

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust* (1772-1775)

Abstract

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe worked on his most famous drama, *Faust*, almost throughout his entire adult life. He wrote the earliest version of “Faust,” the Urfaust, in the 1770s. The first fragments of *Faust* were published in the 1790s, the first complete version was published in 1808, but frequently revised until Goethe’s death in 1832. The “Dedication,” one of the two audio excerpts presented here, addresses the long and unpredictable process of creativity for a writer – and can easily be interpreted as a reflection on the creation and evolution of Faust over time.

Dr. Faust, the famous protagonist of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s tragic play, is a scholar who is highly successful yet frustrated with the limitations of his life and knowledge. After an unsuccessful suicide attempt, he makes a pact with the Devil, represented by Mephistopheles, and arranges that he will receive access to all the pleasures and magic knowledge of the world for a limited time. At the end of the agreed term, the Devil will claim Faust's soul, enslaving him for eternity.

These audio excerpts feature the “Dedication” and the “Prologue—For the Theater,” the first two segments of a reflexive framework preceding the actual play. In the prologue, Goethe presents three different perspectives on the drama as a form of literature. The director [Direktor], who finances and produces the play talks to the poet and playwright [Theaterdichter], and to a “merryman” [Lustige Person] who could be the stage director or a member of the audience. The director focuses on the production and successful reception of the play. The “merryman” wants to please the audience and expects to have fun. The poet is dedicated to creating art and maintaining the artistic standard. Reviewers have frequently commented on the modernity of these reflections – these perspectives still shape today’s drama and even movie productions.

Source

Source: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Dedication," and "Prologue for the Theater," in: Faust: Der Tragödie erster Teil, excerpts, spoken version of Faust on Wikisource, read by Slartidan Tomisachef (in German), published on Wikimedia Commons,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3ADe-Faust_-_Der_Trag%C3%B6die_erster_Teil-Prolog_und_Auf_dem_Theater-wikisource.ogg

Recommended Citation: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust* (1772-1775), published in: German History in Documents and Images,
<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/the-holy-roman-empire-1648-1815/ghdi:audio-5041>> [July 08, 2025].