



Goethe's Faust, Parts I & II

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Translated by Bayard Taylor

Read by:	Multiple readers	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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The theme of making a deal with the devil is one of the most enduring in all art forms. Most treatments are derived from the classic German legend of Faust that dates from the 1500's, the tale of a frustrated scholar who trades his soul for a life of unlimited knowledge and hedonistic pleasure. Goethe's *Faust*, a tragic play in two parts, is considered as the consummate treatment of the subject, as Goethe's magnum opus and as the greatest work of German literature. *Part I*, which is written largely in rhyming verse and was first published in 1808, hews closely to the original legend and depicts the drama of the everyday "small world". Faust and the devil make a deal: the devil will do anything for Faust here on earth and seeks to grant him a moment so sublime he will wish it to last forever, but, if Faust is ever fully satisfied,

he will die and serve the devil in Hell for eternity. In short order Faust is living large and wooing the gorgeous Gretchen. Unsurprisingly, arrogance, deception, and delusion lead him down the path to infernal and near eternal damnation. *Part II*, which was finished in 1831 and published after Goethe's death, is very different from *Part I* and by no means a sequel. Complex and full of references to mythology, it goes far beyond the simple struggle for Faust's soul and depicts the wider world in five separate acts with attention to larger political, historical, philosophical and mystical issues. After conflicts, struggles, and travels through space and time Faust finds a measure of redemption and grace for his striving.

It has been said that the German writer and statesman **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** (August 28, 1749 – March 22, 1832) may well have been the last Renaissance Man, a polymath with expertise spanning a wide range of subject areas. The publication of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, possibly the first best-seller, made him a celebrity at the age of 25 and brought him to the attention of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, who gave him a title and put him to work serving on his privy council, where he served on the War Commission and the Mines and Highway Commissions; he eventually served as Chancellor of the Exchequer in addition to serving as the Duke's principal advisor. His literary output includes *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, which Schopenhauer included as one of the four great novels of all time (the others being *Tristram Shandy*, *La Nouvelle Heloise*, and *Don Quixote*), and the epic masterpiece *Faust*. His scientific works include *Metamorphosis of Plants* (1790), which anticipated evolutionary theory, and *Theory of Colours*, which he considered his most important work. He published numerous poems, many of which were set to music by the likes of Beethoven and Mozart, wrote essays and criticism, and left behind over 10,000 letters and nearly 3,000 drawings. His influence on later generations was enormous as the originator of many ideas which became widespread. He is consistently ranked with the great thinkers and achievers of all time: Plato, Napoleon, Shakespeare, Adam Smith, and Thomas Jefferson, to name a few. He deserves our respect and, more importantly, our attention.