost hear the 60s hippy) embarks on a journey of self-discovery, skirt chasing and empire building finally ending in his 100th year in the ultimate trip, with a little help from his friend, Goethe. This composition is remarkable in innumerable ways. One can use a thesaurus of superlatives: wonderful imagery, perfect choice of words, peerless imagination, beautiful poetry, a unity to the whole which is memorable, as well as numerous wonderful scenes and lines, and always an intelligence that seems to absorb and understand everything. Of course, one can differ with Goethe philosophically. There are other angles from which to view life than Faust and his Mephistophelean foil. And Faust, which contains all the universal ingredients, can be faulted at times, dwelling too much on the antique philosophy, politics and literary questions which interested Goethe in his long life. But all this seems irrelevant to Faust as a work of art, permanently canonized for its beauty and writing alone, whatever disparagement or praise one might hold for its meaning or content. The Norton Edition is edited by Cyrus Hamlin whose interpretive notes are scholarly, contain a subtle respect for Goethe, and are in themselves a book worth reading. The selections of Goethe comment and scholarship range from the brilliant to the outer eliptics of literary criticism, and the included illustrations and Goethe letters on composition are a nice touch. The work of Hamlin and the Arndt translation which here frame Goethe as the main event make the Norton Critical Edition of Faust (2000) one of the better books one is likely to pick up.

60 of 63 people found the following review helpful.

The most elegant among the translations I've read

By Ram Mohan Rao

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, Wayne's translation has the most smooth-flowing, elegant rhyme I've seen.

As positives for this translation: The elegance is unparalleled; the wit is sparkling; the metre is almost flawless; the deviation from Goethe is usually acceptable; and there is never, repeat, never, an obvious rhyme-holder word.

As negatives for this translation: There is in a few cases too much of deviation from the original; Wayne at times infuses his own interpretation and character into the work; and the English, though just perfect for, say, a 1950's speaker in England (and those of us used to that kind of word-flow), may be distracting for Americans in 2000.

An example of the latter: "What depth of chanting, whence the blissful tone / That lames my lifting of the fatal glass?" This is pretty representative: if "lames my lifting" does not sound pretentious or obscure, and if the elegance of it strikes you, Wayne's translation is the one for you. If on the other hand, "lames my lifting" sounds straight out of a mediaeval scroll (as I believe is the case with many Americans), then look elsewhere for a translation you will enjoy (read: Luke).

Another, more involved example is in the final lines of Faust II: Wayne translates "Das unbeschreibliche / Hier ists getan" as "Here the ineffable / Wins life through love". Now that, of course is hardly a translation; but it fits in with Wayne's scheme of things - and that IS the point; Wayne has his "scheme of things", which you may or may not like.

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. Each person comes away from "Faust" having found that that he/she was looking for. Every person is reflected in Faust; "Faust" is the ultimate story of Man. What tempts us, what keeps us, what draws us on, what tears us, what defines us, what lies in store for us - it is all there. "Faust" is a journey everyone should undertake. There is nothing controversial here - no "God", no "Hellfire", nothing but Goethe's straightforward but not blunt, sensitive but not compromised, philosophical but not dreamy, analysis of the human situation. "Faust" is the Master thinker Goethe's sincere attempt at looking at it all; and it does not fall visibly short of the task. Part I should be read by everyone; Part II is not strictly a sequel, but in many ways is, as Wayne shows in his Introduction. Part II requires some knowledge of Greek Mythology; and does in many ways "complete the story". Only, it goes way beyond that.

36 of 36 people found the following review helpful.

Genius Meets Genius

By Enrique Lerda

Having tried my hand at translations myself, I am awestruck by the performance of Walter Arndt. Faust is rightly regarded as a climax in German letters and, together with Don Quixote, The Divine Comedy, War and Peace and King Lear, in world literature. The nobility of its language, the sharpness of its mockery, the breadth of its subject matter and the beauty of its lyricism all make it unique. And all pose seemingly insuperable problems to the translator

What should a translator do? Try to convey meaning as literally as possible? Reproduce rhyme and meter patterns as faithfully as possible? Convey the spirit of the work more than its form and letters? All of these are worthy objectives but they all are competing and, seemingly, mutually exclusive ones.

It is a measure of Mr. Arndt's artistry that these conflicts seem to dissolve in his text. From the beautiful and melancholy Dedication that precedes Part I to the mystical and esoteric completion of Part II I was unable to find a single jarring note, even though I love the German text with some fanaticism. Compare the following:

Ihr naht Euch wieder, schwankende Gestalten  
Die frueh sich einst dem trueben Blick gezeigt



Wag ich es wohl Euch diesmal fest zu halten..

Once more you near me, wavering apparitions  
That early showed before the turbid gaze  
Will now I seek to grant you definition...

Or this:

Alles Vergaengliche  
Ist nur ein Gleichniss  
Das Unzulaengliche  
Hier wird's Ereigniss  
Das Unbeschreibliche  
Hier ist es gethan  
Das Ewig-Weibliche  
Zieht uns hinan.

All that is changeable  
Is but refraction  
The unattainable  
Here becomes action  
Human discernment  
Here is passed by  
Woman Eternal  
Draw us on high.

One may quarrel with the last line (I would have preferred "draws" since the chorus is not praying but praising), but what matters much more is that the sensation of "Ausklang", of a closing chord, is reproduced perfectly without doing (much) violence to the meaning.

Mr. Arndt's (or are they the Editor's?) generous explanatory footnotes are a mine of erudition and good sense. Only the quality and relevance of the Essays by various authors, appended to the work, are of variable quality.

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