

Dealing with the Devil: Goethe's Faust in Translation

(Un)Common Reads 28509

Little 117

Monday 9:35 a.m. - 10:25 a.m. ET

Clay.greene@ufl.edu

Office Hours: Zoom by Appointment

Description

“Germany’s Shakespeare,” Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) created *Faust*, the essential modern dramatic poem about the conflict of reason and faith, tradition and the individual, the life of intellect and the life of feeling. In this tragedy of loss and redemption, Goethe paints the image of the modern man, Heinrich Faust, a scientist and scholar bored to the point of despair by the rationalistic and disenchanting modern world. Signing a pact in blood with the witty demon Mephistopheles, Faust falls in love with the beautiful peasant-girl Gretchen and plunges himself into a world of feeling and emotion, throwing away both traditional religious faith and scientific reason. Reading Goethe’s classic and beloved poetic drama—known in Germany as well as *Romeo and Juliet* is in America—we will ask ourselves the pressing questions of how to live in the modern world. Is romantic love the solution to human suffering? Is evil real, or only a phantom created to keep the strong from taking all they can get? Can an intelligent person believe in God? Goethe’s answers will surprise and challenge us, as will his conviction that truth does not lie in what past thinkers have thought or said but what you can discover for yourself. “Everything past is only a metaphor!” Goethe says at his tragedy’s end. “What cannot be grasped is *the here and now*.” We will read *Faust*, therefore, not primarily to understand the past, but to understand the ungraspable *here and now*.

Course Goals:

1. Gain a comprehensive understanding of the plot, themes, and motifs of Faust Part One
2. Develop critical reading and analytical skills
3. Understand the historical and cultural context of Faust Part One
4. Understand Goethe's use of literary techniques and the work's significance in the German literary tradition
5. Develop effective communication skills through class discussion and written assignments

Text

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Part One*, trans. David Luke, *Oxford World Classics*, 2008.

Course Schedule:

Week 1: Introduction

Course overview and expectations

Introduction to Goethe's life and literary career

Overview of *Faust Part One*'s historical and cultural context

Week 2: The Prologue (Oxford 4-12)

In-class writing

Day 1 Prologue in Heaven: The Prologue (Oxford 9-12)

Book of Job 1 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job%201&version=NIV>

“Interpretive Notes,” 348-351

Week 3: Faust and the Encyclopedia of Western Knowledge (15-19)

“Interpretive Notes,” 351-353

“*Faust as Doctor of Theology*,” 586-598

The conflict of Enlightenment and Christianity

Faust's Despair (15-27)

Close reading and analysis of Faust's opening monologue
Discussion of Faust's character and motivations
Exploration of Faust's despair as a central theme in the work

Week 4: Mephistopheles (27-47)

Close reading and analysis of Mephistopheles' first appearance
Discussion of Mephistopheles' character and motivations
Exploration of Mephistopheles' role as Faust's foil

Week 5: The Pact with the Devil (47-62)

In-class writing

Close reading and analysis of the pact between Faust and Mephistopheles
Discussion of the ethical implications of the pact

Week 6: Interlude: Goethe and Nietzsche (Review, no reading)

Week 7: Mortal entanglements (62-81)

In-class writing

What is the significance of Faust's decision to go to the tavern?
Class consciousness (in order to set up the later effect with Gretchen).
German Nationalism

Week 8: Gretchen and Faust's Love Story (81-102)

The Quartet

Exploration of the relationship between Faust and Gretchen

Week 9: "The Gretchen Question" (102-120)

Societal norms and values

Week 10: Creative Project Discussion + In-class work

Week 11: The Walpurgis Night Scene (122-140)

In-class writing

Close reading and analysis of the Walpurgis Night scene
Discussion of the scene's significance to the work as a whole
Exploration of the themes of temptation and desire

Week 12: The end of Part One (140-148)

Close reading and analysis of the final scenes of the Gretchen story
Discussion of the significance of Gretchen's story to the work as a whole
Exploration of the work's themes of sin, redemption, and salvation

Week 13: Creative Project Presentation

Week 14: Course conclusion + Artist statement submission

Grade Overview

Attendance and Discussion 30 %

In-Class Presentation 30%

Creative Project 30%

Occasional in-class writing 10%

Attendance and Discussion

One of my goals for this class is to promote our abilities to discuss ideas in a critical and argumentative fashion. This means disagreement, something I will promote. Often students quickly try to smooth out their disagreements with other students or with me. This is a lost opportunity. The pressure to defend positions, adapt arguments, and find evidence leads us into deeper knowledge and insight.

In concrete terms, a good rule of thumb for participation is to be prepared to make one substantive comment per class. If I have not heard on you for a while, I may call on you to give you the opportunity to earn your participation points. Questions or requests for clarification also count as good participation. All comments and questions are encouraged.

In-Class Presentation

Throughout the semester, each student will be responsible for leading an in-class discussion on a specific topic related to Faust Part One. The purpose of these presentations is to encourage student engagement and foster a deeper understanding of the text. Each student will sign up for a specific presentation topic at the beginning of the semester. Students will have access to the library and other resources to aid in their research and preparation. Presentations should be 20-30 minutes long and include time for discussion and questions. Students should aim to foster class discussion and encourage participation. Presentations should be well-organized, clear, and engaging.

Grading Rubric:

1. Content (30%): The presentation is well-researched and provides a thorough analysis of the topic.
 2. Delivery (20%): The presentation is well-organized, clear, and engaging.
 3. Participation (30%): The student encourages class discussion and participation.
 4. Time Management (20%): The presentation is within the time limit of 20-30 minutes.
- Note: The instructor will provide feedback and guidance to help students prepare their presentations. The instructor may also modify the presentation topics and guidelines to fit the needs of the class.

Creative Project

Objective: The objective of this project is to allow students to explore the themes and motifs of Faust Part One by creating a creative project that is inspired by the text. The project can be in any form, such as a painting, a sculpture, a short film, a piece of music, or a creative writing piece.

Instructions:

1. Choose a theme or motif from *Faust Part One* that you want to explore in your project. This can be any element of the text that you find interesting or compelling.
2. Brainstorm ideas for your project. Think about the medium you want to use and how you can effectively convey your chosen theme or motif through your creative work.
3. Create your project. This can take any form you choose, as long as it effectively communicates your chosen theme or motif. Your project should demonstrate a clear understanding of the text and its themes.
4. Write a 1-2 page artist statement explaining your project. In this statement, you should describe the inspiration behind your project, how you approached creating it, and what you hope to communicate through it. You should also reflect on how your project connects to the themes and motifs of *Faust Part One*.
5. Present your project to the class. During the presentation, you should explain your project and its connection to the text, and be prepared to answer questions from your classmates.

Grading Criteria:

- Clear connection to the text and its themes (30%)
- Creativity and originality (30%)

- Technical skill (20%)
- Effectiveness in communicating chosen theme or motif (20%)

Deadlines:

- Brainstorming and idea submission: Week 10
- Project submission: Week 13
- Artist statement submission: Week 14

Note: The instructor will provide guidance and feedback throughout the project, including during the brainstorming and idea submission stage. The instructor may also provide examples of successful creative projects based on Faust Part One to inspire and guide students in their work.

In-class writing

The instructor will administer a series of occasional in-class writing assignments throughout the semester, which will account for 10% of the final grade. These assignments will be designed to encourage active reading and critical thinking about the text, as well as provide an opportunity for students to practice their writing skills.

Instructions:

1. At the beginning of each class session, the instructor will provide a prompt related to the assigned reading for the day.
2. Students will have 10-15 minutes to write a brief response to the prompt, demonstrating their understanding of the text and their ability to analyze and interpret it.
3. At the end of the class session, students will submit their response to the instructor for grading.

Grading Criteria:

- Demonstrated understanding of the text and the prompt (30%)
- Evidence of critical thinking and analysis (40%)
- Clarity and coherence of writing (30%)

Note: The instructor may choose to provide feedback on the responses or hold individual conferences with students to discuss their writing skills and offer suggestions for improvement.