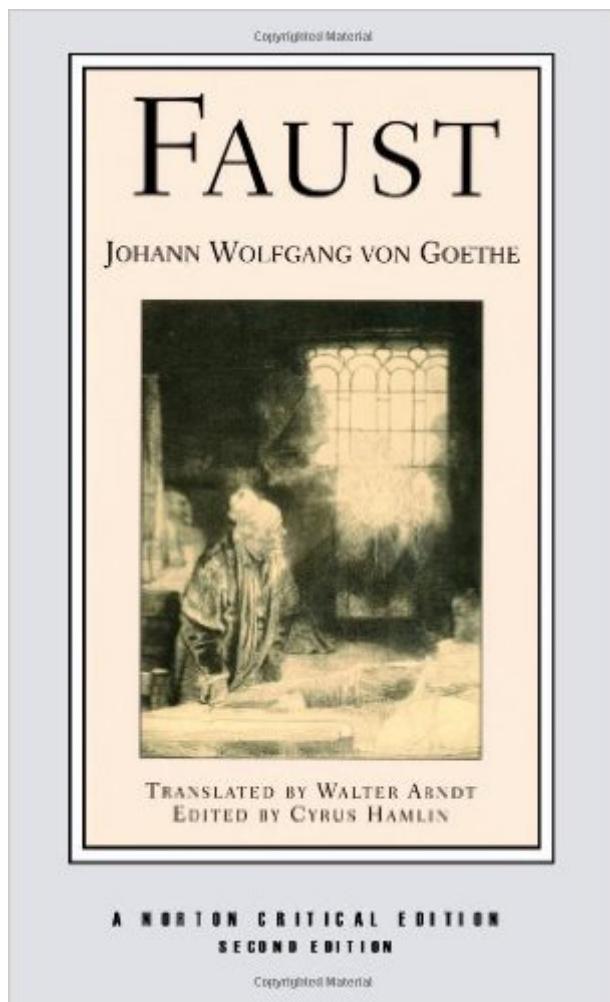


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Faust: A Tragedy (Norton Critical Editions)



Synopsis

Walter Arndt's translation of Faust reproduces the sense of the German original and Goethe's enormously varied metrics and rhyme schemes. This edition presents Parts I and II complete. Cyrus Hamlin provides essential supporting material for this difficult text, and his Interpretive Notes have been expanded and reset in larger, easy-to-read type. "Comments by Contemporaries" includes short pieces by Margaret Fuller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Carlyle, and Wilhelm von Humboldt. "Modern Criticism"--comprised of ten essays newly added to the Second Edition--presents the perspectives of Stuart Atkins, Jaroslav Pelikan, Benjamin Bennett, Franco Moretti, Friedrich A. Kittler, Neil M. Flax, Marc Shell, Jane Brown, Hans Rudolf Vaget, and Marshall Berman. A Selected Bibliography is included.

Book Information

Paperback: 752 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; 2 edition (November 5, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393972828

ISBN-13: 978-0393972825

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 0.9 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (65 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #83,325 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #13 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > European > German #43 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Literature > World Literature > European #84 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > European > German

Customer Reviews

"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.

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).

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 Ereignisss Das Unbeschreibliche Hier ist es gethan Das Ewig-Weibliche Zieht uns hinan.

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