

FAUST

*Johann Wolfgang von
Goethe*



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Faust

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Preface

It is twenty years since I first determined to attempt the translation of *Faust*, in the original metres. At that time, although more than a score of English translations of the First Part, and three or four of the Second Part, were in existence, the experiment had not yet been made. The prose version of Hayward seemed to have been accepted as the standard, in default of anything more satisfactory: the English critics, generally sustaining the translator in his views concerning the secondary importance of form in Poetry, practically discouraged any further attempt; and no one, familiar with rhythmical expression through the needs of his own nature, had devoted the necessary love and patience to an adequate reproduction of the great work of Goethe's life.

Mr. Brooks was the first to undertake the task, and the publication of his translation of the First Part (in 1856) induced me, for a time, to give up my own design. No previous English version exhibited such abnegation of the translator's own tastes and habits of thought, such reverent desire to present the original in its purest form. The care and conscience with which the work had been performed were so apparent, that I now state with reluctance what then seemed to me to be its only deficiencies,—a lack of the lyrical fire and fluency of the original in some passages, and an occasional lowering of the tone through the use of words which are literal, but not equivalent. The plan of translation adopted by Mr. Brooks was so entirely my own, that when further residence in Germany and a more careful study of both parts of *Faust* had satisfied me that the field was still open,—that the means furnished by the poetical affinity of the two languages had not yet been exhausted,—nothing remained for me but to follow him in all essential

particulars. His example confirmed me in the belief that there were few difficulties in the way of a nearly literal yet thoroughly rhythmical version of *Faust*, which might not be overcome by loving labor. A comparison of seventeen English translations, in the arbitrary metres adopted by the translators, sufficiently showed the danger of allowing license in this respect: the white light of Goethe's thought was thereby passed through the tinted glass of other minds, and assumed the coloring of each. Moreover, the plea of selecting different metres in the hope of producing a similar effect is unreasonable, where the identical metres are possible.

The value of form, in a poetical work, is the first question to be considered. No poet ever understood this question more thoroughly than Goethe himself, or expressed a more positive opinion in regard to it. The alternative modes of translation which he presents (reported by Riemer, quoted by Mrs. Austin, in her "Characteristics of Goethe," and accepted by Mr. Hayward), ^[A]are quite independent of his views concerning the value of form, which we find given elsewhere, in the clearest and most emphatic manner.

^[B]Poetry is not simply a fashion of expression: it is the form of expression absolutely required by a certain class of ideas. Poetry, indeed, may be distinguished from Prose by the single circumstance, that it is the utterance of whatever in man cannot be perfectly uttered in any other than a rhythmical form: it is useless to say that the naked meaning is independent of the form: on the contrary, the form contributes essentially to the fullness of the meaning. In Poetry which endures through its own inherent vitality, there is no forced union of these two elements. They are as intimately blended, and with the same mysterious beauty, as the sexes in the ancient Hermaphroditus. To attempt to represent Poetry in Prose, is very much like attempting to translate music into speech. ^[C]

[A] "'There are two maxims of translation,' says he: 'the one requires that the author, of a foreign nation, be brought to us in such a manner that we may regard him as our own; the other, on the contrary, demands of us that we transport ourselves over to him, and adopt his situation, his mode of speaking, and his peculiarities. The advantages of both are sufficiently known to all instructed persons, from masterly examples.'" Is it necessary, however, that there should always be this alternative? Where the languages are kindred, and equally capable of all varieties of metrical expression, may not both these "maxims" be observed in the same translation? Goethe, it is true, was of the opinion that *Faust* ought to be given, in French, in the manner of Clement Marot; but this was undoubtedly because he felt the inadequacy of modern French to express the naive, simple realism of many passages. The same objection does not apply to English. There are a few archaic expressions in *Faust*, but no more than are still allowed—nay, frequently encouraged—in the English of our day.

[B] "You are right," said Goethe; "there are great and mysterious agencies included in the various forms of Poetry. If the substance of my 'Roman Elegies' were to be expressed in the tone and measure of Byron's 'Don Juan,' it would really have an atrocious effect."— *Eckermann* .

"The rhythm," said Goethe, "is an unconscious result of the poetic mood. If one should stop to consider it mechanically, when about to write a poem, one would become bewildered and accomplish nothing of real poetical value."— *Ibid* .

" *All that is poetic in character should be rhythmically treated* ! Such is my conviction; and if even a sort of poetic prose should be gradually introduced, it would only show that the distinction between prose and poetry had been completely lost sight of."— *Goethe to Schiller* , 1797.

Tycho Mommsen, in his excellent essay, *Die Kunst des Deutschen Uebersetzers aus neueren Sprachen* , goes so far as to say: "The metrical or rhymed modelling of a

poetical work is so essentially the germ of its being, that, rather than by giving it up, we might hope to construct a similar work of art before the eyes of our countrymen, by giving up or changing the substance. The immeasurable result which has followed works wherein the form has been retained—such as the Homer of Voss, and the Shakespeare of Tieck and Schlegel—is an incontrovertible evidence of the vitality of the endeavor."

[C] "Goethe's poems exercise a great sway over me, not only by their meaning, but also by their rhythm. It is a language which stimulates me to composition."—

Beethoven .

The various theories of translation from the Greek and Latin poets have been admirably stated by Dryden in his Preface to the "Translations from Ovid's Epistles," and I do not wish to continue the endless discussion,—especially as our literature needs examples, not opinions. A recent expression, however, carries with it so much authority, that I feel bound to present some considerations which the accomplished scholar seems to have overlooked. Mr. Lewes [D] justly says: "The effect of poetry is a compound of music and suggestion; this music and this suggestion are intermingled in words, which to alter is to alter the effect. For words in poetry are not, as in prose, simple representatives of objects and ideas: they are parts of an organic whole,—they are tones in the harmony." He thereupon illustrates the effect of translation by changing certain well-known English stanzas into others, equivalent in meaning, but lacking their felicity of words, their grace and melody. I cannot accept this illustration as valid, because Mr. Lewes purposely omits the very quality which an honest translator should exhaust his skill in endeavoring to reproduce. He turns away from the *one best* word or phrase in the English lines he quotes, whereas the translator seeks precisely that one best word or phrase

(having *all* the resources of his language at command), to represent what is said in *another* language. More than this, his task is not simply mechanical: he must feel, and be guided by, a secondary inspiration. Surrendering himself to the full possession of the spirit which shall speak through him, he receives, also, a portion of the same creative power. Mr. Lewes reaches this conclusion: "If, therefore, we reflect what a poem *Faust* is, and that it contains almost every variety of style and metre, it will be tolerably evident that no one unacquainted with the original can form an adequate idea of it from translation," [E] which is certainly correct of any translation wherein something of the rhythmical variety and beauty of the original is not retained. That very much of the rhythmical character may be retained in English, was long ago shown by Mr. Carlyle, [F] in the passages which he translated, both literally and rhythmically, from the *Helena* (Part Second). In fact, we have so many instances of the possibility of reciprocally transferring the finest qualities of English and German poetry, that there is no sufficient excuse for an unmetrical translation of *Faust*. I refer especially to such subtile and melodious lyrics as "The Castle by the Sea," of Uhland, and the "Silent Land" of Salis, translated by Mr. Longfellow; Goethe's "Minstrel" and "Coptic Song," by Dr. Hedge; Heine's "Two Grenadiers," by Dr. Furness and many of Heine's songs by Mr Leland; and also to the German translations of English lyrics, by Freiligrath and Strodtmann. [G]

[D] Life of Goethe (Book VI.).

[E] Mr. Lewes gives the following advice: "The English reader would perhaps best succeed who should first read Dr. Anster's brilliant paraphrase, and then carefully go through Hayward's prose translation." This is singularly at variance with the view he has just expressed. Dr. Anster's version is an almost incredible dilution of the original,

written in *other* metres; while Hayward's entirely omits the element of poetry.

[F] Foreign Review, 1828.

[G] When Freiligrath can thus give us Walter Scott:—

"Kommt, wie der Wind kommt,
Wenn Wälder erzittern
Kommt, wie die Brandung
Wenn Flotten zersplittern!
Schnell heran, schnell herab,
Schneller kommt Al'e!—
Häuptling und Bub' und Knapp,
Herr und Vasalle!"

or Strodtmann thus reproduce Tennyson:—

"Es fällt der Strahl auf Burg und Thal,
Und schneeige Gipfel, reich an Sagen;
Viel' Lichter wehn auf blauen Seen,
Bergab die Wasserstürze jagen!
Blas, Hüfthorn, blas, in Wiederhall erschallend:
Blas, Horn—antwortet, Echos, hallend, hallend, hallend!"

—it must be a dull ear which would be satisfied with the

omission of rhythm and rhyme.

I have a more serious objection, however, to urge against Mr. Hayward's prose translation. Where all the restraints of verse are flung aside, we should expect, at least, as accurate a reproduction of the sense, spirit, and tone of the original, as the genius of our language will permit. So far from having given us such a reproduction, Mr. Hayward not only occasionally mistakes the exact meaning of the German text, ^[H]but, wherever two phrases may be used to express the meaning with equal fidelity, he very frequently selects that which has the less grace, strength, or beauty. ^[I]

[H] On his second page, the line *Mein Lied ertönt der unbekanntem Menge*, "My song sounds to the unknown multitude," is translated: "My sorrow voices itself to the strange throng." Other English translators, I notice, have followed Mr. Hayward in mistaking *Lied* for *Leid*.

[I] I take but one out of numerous instances, for the sake of illustration. The close of the Soldier's Song (Part I. Scene II.) is:—

"Kühn is das Mühen,
Herrlich der Lohn!
Und die Soldaten
Ziehen davon."

Literally:

Bold is the endeavor,
Splendid the pay!

And the soldiers
March away.

This Mr. Hayward translates:—

Bold the adventure,
Noble the reward—
And the soldiers
Are off.

For there are few things which may not be said, in English, in a twofold manner,—one poetic, and the other prosaic. In German, equally, a word which in ordinary use has a bare prosaic character may receive a fairer and finer quality from its place in verse. The prose translator should certainly be able to feel the manifestation of this law in both languages, and should so choose his words as to meet their reciprocal requirements. A man, however, who is not keenly sensible to the power and beauty and value of rhythm, is likely to overlook these delicate yet most necessary distinctions. The author's thought is stripped of a last grace in passing through his mind, and frequently presents very much the same resemblance to the original as an unhewn shaft to the fluted column. Mr. Hayward unconsciously illustrates his lack of a refined appreciation of verse, "in giving," as he says, " *a sort of rhythmical arrangement* to the lyrical parts," his object being "to convey some notion of the variety of versification which forms one great charm of the poem." A literal translation is

always possible in the unrhymed passages; but even here Mr. Hayward's ear did not dictate to him the necessity of preserving the original rhythm.

While, therefore, I heartily recognize his lofty appreciation of *Faust*,—while I honor him for the patient and conscientious labor he has bestowed upon his translation,—I cannot but feel that he has himself illustrated the unsoundness of his argument. Nevertheless, the circumstance that his prose translation of *Faust* has received so much acceptance proves those qualities of the original work which cannot be destroyed by a test so violent. From the cold bare outline thus produced, the reader unacquainted with the German language would scarcely guess what glow of color, what richness of changeful life, what fluent grace and energy of movement have been lost in the process. We must, of course, gratefully receive such an outline, where a nearer approach to the form of the original is impossible, but, until the latter has been demonstrated, we are wrong to remain content with the cheaper substitute.

It seems to me that in all discussions upon this subject the capacities of the English language have received but scanty justice. The intellectual tendencies of our race have always been somewhat conservative, and its standards of literary taste or belief, once set up, are not varied without a struggle. The English ear is suspicious of new metres and unaccustomed forms of expression: there are critical detectives on the track of every author, and a violation of the accepted canons is followed by a summons to judgment. Thus the tendency is to contract rather than to expand the acknowledged excellences of the language. [J]

[J] I cannot resist the temptation of quoting the following passage from Jacob Grimm: "No one of all the modern languages has acquired a greater force and strength than the English, through the derangement and relinquishment

of its ancient laws of sound. The unteachable (nevertheless *learnable*) profusion of its middle-tones has conferred upon it an intrinsic power of expression, such as no other human tongue ever possessed. Its entire, thoroughly intellectual and wonderfully successful foundation and perfected development issued from a marvelous union of the two noblest tongues of Europe, the Germanic and the Romanic. Their mutual relation in the English language is well known, since the former furnished chiefly the material basis, while the latter added the intellectual conceptions. The English language, by and through which the greatest and most eminent poet of modern times—as contrasted with ancient classical poetry—(of course I can refer only to Shakespeare) was begotten and nourished, has a just claim to be called a language of the world; and it appears to be destined, like the English race, to a higher and broader sway in all quarters of the earth. For in richness, in compact adjustment of parts, and in pure intelligence, none of the living languages can be compared with it,—not even our German, which is divided even as we are divided, and which must cast off many imperfections before it can boldly enter on its career."— *Ueber den Ursprung der Sprache* .

The difficulties in the way of a nearly literal translation of *Faust* in the original metres have been exaggerated, because certain affinities between the two languages have not been properly considered. With all the splendor of versification in the work, it contains but few metres of which the English tongue is not equally capable. Hood has familiarized us with dactylic (triple) rhymes, and they are remarkably abundant and skillful in Mr. Lowell's "Fable for the Critics": even the unrhymed iambic hexameter of the *Helena* occurs now and then in Milton's *Samson Agonistes* . It is true that the metrical foot into which the German language most naturally falls is the *trochaic* , while in English it is the *iambic* : it is true that German is rich, involved, and tolerant of new combinations, while English

is simple, direct, and rather shy of compounds; but precisely these differences are so modified in the German of *Faust* that there is a mutual approach of the two languages. In *Faust*, the iambic measure predominates; the style is compact; the many licenses which the author allows himself are all directed towards a shorter mode of construction. On the other hand, English metre compels the use of inversions, admits many verbal liberties prohibited to prose, and so inclines towards various flexible features of its sister-tongue that many lines of *Faust* may be repeated in English without the slightest change of meaning, measure, or rhyme. There are words, it is true, with so delicate a bloom upon them that it can in no wise be preserved; but even such words will always lose less when they carry with them their rhythmical atmosphere. The flow of Goethe's verse is sometimes so similar to that of the corresponding English metre, that not only its harmonies and caesural pauses, but even its punctuation, may be easily retained.

I am satisfied that the difference between a translation of *Faust* in prose or metre is chiefly one of labor,—and of that labor which is successful in proportion as it is joyously performed. My own task has been cheered by the discovery, that the more closely I reproduced the language of the original, the more of its rhythmical character was transferred at the same time. If, now and then, there was an inevitable alternative of meaning or music, I gave the preference to the former. By the term "original metres" I do not mean a rigid, unyielding adherence to every foot, line, and rhyme of the German original, although this has very nearly been accomplished. Since the greater part of the work is written in an irregular measure, the lines varying from three to six feet, and the rhymes arranged according to the author's will, I do not consider that an occasional change in the number of feet, or order of rhyme, is any violation of the metrical plan. The single slight liberty I

have taken with the lyrical passages is in Margaret's song,—"The King of Thule,"—in which, by omitting the alternate feminine rhymes, yet retaining the metre, I was enabled to make the translation strictly literal. If, in two or three instances, I have left a line unrhymed, I have balanced the omission by giving rhymes to other lines which stand unrhymed in the original text. For the same reason, I make no apology for the imperfect rhymes, which are frequently a translation as well as a necessity. With all its supreme qualities, *Faust* is far from being a technically perfect work. [K]

[K] "At present, everything runs in technical grooves, and the critical gentlemen begin to wrangle whether in a rhyme an *s* should correspond with an *s* and not with *sz*. If I were young and reckless enough, I would purposely offend all such technical caprices: I would use alliteration, assonance, false rhyme, just according to my own will or convenience—but, at the same time, I would attend to the main thing, and endeavor to say so many good things that every one would be attracted to read and remember them."— *Goethe*, in 1831.

The feminine and dactylic rhymes, which have been for the most part omitted by all metrical translators except Mr. Brooks, are indispensable. The characteristic tone of many passages would be nearly lost, without them. They give spirit and grace to the dialogue, point to the aphoristic portions (especially in the Second Part), and an ever-changing music to the lyrical passages. The English language, though not so rich as the German in such rhymes, is less deficient than is generally supposed. The difficulty to be overcome is one of construction rather than of the vocabulary. The present participle can only be used to a limited extent, on account of its weak termination, and the want of an accusative form to the noun also restricts the arrangement of words in English verse. I cannot hope

to have been always successful; but I have at least labored long and patiently, bearing constantly in mind not only the meaning of the original and the mechanical structure of the lines, but also that subtile and haunting music which seems to govern rhythm instead of being governed by it.

B.T.

DEDICATION

Again ye come, ye hovering Forms! I find ye,
As early to my clouded sight ye shone!
Shall I attempt, this once, to seize and bind ye?
Still o'er my heart is that illusion thrown?
Ye crowd more near! Then, be the reign assigned ye,
And sway me from your misty, shadowy zone!
My bosom thrills, with youthful passion shaken,
From magic airs that round your march awaken.

Of joyous days ye bring the blissful vision;
The dear, familiar phantoms rise again,
And, like an old and half-extinct tradition,
First Love returns, with Friendship in his train.
Renewed is Pain: with mournful repetition
Life tracks his devious, labyrinthine chain,
And names the Good, whose cheating fortune tore them
From happy hours, and left me to deplore them.

They hear no longer these succeeding measures,
The souls, to whom my earliest songs I sang:

Dispersed the friendly troop, with all its pleasures,
And still, alas! the echoes first that rang!
I bring the unknown multitude my treasures;
Their very plaudits give my heart a pang,
And those beside, whose joy my Song so flattered,
If still they live, wide through the world are scattered.

And grasps me now a long-unwonted yearning
For that serene and solemn Spirit-Land:
My song, to faint Aeolian murmurs turning,
Sways like a harp-string by the breezes fanned.

I thrill and tremble; tear on tear is burning,
And the stern heart is tenderly unmanned.
What I possess, I see far distant lying,
And what I lost, grows real and undying.

PRELUDE AT THE THEATRE

MANAGER ===== DRAMATIC POET ===== MERRY-ANDREW

MANAGER

You two, who oft a helping hand
Have lent, in need and tribulation.
Come, let me know your expectation
Of this, our enterprise, in German land!
I wish the crowd to feel itself well treated,
Especially since it lives and lets me live;
The posts are set, the booth of boards completed.
And each awaits the banquet I shall give.
Already there, with curious eyebrows raised,
They sit sedate, and hope to be amazed.
I know how one the People's taste may flatter,
Yet here a huge embarrassment I feel:
What they're accustomed to, is no great matter,
But then, alas! they've read an awful deal.
How shall we plan, that all be fresh and new,—
Important matter, yet attractive too?
For 'tis my pleasure-to behold them surging,
When to our booth the current sets apace,
And with tremendous, oft-repeated urging,
Squeeze onward through the narrow gate of grace:
By daylight even, they push and cram in
To reach the seller's box, a fighting host,

And as for bread, around a baker's door, in famine,
To get a ticket break their necks almost.
This miracle alone can work the Poet
On men so various: now, my friend, pray show it.

POET

Speak not to me of yonder motley masses,
Whom but to see, puts out the fire of Song!
Hide from my view the surging crowd that passes,
And in its whirlpool forces us along!
No, lead me where some heavenly silence glasses
The purer joys that round the Poet throng,—
Where Love and Friendship still divinely fashion
The bonds that bless, the wreaths that crown his passion!
Ah, every utterance from the depths of feeling
The timid lips have stammeringly expressed,—
Now failing, now, perchance, success revealing,—
Gulps the wild Moment in its greedy breast;
Or oft, reluctant years its warrant sealing,
Its perfect stature stands at last confessed!
What dazzles, for the Moment spends its spirit:
What's genuine, shall Posterity inherit.

MERRY-ANDREW

Posterity! Don't name the word to me!
If *I* should choose to preach Posterity,
Where would you get contemporary fun?
That men *will* have it, there's no blinking:
A fine young fellow's presence, to my thinking,
Is something worth, to every one.

Who genially his nature can outpour,
Takes from the People's moods no irritation;
The wider circle he acquires, the more
Securely works his inspiration.
Then pluck up heart, and give us sterling coin!
Let Fancy be with her attendants fitted,—
Sense, Reason, Sentiment, and Passion join,—
But have a care, lest Folly be omitted!

MANAGER

Chiefly, enough of incident prepare!
They come to look, and they prefer to stare.
Reel off a host of threads before their faces,
So that they gape in stupid wonder: then
By sheer diffuseness you have won their graces,
And are, at once, most popular of men.
Only by mass you touch the mass; for any
Will finally, himself, his bit select:
Who offers much, brings something unto many,
And each goes home content with the effect,
If you've a piece, why, just in pieces give it:
A hash, a stew, will bring success, believe it!
'Tis easily displayed, and easy to invent.
What use, a Whole compactly to present?
Your hearers pick and pluck, as soon as they receive it!

POET

You do not feel, how such a trade debases;
How ill it suits the Artist, proud and true!
The botching work each fine pretender traces
Is, I perceive, a principle with you.

MANAGER

Such a reproach not in the least offends;
A man who some result intends
Must use the tools that best are fitting.
Reflect, soft wood is given to you for splitting,
And then, observe for whom you write!
If one comes bored, exhausted quite,
Another, satiate, leaves the banquet's tapers,
And, worst of all, full many a wight
Is fresh from reading of the daily papers.
Idly to us they come, as to a masquerade,
Mere curiosity their spirits warming:
The ladies with themselves, and with their finery, aid,
Without a salary their parts performing.
What dreams are yours in high poetic places?
You're pleased, forsooth, full houses to behold?
Draw near, and view your patrons' faces!
The half are coarse, the half are cold.
One, when the play is out, goes home to cards;
A wild night on a wench's breast another chooses:
Why should you rack, poor, foolish bards,
For ends like these, the gracious Muses?
I tell you, give but more—more, ever more, they ask:
Thus shall you hit the mark of gain and glory.
Seek to confound your auditory!
To satisfy them is a task.—
What ails you now? Is't suffering, or pleasure?

POET

Go, find yourself a more obedient slave!
What! shall the Poet that which Nature gave,
The highest right, supreme Humanity,
Forfeit so wantonly, to swell your treasure?
Whence o'er the heart his empire free?
The elements of Life how conquers he?
Is't not his heart's accord, urged outward far and dim,