



***JOHANN
WOLFGANG
VON GOETHE***

***FAUST; A TRAGEDY,
TRANSLATED FROM
THE GERMAN
OF GOETHE***



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Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Faust; a Tragedy, Translated from the German of Goethe

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A TRAGEDY

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

OF

GOETHE

WITH NOTES

BY

CHARLES T BROOKS

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

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Perhaps some apology ought to be given to English scholars, that is, those who do not know German, (to those, at least, who do not know what sort of a thing Faust is in the original,) for offering another translation to the public, of a poem which has been already translated, not only in a literal prose form, but also, twenty or thirty times, in metre, and sometimes with great spirit, beauty, and power.

The author of the present version, then, has no knowledge that a rendering of this wonderful poem into the exact and ever-changing metre of the original has, until now, been so much as attempted. To name only one defect, the very best versions which he has seen neglect to follow the exquisite artist in the evidently planned and orderly intermixing of *male* and *female* rhymes, *i.e.* rhymes which fall on the last syllable and those which fall on the last but one. Now, every careful student of the versification of Faust must feel and see that Goethe did not intersperse the one

kind of rhyme with the other, at random, as those translators do; who, also, give the female rhyme (on which the vivacity of dialogue and description often so much depends,) in so small a proportion.

A similar criticism might be made of their liberty in neglecting Goethe's method of alternating different measures with each other.

It seems as if, in respect to metre, at least, they had asked themselves, how would Goethe have written or shaped this in English, had that been his native language, instead of seeking *con amore* (and *con fidelità*) as they should have done, to reproduce, both in spirit and in form, the movement, so free and yet orderly, of the singularly endowed and accomplished poet whom they undertook to represent.

As to the objections which Hayward and some of his reviewers have instituted in advance against the possibility of a good and faithful metrical translation of a poem like Faust, they seem to the present translator full of paradox and sophistry. For instance, take this assertion of one of the reviewers: "The sacred and mysterious union of thought with verse, twin-born and immortally wedded from the moment of their common birth, can never be understood by those who desire verse translations of good poetry." If the last part of this statement had read "by those who can be contented with *prose* translations of good poetry," the position would have been nearer the truth. This much we might well admit, that, if the alternative were either to have a poem like Faust in a metre different and glaringly different from the original, or to have it in simple and strong prose,

then the latter alternative would be the one every tasteful and feeling scholar would prefer; but surely to every one who can read the original or wants to know how this great song *sung itself* (as Carlyle says) out of Goethe's soul, a mere prose rendering must be, comparatively, a *corpus mortuum*.

The translator most heartily dissents from Hayward's assertion that a translator of Faust "must sacrifice either metre or meaning." At least he flatters himself that he has made, in the main, (not a compromise between meaning and melody, though in certain instances he may have fallen into that, but) a combination of the meaning with the melody, which latter is so important, so vital a part of the lyric poem's meaning, in any worthy sense. "No poetic translation," says Hayward's reviewer, already quoted, "can give the rhythm and rhyme of the original; it can only substitute the rhythm and rhyme of the translator." One might just as well say "no *prose* translation can give the *sense and spirit* of the original; it can only substitute the *sense and spirit of the words and phrases of the translator's language*;" and then, these two assertions balancing each other, there will remain in the metrical translator's favor, that he may come as near to giving both the letter and the spirit, as the effects of the Babel dispersion will allow.

As to the original creation, which he has attempted here to reproduce, the translator might say something, but prefers leaving his readers to the poet himself, as revealed in the poem, and to the various commentaries of which we have some accounts, at least, in English. A French translator of the poem speaks in his introduction as follows: "This

Faust, conceived by him in his youth, completed in ripe age, the idea of which he carried with him through all the commotions of his life, as Camoens bore his poem with him through the waves, this Faust contains him entire. The thirst for knowledge and the martyrdom of doubt, had they not tormented his early years? Whence came to him the thought of taking refuge in a supernatural realm, of appealing to invisible powers, which plunged him, for a considerable time, into the dreams of Illuminati and made him even invent a religion? This irony of Mephistopheles, who carries on so audacious a game with the weakness and the desires of man, is it not the mocking, scornful side of the poet's spirit, a leaning to sullenness, which can be traced even into the earliest years of his life, a bitter leaven thrown into a strong soul forever by early satiety? The character of Faust especially, the man whose burning, untiring heart can neither enjoy fortune nor do without it, who gives himself unconditionally and watches himself with mistrust, who unites the enthusiasm of passion and the dejectedness of despair, is not this an eloquent opening up of the most secret and tumultuous part of the poet's soul? And now, to complete the image of his inner life, he has added the transcendently sweet person of Margaret, an exalted reminiscence of a young girl, by whom, at the age of fourteen, he thought himself beloved, whose image ever floated round him, and has contributed some traits to each of his heroines. This heavenly surrender of a simple, good, and tender heart contrasts wonderfully with the sensual and gloomy passion of the lover, who, in the midst of his love-dreams, is persecuted by the phantoms of his imagination

and by the nightmares of thought, with those sorrows of a soul, which is crushed, but not extinguished, which is tormented by the invincible want of happiness and the bitter feeling, how hard a thing it is to receive or to bestow."

DEDICATION.[1]

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Once more ye waver dreamily before me,
Forms that so early cheered my troubled eyes!
To hold you fast doth still my heart implore me?
Still bid me clutch the charm that lures and flies?
Ye crowd around! come, then, hold empire o'er me,
As from the mist and haze of thought ye rise;
The magic atmosphere, your train enwreathing,
Through my thrilled bosom youthful bliss is breathing.

Ye bring with you the forms of hours Elysian,
And shades of dear ones rise to meet my gaze;
First Love and Friendship steal upon my vision
Like an old tale of legendary days;
Sorrow renewed, in mournful repetition,
Runs through life's devious, labyrinthine ways;
And, sighing, names the good (by Fortune cheated
Of blissful hours!) who have before me fled.

These later songs of mine, alas! will never
Sound in their ears to whom the first were sung!
Scattered like dust, the friendly throng forever!
Mute the first echo that so grateful rung!

To the strange crowd I sing, whose very favor
Like chilling sadness on my heart is flung;
And all that kindled at those earlier numbers
Roams the wide earth or in its bosom slumbers.

And now I feel a long-unwonted yearning
For that calm, pensive spirit-realm, to-day;
Like an Aeolian lyre, (the breeze returning,)
Floats in uncertain tones my lisping lay;
Strange awe comes o'er me, tear on tear falls burning,
The rigid heart to milder mood gives way!
What I possess I see afar off lying,
And what I lost is real and undying.

PRELUDE

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IN THE THEATRE.

Manager. Dramatic Poet. Merry Person.

Manager. You who in trouble and distress
Have both held fast your old allegiance,
What think ye? here in German regions
Our enterprise may hope success?
To please the crowd my purpose has been steady,
Because they live and let one live at least.
The posts are set, the boards are laid already,
And every one is looking for a feast.

They sit, with lifted brows, composed looks wearing,
Expecting something that shall set them staring.
I know the public palate, that's confest;
Yet never pined so for a sound suggestion;
True, they are not accustomed to the best,
But they have read a dreadful deal, past question.
How shall we work to make all fresh and new,
Acceptable and profitable, too?
For sure I love to see the torrent boiling,
When towards our booth they crowd to find a place,
Now rolling on a space and then recoiling,
Then squeezing through the narrow door of grace:
Long before dark each one his hard-fought station
In sight of the box-office window takes,
And as, round bakers' doors men crowd to escape
starvation,
For tickets here they almost break their necks.
This wonder, on so mixed a mass, the Poet
Alone can work; to-day, my friend, O, show it!

Poet. Oh speak not to me of that motley ocean,
Whose roar and greed the shuddering spirit chill!
Hide from my sight that billowy commotion
That draws us down the whirlpool 'gainst our will.
No, lead me to that nook of calm devotion,
Where blooms pure joy upon the Muses' hill;
Where love and friendship aye create and cherish,
With hand divine, heart-joys that never perish.
Ah! what, from feeling's deepest fountain springing,
Scarce from the stammering lips had faintly passed,
Now, hopeful, venturing forth, now shyly clinging,

To the wild moment's cry a prey is cast.
Oft when for years the brain had heard it ringing
It comes in full and rounded shape at last.
What shines, is born but for the moment's pleasure;
The genuine leaves posterity a treasure.

Merry Person. Posterity! I'm sick of hearing of it;
Supposing I the future age would profit,
Who then would furnish ours with fun?
For it must have it, ripe and mellow;
The presence of a fine young fellow,
Is cheering, too, methinks, to any one.
Whoso can pleasantly communicate,
Will not make war with popular caprices,
For, as the circle waxes great,
The power his word shall wield increases.
Come, then, and let us now a model see,
Let Phantasy with all her various choir,
Sense, reason, passion, sensibility,
But, mark me, folly too! the scene inspire.

Manager. But the great point is action! Every one
Comes as spectator, and the show's the fun.
Let but the plot be spun off fast and thickly,
So that the crowd shall gape in broad surprise,
Then have you made a wide impression quickly,
You are the man they'll idolize.
The mass can only be impressed by masses;
Then each at last picks out his proper part.
Give much, and then to each one something passes,
And each one leaves the house with happy heart.
Have you a piece, give it at once in pieces!

Such a ragout your fame increases;
It costs as little pains to play as to invent.
But what is gained, if you a whole present?
Your public picks it presently to pieces.

Poet. You do not feel how mean a trade like that must be!
In the true Artist's eyes how false and hollow!
Our genteel botchers, well I see,
Have given the maxims that you follow.

Manager. Such charges pass me like the idle wind;
A man who has right work in mind
Must choose the instruments most fitting.
Consider what soft wood you have for splitting,
And keep in view for whom you write!
If this one from *ennui* seeks flight,
That other comes full from the groaning table,
Or, the worst case of all to cite,
From reading journals is for thought unable.
Vacant and giddy, all agog for wonder,
As to a masquerade they wing their way;
The ladies give themselves and all their precious plunder
And without wages help us play.
On your poetic heights what dream comes o'er you?
What glads a crowded house? Behold
Your patrons in array before you!
One half are raw, the other cold.
One, after this play, hopes to play at cards,
One a wild night to spend beside his doxy chooses,
Poor fools, why court ye the regards,
For such a set, of the chaste muses?
I tell you, give them more and ever more and more,

And then your mark you'll hardly stray from ever;
To mystify be your endeavor,
To satisfy is labor sore....
What ails you? Are you pleased or pained? What notion——

Poet. Go to, and find thyself another slave!

What! and the lofty birthright Nature gave,
The noblest talent Heaven to man has lent,
Thou bid'st the Poet fling to folly's ocean!
How does he stir each deep emotion?
How does he conquer every element?
But by the tide of song that from his bosom springs,
And draws into his heart all living things?
When Nature's hand, in endless iteration,
The thread across the whizzing spindle flings,
When the complex, monotonous creation
Jangles with all its million strings:
Who, then, the long, dull series animating,
Breaks into rhythmic march the soulless round?
And, to the law of All each member consecrating,
Bids one majestic harmony resound?
Who bids the tempest rage with passion's power?
The earnest soul with evening-redness glow?
Who scatters vernal bud and summer flower
Along the path where loved ones go?
Who weaves each green leaf in the wind that trembles
To form the wreath that merit's brow shall crown?
Who makes Olympus fast? the gods assembles?
The power of manhood in the Poet shown.

Merry Person. Come, then, put forth these noble powers,
And, Poet, let thy path of flowers

Follow a love-adventure's winding ways.
One comes and sees by chance, one burns, one stays,
And feels the gradual, sweet entangling!
The pleasure grows, then comes a sudden jangling,
Then rapture, then distress an arrow plants,
And ere one dreams of it, lo! *there* is a romance.
Give us a drama in this fashion!
Plunge into human life's full sea of passion!
Each lives it, few its meaning ever guessed,
Touch where you will, 'tis full of interest.
Bright shadows fleeting o'er a mirror,
A spark of truth and clouds of error,
By means like these a drink is brewed
To cheer and edify the multitude.
The fairest flower of the youth sit listening
Before your play, and wait the revelation;
Each melancholy heart, with soft eyes glistening,
Draws sad, sweet nourishment from your creation;
This passion now, now that is stirred, by turns,
And each one sees what in his bosom burns.
Open alike, as yet, to weeping and to laughter,
They still admire the flights, they still enjoy the show;
Him who is formed, can nothing suit thereafter;
The yet unformed with thanks will ever glow.

Poet. Ay, give me back the joyous hours,
When I myself was ripening, too,
When song, the fount, flung up its showers
Of beauty ever fresh and new.
When a soft haze the world was veiling,
Each bud a miracle bespoke,

And from their stems a thousand flowers I broke,
Their fragrance through the vales exhaling.
I nothing and yet all possessed,
Yearning for truth and in illusion blest.
Give me the freedom of that hour,
The tear of joy, the pleasing pain,
Of hate and love the thrilling power,
Oh, give me back my youth again!

Merry Person. Youth, my good friend, thou needest
certainly

When ambushed foes are on thee springing,
When loveliest maidens witchingly
Their white arms round thy neck are flinging,
When the far garland meets thy glance,
High on the race-ground's goal suspended,
When after many a mazy dance
In drink and song the night is ended.
But with a free and graceful soul
To strike the old familiar lyre,
And to a self-appointed goal
Sweep lightly o'er the trembling wire,
There lies, old gentlemen, to-day
Your task; fear not, no vulgar error blinds us.
Age does not make us childish, as they say,
But we are still true children when it finds us.

Manager. Come, words enough you two have bandied,
Now let us see some deeds at last;
While you toss compliments full-handed,
The time for useful work flies fast.
Why talk of being in the humor?

Who hesitates will never be.
If you are poets (so says rumor)
Now then command your poetry.
You know full well our need and pleasure,
We want strong drink in brimming measure;
Brew at it now without delay!
To-morrow will not do what is not done to-day.
Let not a day be lost in dallying,
But seize the possibility
Right by the forelock, courage rallying,
And forth with fearless spirit sallying,—
Once in the yoke and you are free.
Upon our German boards, you know it,
What any one would try, he may;
Then stint me not, I beg, to-day,
In scenery or machinery, Poet.
With great and lesser heavenly lights make free,
Spend starlight just as you desire;
No want of water, rocks or fire
Or birds or beasts to you shall be.
So, in this narrow wooden house's bound,
Stride through the whole creation's round,
And with considerate swiftness wander
From heaven, through this world, to the world down yonder.

PROLOGUE

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IN HEAVEN.

[THE LORD. THE HEAVENLY HOSTS *afterward*
MEPHISTOPHELES. *The three archangels,* RAPHAEL,
GABRIEL, *and* MICHAEL, *come forward.*]

Raphael. The sun, in ancient wise, is sounding,
With brother-spheres, in rival song;
And, his appointed journey rounding,
With thunderous movement rolls along.
His look, new strength to angels lending,
No creature fathom can for aye;
The lofty works, past comprehending,
Stand lordly, as on time's first day.

Gabriel. And swift, with wondrous swiftness fleeting,
The pomp of earth turns round and round,
The glow of Eden alternating
With shuddering midnight's gloom profound;
Up o'er the rocks the foaming ocean
Heaves from its old, primeval bed,
And rocks and seas, with endless motion,
On in the spheral sweep are sped.