

Faust



# Faust

A Tragedy

Part 1

Johann Wolfgang von

Goethe

Translated by Mike Smith

Shearsman Books

First published in the United Kingdom in 2012 by  
Shearsman Books  
50 Westons Hill Drive  
Emersons Green  
Bristol  
BS16 7DF

Shearsman Books Ltd Registered Office  
30–31 St. James Place, Mangotsfield, Bristol BS16 9JB  
(this address not for correspondence)

<http://www.shearsman.com/>

ISBN 978-1-84861-214-3

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The title page opposite replicates the title page of the first edition,  
published by the bookseller J.F. Cotta in Tübingen in 1808.

# F a u s t.



Eine Tragödie

von

Goethe.



Tübingen

in der J. F. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung.

1808.



## Introduction

*Faust* occupies a central place in German literature, as the *magnum opus* of its greatest writer, as one of its greatest dramas, and as an epic poem of the highest quality—for, although it was written to be performed, it may also be regarded as a dramatic poem, prophetic perhaps of Berlioz's hybrid musical adaptation in *La Damnation de Faust*.

The Faust story caught Goethe's attention from an early stage and the first published results of his engagement with it was *Faust. A Fragment*, published in 1790. He had however written a dramatic treatment of the story in his 20s, a fact which only became apparent over a century later, when the papers of Luisa von Göchhausen, a lady of the court of Weimar, were found to contain a transcription of this work, since known as the *Urfaust* (Original Faust). This early work was published in 1887. *Faust. A Tragedy, Part One* was finally completed in 1808 and was later revised and published in a new edition in 1829. The third act of Part 2 appeared in 1827, part of the first act a year later, and the complete text in 1832, shortly after the author's death. The entirety of *Faust*, parts 1 and 2 together, was performed for the first time in 1875, in Weimar. The translation presented in this volume encompasses only Part One, which is usually performed without its cerebral pendant piece, and remains the keystone of Goethe's career.

The literary source for Goethe's version of *Faust* lies in the 16<sup>th</sup> century *Faustbuch* (Faust Book), which told the tale of one Johann Georg Faust (1480–1540), a magician and astrologer, who was reputed to have sold his soul to the devil in exchange for wisdom and years of carnal pleasure. In addition, Goethe also drew on the Biblical *Book of Job*, whose eponymous protagonist undergoes trials at the hands of the Devil, despite terrible trials, only to be rewarded finally for his fortitude by God. There are also many nods towards classical antecedents, such as Homer and Virgil, but the first two sources listed here are the key to Goethe's vision of the tale.

## The Plot

In heaven, the archangels praise God and his works, but they are mocked by Mephistopheles (Satan), who has time neither for God, nor for his creation, mankind. God praises Faust as a man of honest endeavor who helps others, whilst admitting that Faust is troubled by the failures in his

research. Mephistopheles wagers with God that he can lead Faust astray from the path of righteousness, and is granted permission by God to tempt him, and thus try to win over his soul.

We now move to Earth, to Faust's laboratory/study, where the protagonist bemoans his lack of understanding of the workings of the universe, despite his accumulated learning. Not even the tools of magic allow him to reveal the eternal truths, and he contemplates suicide in the face of such failure. To clear the gloom, he decides to go out—for it is the festive season of Easter—along with his assistant, Wagner. A black dog joins them on their walk, and follows them home. Back in his study, Faust reads from The Bible, causing the dog to howl. Assuming the dog to be possessed, Faust chants a magical spell to cause the possessor to reveal itself. Mephistopheles appears only as a traveling scholar, but Faust guesses his visitor's true identity. They discuss philosophy and, at the end of the visit, Faust invites him to return. Spirits called up by Mephistopheles sing Faust to sleep and grant him dreams of pleasure.

Mephistopheles returns the following day, and offers to show Faust the world's secrets and to grant him the finest pleasures the world has to offer. In return Faust must give up his immortal soul to him. Faust agrees, with one caveat: he must be granted the ultimate pleasure at the end of the trip; this agreed, he signs the pact in his own blood.

The pact signed, the two sally forth on a wild adventure: first a tavern in Leipzig, where they play pranks on some local drinkers, and then a witch's kitchen, where the witch brews a potion that permits Faust to shed thirty years and turn into a handsome youth. Then on the street, Faust spies a beautiful girl, Margaretha (Margaret, familiarly known as Gretchen), whom he accosts. She will have nothing to do with him, but he vows to seduce her. While she visits her neighbor Martha, Faust steals into her room and leaves a casket of jewels, provided by Mephisto. Gretchen's mother mistrusts the expensive gift and donates the jewels to her local church for the decoration of a shrine—much to Mephisto's distress. Nonetheless, Gretchen wonders who her secret admirer must be. Mephisto provides more jewels for Faust's wooing, and on this occasion Gretchen does not tell her mother what has happened. Faust meets her in the garden, and she is much taken with the handsome nobleman. Faust is in love with her, but also overwhelmed with desire. Mephisto ensures that lust triumphs and, when Gretchen sleeps with Faust, she becomes pregnant. By the time she discovers this, however, Faust has vanished, and she seeks forgiveness for her sin through prayer to the Blessed Virgin.



In time, Faust's lust returns and he again desires Gretchen. He and Mephisto go together but are confronted by Valentine, Gretchen's brother who accuses Faust of besmirching his sister's honour. The two come to blows and Faust kills his opponent in a sword fight.

Another year passes, and Faust attends the annual gathering of witches and warlocks on Walpurgisnacht (this translates as Walburga's Night, or perhaps Waldborga's Night—the German name suggests both an early Christian saint and a pre-Christian fertility goddess). This occurs on 30 April, according to legend, on the Brocken, the highest mountain in the Harz range. Whiling away time during the gathering, Faust begins thinking anew of poor Gretchen, and has a vision of her in prison. Overcome with guilt, he begs Mephisto to aid him in an attempt to free her. The two then ride to the prison, on magic horses in the dead of night, and through Mephisto's arcane spells gain access to the dungeon where Gretchen's cell is located. Faust's former lover lies in the corner, awaiting execution for the murder of the child that she had borne from her union with Faust. She has lost her wits, but regains them upon hearing Faust's voice. She rises, and her chains fall away. As dawn breaks, Faust urges her to fly away with him. However, although she fears her impending death, she will not leave, believing she must pay for her crime. Mephisto appears and she recognizes him for what he is, whereupon she throws herself on the mercy of God, begging salvation from Heaven.



## Translator's Note

A new version in English of the First Part of Goethe's *Faust* may seem difficult to justify. Certainly, there are enough precedents. Indeed, the success of Louis MacNeice's abridged radio version and C.F. MacIntyre's free verse translation of 1942, in particular, convinced me I should attempt my own, a project that has become deeply personal. Goethe's particular brand of Romanticism unsettles, but it is just this discomfort, evoked so powerfully by *Faust*, that justifies an attempt to give our present cataclysmic moment its own version, a version that attempts to represent the sense and fluidity of Goethe's variable line in a thoroughly contemporary idiom. To accomplish this, I have collapsed and broken lines for my own purposes and frequently relied on off-rhyme. Although *Faust* was not written to be put on stage, it was written to be performed aloud without awkwardness.

I have not made this attempt alone. Until her death in 2007, my collaborator, Dr. Emily Arndt, Assistant Professor of Theology at Georgetown University, provided me with necessary and invaluable commentary and critique. This translation would not have been possible without her. I would also like to acknowledge the contributions to this project of Drs. Murray and Frances Arndt and, perhaps most of all, to John Matthias, under whose mentorship this project began. I also thank Tony Frazer for taking a chance with this book. Any infelicities that have survived the purging gaze of all these sets of eyes I must claim as my own.

Mike Smith



For Jack and Virginia Clinard  
and for  
Paul Brandon Nelson



## Dedication

Wavering shapes, again you hover near,  
who once appeared before my clouded eyes.  
Should I attempt this time to hold you here?  
Can my heart still hold those old fantasies?  
You press in on me. Good! Now you may reign  
as out of the haze and mist you rise and bring  
into my breast a youthful shuddering  
from the magic exhalations of your train.

You bring your visions of a happier day  
with you, and many shadows I loved arise,  
as in an old tale, half-dying away—  
First Love appears; beside him Friendship flies.  
The pain is new; again I hear the sobbed  
lament of Life's Labyrinthine ways,  
which names the Good Ones, those whom Fate has robbed  
of lovely hours, long vanished from my eyes.

Those souls to whom I first sang do not hear  
these later songs. That friendly crowd has long  
been scattered, that first echo faded from the air.  
My sorrow sings out for the unknown throng,  
the many whose very praise causes my heart  
to sink. And those to whom my song gave mirth  
and joy and happiness, if they are part  
of things still, live scattered throughout the earth.

And I am seized now by a yearning, long-  
lost, for the still and silent spirit realm,  
as in unsteady tones, my whispered song,  
as if from an Aeolian harp, hangs in the air.  
A shudder overtakes me, tear follows tear.  
The stern heart lets itself grow soft and calm.  
What I possess, I see as far away  
and what has vanished becomes reality.

## Prelude in the Theater

*Director. Poet. Clown.*

### Director

You two, who so often have stood by me  
in need and trouble, tell me now  
how well you think our show  
will do in our own home of Germany.  
I want to delight the crowd very much  
because they live and so they let live too.  
The posts are set; the boards all touch,  
and everyone expects a big to-do.  
They sit dressed up—brows arched, eyes wide—  
relaxed and waiting to be astonished.  
I know how the People are satisfied,  
and I have never been in such a spot.  
It's true, they aren't accustomed to the best,  
but they have read an awful lot.  
How do we make something fresh and new,  
and also pleasing and significant?  
Of course, it pleases me to view  
the rushing crowd stream to our tent,  
and with violent and repeated blows  
force themselves through the nearest gate of grace;  
when it is still daylight, barely even four,  
they fight and push towards the ticket windows  
like the starving at a baker's door.  
They almost break their necks to get a place.  
Only the poet can work this miracle, to sway  
so many different souls.

My friend, do it today!

### Poet

O, do not speak to me of the motley crowds, rabble  
from whom the spirit flees on sight.  
Shield me from the waves of those who, against our might,  
drag us, flailing, into their whirlpool.  
No, lead me instead to that heavenly silence



only the poet knows, where life and friendship lift  
with Heart's blessing, to become as one, and commence  
with godlike hands to create and nourish his gift.

Ach, what sprung from deep in our breast—  
all that our lips began, timidly, to speak, at last,  
failing at times, at times getting it right,  
is devoured by the savage moment's might.  
Often, it must first pass through many years  
before its final form appears.  
What shines like foil attracts the moment's gaze;  
the genuine will not be lost to future days.

### **Clown**

Don't you talk to me of future days yet!  
If I spouted off about posterity,  
who would give the here and now its merriment?  
That's what they want, and that's what they should get.  
The presence of a good boy in the present  
is worth a lot, I always say.  
Those who can express themselves with some charm  
won't mind the Public's shifts in mood. They play  
for the widest circle, so that they  
can then insure their hold stays firm.  
So be good now wholly and in every fashion.  
Let fantasy burst forth in its varied voices:  
Thought, Reason, Feeling, and Passion.  
But you be sure to add Folly to your choices.

### **Director**

Above all, let enough things happen! They prize  
a show and want a grand event.  
If many things parade before their eyes,  
so that the mob gapes in astonishment,  
then you will win the great majority,  
and be a man of real celebrity.  
The masses can be subdued only by mass,  
so each can find a part from the great whole.  
He who brings a lot, brings everyone some,

and everyone goes happily on home.  
Give us the piece you write in pieces. Start  
us with a Ragout, a sure hit—  
Easily penned, and easy to present it.  
Why try to bring out a whole work of art?  
The public will just pick it all apart.

### Poet

You do not feel the baseness of such a spree.  
How improper for the artist of worth.  
The bungling of your neat peers has brought forth  
a list of maxims, I see.

### Director

Such accusations do not disturb me.  
A man who wants results should understand  
one uses the best tools for the job at hand.  
So consider, the wood you need to split  
is soft, and remember for whom it is you write.  
If one has come out of boredom,  
another arrives stuffed from overeating,  
while many, and this is really bad,  
come straight from the evening papers. They come  
to us disturbed, as from a masquerade.  
Curiosity alone spurs their steps.  
The ladies come to us in all their dress  
and makeup, and play their parts for free, no less.  
Why do you dream from such poetic steepes?  
And yet, aren't you pleased by a full house?  
Take a close look at your patrons. One half is raw,  
the other cold. After the play, one hopes to fall  
into a card game, and one wants to lose  
a wild night on some hooker's breast.  
Why plague the muses for such a purpose?  
I tell you, give them more and more and always more again,  
and then you cannot miss.  
Just try to mystify,  
not satisfy.  
What's got into you, joy or pain?

## Poet

Go out and find yourself another slave.  
The Poet ought to willingly give back  
the highest right that nature gave—  
the right of humanity—for your sake?  
How does he move all hearts?  
How does he conquer every element?  
Is it not the music from his breast sent  
to pull the world back in his heart again?  
When Nature spins the eternal thread and wires  
it on the spindle indifferently,  
when all of Nature's disharmonic horde  
sound their morose and muddled choirs,  
who divides the line, endlessly flowing,  
reviving and bestowing  
rhythm and pulse to all?  
Who calls the single to celebrate the whole,  
where all sing out in glorious accord?  
Who makes the storms reveal our Passion's rage,  
the glow of sunset gloss our thoughtfulness?  
Who shakes the loveliest spring blossoms loose  
to line the path the sweetheart treads?  
Who weaves the insignificant green leaves  
into wreaths worth honoring our best?  
Who safeguards Olympus and unites the Gods?  
Our human strength incarnate in the Poets.

## Clown

So use it then, this lovely skill,  
and conduct that business of poetry  
as you would start a love affair:  
You meet by chance, you feel something, stay there,  
and, by and by, you find yourself ensnared.  
Happiness grows, then its teeth are bared.  
First comes delight, then pain as you are bitten,  
and, hey, you find the story is all written!

This is the drama you must give!  
Grasp the fullness of how we live!

Each one lives it, but not many know they do.  
Seize it where you will, it will seize you too.  
A color-cluttered picture is not clear—  
Much false, and just a spark of what is true...  
That is the better brew  
to quench and satisfy the world.  
The flowering of youth will gather round  
to hear the revelation of your mind,  
and every tender soul will nurse  
on the melancholy of your verse.  
First this, then that excites them in your art,  
as all find what is bearing on their heart.  
Still, their capacity to laugh and cry is great.  
They honor, still, your flights, and love an attitude.  
Those who have finished can find nothing right,  
but those still growing always show their gratitude.

### **Poet**

So give me back those times  
when I, myself, was capable of growth,  
and when a spring of rushing hymns  
burst self-renewing from the earth—  
Mist veiled the world, and each bud still promised  
wonder, and when I'd gathered in my fist  
a thousand blooming boughs that grew to fluff  
the slopes and valleys both,  
I had nothing, and yet enough:  
The lust for Fantasy and a thirst for Truth.  
Give back to me my uncontrolled drive,  
that profound joy entwined with pain,  
Hate's strength and the power of Love.  
Give me back my youth again.

### **Clown**

Your youth, my friend, you need the most  
when facing some foe in a fight.  
Or when girls' lovely arms are tossed  
around your neck with all their might.  
When that winner's wreath in the distance,

paces you on your hard-won way.  
When after the whirling violence of the dance,  
you eat and drink the night away.  
But to sing in well-known chords  
with courage and with graceful words,  
to set, through charming misstep, and chase  
a self-appointed aim,  
that, old man, is your task, and we  
will honor you no less.  
Old age makes people childish, so they claim,  
but it finds we're all true children, really.

### **Director**

You've said plenty, now let  
me see some action. While you alternate  
issuing each other compliments,  
something useful might commence.  
What good is it to talk of mood.  
The one who hesitates never makes good.  
If poetry is your profession,  
commandeer some poetry, then.  
You know what we need. We want stiff drink!  
Now brew up some at once. Don't think  
what isn't done today will be done tomorrow.  
And no day should you let be missed.  
Catch hold of what is possible  
and clutch it tightly by the tail,  
then you will never let go,  
but labor on, because you must.

You know that on our German stage  
we try out whatever we might.  
So spare us nothing here tonight,  
neither machinery nor assemblage.  
Employ the sun and moon. Employ  
the many stars as you desire.  
Use walls of stone, water, fire.  
Use beast and birds, we have a great supply.  
So walk our narrow house of boards here

until you stride Creation's sphere.  
Move thoughtfully, but quickly as well,  
from Heaven through the world to Hell.

## Prologue in Heaven (Lines 243–354)

*The Lord. The Heavenly Host.  
Later, Mephistopheles.*

*(The Three Archangels come forward.)*

### Raphael

The sun sings out, an ancient trope,  
competing with its fellow spheres,  
completing its predestined scope,  
with claps of thunder in their ears.

The sight of it gives strength to angels,  
but none can fathom why. The high,  
incomprehensible work dangles  
as brightly now as the First Day.

### Gabriel

Swiftly, past even thought's swift pace,  
Earth's splendor spins along in flight,  
exchanging Eden's light and grace,  
for the deep and awful night.

In foaming currents, oceans rush  
against the rocks from far below,  
as speeding worlds forever push  
the rocks and oceans, too.

### Michael

And warring tempests sound their strain  
from sea to land, from land to sea,  
and, raging, forge a coiling chain  
of deep and savage energy,

as flashing desolations flare  
and light the crashing thunder's way,  
but, Lord, your heralds must revere  
the mild progression of your day.

### **All Three**

The sight gives strength to all the angels,  
though none can fathom why. The high,  
incomprehensible work dangles,  
glorious now as its first day.

### **Mephistopheles**

Since you, O lord, again come close  
and ask how we all are, and since  
you used to like to see me too, I chose  
to tag along once more with your servants.  
Forgive me, for I cannot make  
pretty speeches, and, for that, the group looks down  
on me. My pathos would surely make you laugh,  
had you not banished laughter a while back.  
I don't have much to say of worlds and sun.  
I see only how Humankind torments itself.  
The small gods of the world are stamped to stay  
as strange as on the world's first day.

His life might be a little better, had you  
not given him that sliver of Heaven he  
calls Reason and only uses to grow  
more beastly than the beasts. He seems to me—  
If you don't mind me saying so—  
just like the long-legged cicada  
that always flits and flies and, flying, springs  
and, springing in the grass, still sings  
the same old song. If only he stayed a  
bug in the grass, but there's no trash heap that  
his nose will not investigate.

### **The Lord**

Don't you have anything else to add?  
Do you come only to complain?  
Is nothing on Earth ever right?

### **Mephistopheles**

No Lord, I find it there, as always, pretty bad.



Mankind continues so in grief and pain  
that even I feel sorry adding to their plight.

**The Lord**

Do you know Faust.

**Mephistopheles**

The Doctor?

**The Lord**

My servant.

**Mephistopheles**

Really? He serves you oddly, then.  
His food and drink are not of the earth.  
The ferment of his drive carries him forth  
so far, that he himself half-knows he is insane.  
From Heaven he demands the fairest star  
and from the earth its greatest joy.  
But all things near and all things far,  
can't quench his deepest heart's desire.

**The Lord**

Since, now, though muddled he still serves, I'll steer  
him to a clearer view. The gardener knows  
that when the tree is green, it grows  
to drape itself in blooms and fruit some future year.

**Mephistopheles**

You want to bet? You'll lose, Lord,  
if you give me a free hand to lead  
him gently down my avenue.

**The Lord**

As long as he stays alive  
I won't forbid you to pursue  
him. Humankind must err as long as they still strive.

**Mephistopheles**

For that, you have my thanks. I've always felt  
a little awkward dealing with the dead.  
I much prefer a cheek that's full and red.  
When corpses come, I leave the house.  
My method's more like the cat's with a mouse.

**The Lord**

Enough! I'll let you have your game.  
If you can, draw his spirit from its Source  
and lead him, provided you can catch  
him, on your downward path. But when, in shame  
you stand before me, concede you've met your match:  
A good man, even in his darkest state  
will always be aware of the right course.

**Mephistopheles**

Alright. But we will not have long to wait—  
I'm feeling pretty good about this bet.  
And when I win, admit you've lost  
and let my triumph puff my chest.  
He'll feast on dust, and love it, like  
my cousin does, the famous snake.

**The Lord**

You may appear before me freely.  
I never hated those like you.  
Of all the spirits that negate,  
the joker is the least of worries.  
Human activity tires easily.  
They soon prefer complete silence, so  
I give them, gladly, one who harries  
and works as Devil to create.

But you, true sons of God, delight  
in eternal living Beauty. May what's  
becoming, all that lives and strives upright,  
embrace you in sweet bonds of Love.  
And may you ground with everlasting thoughts  
those apparitions wavering above.

*(The Heavens close, the Archangels disperse.)*

**Mephistopheles**

I like to see the old guy when I can,  
and I make sure that I give no offense.  
It's charming when so great a Lord consents  
to speak unto the Devil man-to-man.

# The First Part of the Tragedy

## Night

*(A narrow, high-vaulted, Gothic room;  
Faust sits, restless, in an armchair at his desk.)*

### Faust

I've studied, ach! Philosophy,  
the Law and Medicine,  
and, worst of all, Theology,  
constantly, feverishly, again and again,  
and here I am, poor clown,  
no smarter than I was before.  
They name me Magister, Doctor, in fact, and for  
ten years I've dragged my pupils by the nose  
(crooked and crossways, up and down)  
to see that we know nothing we suppose.

This burns my heart, which at least means  
I'm cleverer than all those other brains—  
doctors, teachers, writers, the priests as well.  
No doubts or scruples torment me.  
I'm not scared of the Devil or his Hell,  
but this has cost me all my joy.

Do not pretend I know anything much.  
Do not pretend that I can teach  
young minds, to improve them or set them straight.  
I have no money, nothing of worth,  
no honor or glory here on Earth—  
No dog would want to live like that!

Therefore, I've turned to magic, hoping through  
a spirit's strength and mouth, to break  
open some of the secrets, so  
I will no longer speak  
with sour sweat of what I do not know;  
so I might recognize the inner force

that binds the world, see all the seeds, the cords  
and weavings of our universe  
and quit this rummaging in words.

O see the full moon's light! I wish you shined  
for the last time on my pain!  
So many midnights, I've been right here,  
hunched over books and papers in this chair  
when you appeared, my gloomy friend!

Oh, if only under your pretty light,  
I could run up to the mountain,  
and, with the spirits, range cavern and ridge,  
weaving over meadows in your twilight,  
purged of this smoky knowledge,  
and bathing myself healthy in your dew.

But am I stuck in this dungeon, after all?  
This damn dank hole in the wall  
where Heaven's lovely light itself can do  
no more than gleam gloomily through dark glass.  
Shut up with all these books: dusty, worm-gnawed,  
piled high as the ceiling vault, walled  
with smoke-stained papers, cluttered with a mass  
of beakers, jars, and boxes, imperiled  
by instruments stacked on each side, and a cache  
of all this inherited trash.  
This is your world! Or what is called a world!

And still you wonder why the heart  
lies cramped with dread;  
why this unfathomable hurt  
diminishes your lust for life. Instead  
of living Nature, made  
by God for humankind, you stumble on  
in smoke and mustiness, arrayed  
with skeletons of beasts and human bone.

Fly! Out into the wider land  
with only this mysterious book in tow,

written in Nostradamus's own hand.  
Is this not company enough to go?  
You'll comprehend the cycle of a star,  
then after Nature teaches you, your own  
soul's strength will soon be shown,  
and how the spirits speak to one another.  
But such dry musings can't explain  
these holy symbols. You float in air,  
O spirits, all around me here,  
answer me if you can.

*(He opens the book and sees the sign of the macro-cosmos.)*

Aha! What joy flows to every sense  
at this first glance? I feel  
a young and holy lust for life now start,  
freshly glowing through all my nerves and veins.  
Was it a god who wrote these signs that still  
my inner rages, that shower  
with pleasure my poor heart  
and with a secret drive reveal  
to me Nature's every hidden power?

Am I a god? I feel so entirely complete.  
I see in these pure signs  
creative Nature laid bare at my feet.  
And now I understand the sage's lines:  
"The spirit world is not shut from your sight.  
Your mind is closed; your heart is dead.  
Rise, student, undeterred, and bathe instead  
your mortal breast in the risen sunlight."

*(He contemplates the sign.)*

How they all weave themselves into the whole,  
each in the other, working and alive.  
How Heaven's powers, climbing up and down, hold  
and pass between them pails of gold.  
With blessed scent, they swing from Heaven and dive

through Earth, all harmonious with the All.  
What play! But, ach, a play only. Where do,  
unending Nature, I catch hold of you?  
Breasts, where are you, you springs of Life  
from which the Earth and Heaven hang?  
Against you, the wilted heart presses itself.  
You spring, you well, and here in vain I languish.

*(In frustration, he turns the pages and finds the sign of the Earth-Spirit.)*

How differently this symbol works on me.  
You are nearer to me, Spirit of the Earth.  
How suddenly I feel my power's growth;  
How suddenly I glow as if I'd drunk new wine.  
I feel courage enough to venture out  
into the world, to bear upon my back  
all of its griefs and joys,  
to wrestle storms  
and shrug off the crunch of shipwreck.  
Suddenly, clouds form above me  
and the moon hides her light.  
The lamp diminishes:  
It steams. Red light dances around my head—Coldness  
rains down from the ceiling  
and seizes me.  
I feel you, spirit whom I implore.  
Reveal yourself!  
Ah! How you tear my very core!  
All my senses filling  
with new feeling:  
To you, my heart is utterly lost.  
You must! You must! Though my life is the cost!

*(He grabs the book and mysteriously speaks the sign. A reddish flame flares.  
The spirit appears in the fire.)*

## **Spirit**

Who calls me?

**Faust**

Terrible essence!

**Spirit**

Powerfully, you pulled me to this place.  
Long you've been suckling at my sphere  
and now . . .

**Faust**

I can't bear your presence!

**Spirit**

You begged, breathless, to behold me, to hear  
my voice, to see my face.  
You swayed me with your powerful appeal.  
Here I am! What pitiful fear  
envelops you, Superman! Where is your soul's yell?  
Where is that heart able to encase  
a world, to carry it and nurse it,  
that heart, trembling with joy, that burst  
itself to equal us.

Where are you Faust,  
that voice I heard tonight  
that drove itself toward me with all your might?  
Are you he? You, who, confronted by my breath  
alone, shiver for all you're worth,  
a fearful, wriggling worm?

**Faust**

Shall I give way to you, Figure of Fire?  
It is I. It is Faust. Your peer!

**Spirit**

In Life's floods and storm of energy  
I wax and wane,  
weave out and in,  
from birth to grave,  
a never-ending sea,  
an ever-changing, glowing life,



and at the roaring loom of Time, I press,  
weaving God's living dress.

**Faust**

Busy spirit, You, who circle  
the whole wide world. How near to you I feel!

**Spirit**

You're like the spirit you comprehend,  
not me!

**Faust**

Not you?  
Then who?  
Image of Godhead,  
and yet still not like you?

*(A knock.)*

O death! I know that knock. Mein Famulus!  
My greatest chance for happiness despoiled!  
That this great wealth of visions be foiled  
by that dry creeper's fuss!

*(Wagner in a nightshirt and cap enters with a lamp in his hand. Indignant, Faust turns.)*

**Wagner**

Forgive me. I heard your recitations.  
Surely you read from some Greek tragic part?  
I'd like to profit from such an art,  
which has, these days, useful applications.

Many times, I've heard it expressed  
an acting coach might well instruct a priest.

**Faust**

Yes, when the priest is an actor, which is  
the case oftener than you surmise.

**Wagner**

Ah, when one keeps to one's study alone  
and only sees the world on holiday,  
as if by telescope, the world's so far away,  
how can one lead the world by persuasion?

**Faust**

If you don't feel it, you'll never chase it down with skill.  
Unless it flows out from your very soul  
and with the strength of its own easy cheer  
transforms the hearts of all who hear.  
Just sit there pasting words together, stir up  
a stew from another's leftover feast  
and blow a miserable flame to start  
from your small pile of ashes, which, at least,  
will earn you wonder from a child or ape,  
if this is what will please your palate.  
But you will never, breast to breast, create  
if you don't speak from your own heart.

**Wagner**

But delivery means a lot. And I find  
that there I am still far behind.

**Faust**

Seek only honest gain!  
Don't be a jingling fool.  
Commonsense and whatever's sensible  
can get you far with little training!  
If what you have to say is thought out well,  
the words will find you without fail.  
Yes, your speech that glitters so, that laces up  
for humankind their scraps of knowledge, achieves  
as much as misty winds that whip  
and whistle through the rustling Autumn leaves.

**Wagner**

Ach, Gott! But art is long  
and Life so short.

So often at my scholarly studying,  
I lose my head and heart.  
How hard it is to earn the means to work  
our way back to the Source.  
Before we even reach the halfway mark,  
we're likely, poor devils, to die, of course.

**Faust**

Parchment! Is that the holy spring  
from which you drink to forever still  
your thirst? You will not be refreshed by anything  
unless refreshment wells from your own soul.

**Wagner**

But it is a great delight  
to move within the spirit of ages past,  
to see just how the wise before us thought  
and marvel at how far we've come at last.

**Faust**

Oh yes, my friend, right to the stars!  
The times that came before this time of ours  
became a book of seven seals.  
What you call the spirit of past ages  
is just the spirit of those souls  
in whom the ages are reflected images.  
And, honestly, they are so pathetic,  
one runs away at first glance:  
the garbage cans, the cluttered attic,  
and, at the top, those pompous plays  
filled with instructive one-liners, clichés  
just perfect for a puppet to pronounce.

**Wagner**

But the world! The heart and soul of humankind—  
Everyone wants to find out about them.

**Faust**

Yes, but do they understand what they find?  
Who dares to call the child by its right name?

The few who have discovered anything  
foolishly refuse to keep it in their heart;  
And those who have revealed their true thinking—  
their visions to the crowd—have, from the start  
ended up crucified or burned alive.

But friend, I beg you, it's getting late.  
We must now break off this debate.

**Wagner**

I'd like to carry on all night this way.  
I've learned so much speaking with you today.  
But tomorrow, Easter break will begin;  
perhaps you'll have more answers for me then.  
I've studied eagerly and can recall  
what I know, but I want to know it all.

**Faust** (*alone*)

How does hope stay in the heads of those consoled  
by clinging forever to such dry stuff?  
With greedy hands, they reach down deep for gold,  
and still are happy when they bring up worms.  
Dare such a person's voice sound off  
where spirits filled the rooms?  
But, O, for this you are now thanked,  
you poorest son of Earth, you yanked  
me loose from my despair.  
Already my senses start to recharge.  
Ach! The apparition was so large  
I felt I had become a dwarf.

I, image of divinity, who saw  
the mirror of eternal truth so near, began  
relishing Heaven's luminous glow  
and stripped off all the dross of mortal man.  
I, more than cherub, whose free strength flew, rife  
already, through Nature's veins, and dared  
enjoy a god's creative life—  
For this I must now pay:  
One word of thunder swept me far away.

I should not compare myself to you.  
I had the strength to bring you, though  
not the power to keep you here.  
In that blessed moment, I felt so small,  
so great ... Cruelly, you pushed me back to fall  
again into this uncertain human sphere.  
Who teaches me? From what should I abstain?  
Should I give in to this one compulsion?

Ah, our actions like our pain  
hinder this walk of life we're on.  
The wondrous things the mind receives does not forestall  
the urge for strange and stranger stuff.  
When we achieve good in our world, we call  
the better stuff a dream and fraud.  
Those feelings of wonder that gave us life  
are deadened in the earthly crowd.

Once Fantasy flew daringly  
in hope of expanding toward Eternity,  
but now a little room suffices.  
When joy on joy flails in the whirl  
of time, and deep in the heart, worry curls  
its nest, secretly working in Despair,  
holding itself restlessly there,  
disturbing peace and happiness,  
it always puts on fresh disguises  
and comes as house and yard, as child or wife,  
then water, fire, poison, and knife.  
You tremble at the thing that does  
not strike, and grieve for what you may not lose.

I'm not like the gods. This, I deeply feel.  
I am the worm that squirms through soot  
and dust, that lives in dust and soot until  
it's buried by the wanderer's wide boot.  
Is it not dust that narrows this high wall,  
filled with a hundred shelves? And this rabble,  
these thousand separate trifles furred

to keep me in this mothly world?  
Here where I find what I lack? Will I now  
learn in a thousand books somehow  
that humankind tortures itself everywhere,  
though you find a happy one here and there?

What are you grinning at, hollow skull, but that  
your scrambled brain, like mine, once sought the light of day  
and, finding in the quest for truth heavy twilight  
instead, went wretchedly astray?  
Your instruments mock me, it's true, with these  
rollers and combs, these wheels and gear and belts.  
I stood at the gates, you were to be the keys.  
Your wards are intricate, but still can't lift the bolts.

Mysterious even in daytime, never  
will Nature let her veils be stolen. What  
she does not want to be revealed, will not  
be forced from her by any wrench or lever.  
You ancient tools that I don't use, you stand  
there now because my father once used you.  
You ancient scrolls have been smoke-stained  
since the day I let this dull desk-lamp glow.  
Far better had I squandered the few things I owned  
than sweat over this worthless load.  
What you inherit from your father must be earned  
before it's yours for good.  
Each moment creates the tool that it can use.

But why is my eye pinned to that spot?  
Is that vial a magnet to my eyes?  
Why does this sudden light suffuse  
the room with its loveliness, spreading out  
like moonlight breaking through the forest trees?

I greet you, unique vial. With reverence  
I fetch you down, marveling at  
human ingenuity and art.  
You example, par excellence,

of the sweetest sleep-inducing agents,  
you extract of subtly fatal power, bestow  
your gift unto your master now!  
I see you and my pain  
lessens. I grab you and my struggles wane.  
The flood-wave of the spirit ebbs. Above  
the mirror-currents gleaming at my feet, I shove  
off for the open sea,  
lured to new shores by a new day.

A fiery chariot approaches me,  
hovering on light wings. I feel ready  
to pierce the ether through with new pathways,  
to reach new worlds of limitless action.  
This Higher Life! These God-like joys!  
Do I, still such a worm, deserve all that?

Yes, turn your back upon the sweet world's sun.  
Just steel yourself and open the gate  
in front of you that others must slink past.  
Now is the time to show, at last,  
our dignity matches that of the gods  
and does not tremble at that dark cave,  
where fantasy condemns itself to live  
in pain, then further girds  
for the long passageway whose narrow mouth  
flickers with flames of Hell. Coolly profess  
your resolve to make this journey, though, in truth,  
you risk the drop off into nothingness.

Come down, pure crystal vase,  
out of your ancient case.  
I have forgotten you for years.  
You glittered at my father's feasts  
and cheered up all the solemn guests  
when passed from Father's hand to theirs.  
Your images, gleaming under those lights—  
Each drinker first would rhyme to explain them, then try  
in one great gulp to drink you dry—  
Bring back to me those youthful nights!

I will not pass you to my neighbor or sing  
cleverly about your art. Here is a juice  
that gets you quickly drunk. It fills the bowl  
with its brown flood. I prepared it, now I choose  
to down this final drink with all my soul.  
A festive high salute to the morning.

*(He raises the bowl to his lips.)*

*(Bells chime.)*

### **Choir of Angels**

Christ is risen!  
Joy to the mortals, whom  
the ruined, falling,  
the passed down crawling  
faults held in prison!

### **Faust**

What resonance! What bright sound draws the bowl  
forcibly from my lips? Do these deep bells now toll  
the joyful start of Easter? Does this choir incant  
again that lovely consoling hymn  
first sung by angels around the tomb,  
confirming a new covenant?

### **Choir of Women**

We who believed  
took tender care  
of Him. We the bereaved  
anointed Him with myrrh,

clothed and bound him.  
Returning near,  
oh, we found him,  
no longer there.

### **Choir of Angels**

Christ is risen!  
Blessed is the beloved  
one who has passed through



the holy trials, anew  
from the world's prison!

### **Faust**

Strong and gentle heavenly music,  
why search for me down in the dirt?  
Go play for a more tender heart.  
I hear the message; it's faith I lack.

And Miracle is Faith's favorite child.  
I should not attempt to travel  
to those spheres from where these sweet tidings spilled.  
And yet, in childhood I knew well  
this music that calls me back to life.  
In other times, Heaven's love fell  
upon me like a kiss in the solemn quiet  
of Sunday; the prophetic bells rang full  
and prayer was passionate pleasure. A sweet  
incomprehensible longing drove me  
through woods and fields and as I cried  
a thousand burning tears, I felt inside  
of me a whole new world rising.  
This song proclaimed the games of youth, the free  
and happy festival of Spring.  
Memories, with childlike feelings, restrain  
me from this solemn step.  
O ring, sweet songs of Heaven, loud and deep!  
My tears pour out and Earth receives me once again.

### **Choir of Disciples**

The beloved buried one  
is risen already—  
The live exalted son  
marvelously on high.

He's near the joy of birth,  
the joy of creation,  
but we, on the breast of Earth,  
suffer in stagnation.

He has left us alone  
to grieve in our distress.  
Master, we weep and moan  
for you, your happiness.

**Choir of Angels:**

Christ is risen  
from Corruption's belly.  
Now loosen joyfully  
your bonds of prison,

you, who live life, showing  
your love for Him, going  
as preachers, reachers, bowing  
in brotherly feasts, sowing  
the joy you promise, knowing  
that your Master is near.  
Your Master! He is here!