

CLARK UNIVERSITY



FAUST AND THE FAUSTIAN Comparative Literature 233 Thursday, 2:50-5:50, Fall 2010

Professor Robert Tobin

Estabrook 309

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 2-3; also Thursday before class.

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Faust—the scholar who makes a deal with the devil in order to achieve knowledge, love and power—is one of the great myths of modernity. Faust makes his deal with the devil because he despairs of living in the ivory tower and wants to effect real, positive, change in the world. This course thus gives us a chance to think critically about their own desires to “challenge convention and change the world.” Clark University’s Motto, “Challenge Convention and Change the World,” comes directly out of the Faustian tradition, as does the very conception of a socially activist research university.

Based on an historical figure from the 16th century, the Faust story has inspired numerous works of literature, music, art and film, such as for instance, Christopher Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s Faust, and Thomas Mann’s Doctor Faustus, Michael Bulgakov’s Master and Margarita, Charles Gounod’s opera Faust, and G.W. Pabst’s movie, Faust.

In this course we will examine the figure of Faust and roots of the Faustian tradition. We will try to understand why this particular myth has resonated so strongly in modern Western culture. In particular, we will examine the ways in which the Faust story has been used to examine: knowledge, scholarship and the academic life; the creative process; political and historical questions, particularly the Holocaust; gender and the apparent masculinity of this story; and humanity’s perfectibility and/or guilt.

More broadly, this course hopes to give students some tools with which to think about the dilemmas posed by the unattractive compromises most of us have to make in our personal, political and cultural lives. When is it acceptable to make a deal with the devil? And if we have to make a deal with the devil, what are our subsequent responsibilities?

Because the Faust story is so often ultimately a story of damnation or salvation, it lends itself to questions of ethical responsibility—the ethics of scholarship, the ethics of science, the ethics of politics, the ethics of love. In the twentieth century, it has been one of the dominant metaphors for approaching questions of

the Holocaust as well as those surrounding nuclear war. Thus, analyzing these texts can help us develop a clearer sense of our responsibilities as citizens in society.

By studying how this myth has moved between a variety of linguistic traditions (German English French Russian) and vastly different cultures, we can see what brings human society together and what differentiates human societies from each other.

Students who take the course for credit in German will be reading portions of some of the texts in German and will be able to offer insights based on their experiences with the original versions of the texts.

Required Reading

Bulgakov, Mikhail. The Master and Margarita. Trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volkhonsky. New York: Penguin, 1997. (Possible)

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. Faust I & II. Ed. and trans. Stuart Atkins. Boston: Suhrkamp, 1984.

Havel, Vaclav. Temptation. 1985. (Possible)

Mann, Thomas. Doctor Faustus. Trans. John E. Woods. New York: Knopf, 1997.

Marlowe, Christopher. Doctor Faustus with the English Faust Book. Ed. David Wootton. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2005.

You may choose or find other editions, but make sure that they are complete (especially Goethe's Faust is often abridged—make sure you have both Faust I and II). Be aware that translations might diverge wildly. If you do choose a different edition of Goethe's Faust, it will be very helpful if that edition has line numbers marked, so you can easily find the passages that others are discussing.

Grading:

5 one-page papers (in English or German)	10%
1 research paper (10 pages, 5 pieces of secondary lit)	25%
Class presentation on secondary literature	10%
Write up of secondary literature	10%
Class notes on blog	10%
Commentary and activity on blog	10%
Participation in class	25%
(German students include participation in conversation hour)	

Short Papers: these will be one-page responses to the texts. German students will write in German, others in English. Varying assignments.

Research Paper: This paper is longer. You will need to do research on secondary sources (try for around 5). But you will ultimately need to have your own thesis statement, which you defend with citations from the text.

Class Presentation: Everyone will give a class presentation on a piece of secondary literature. I can help you find one that will let you lead the discussion in a direction that interests you particularly.

Write-Up of Secondary Literature: Provide a complete and accurate citation, plus a summary of the author's findings. Conclude with your own brief assessment of the work.

Class Notes on Blog: We will have a weblog in this course. Each day, one student will be the secretary and will report on the blog what we did. You should do this within 24 hours of class. This would also be the place to add a few thoughts on what we should have done! In addition, that student will make at least one other entry in the blog, linking the reading or discussion to something else out in the virtual world.

Blog Participation: At least once a week, everyone will respond to the blog entries posted by the blog managers. If you want to talk about something radically different than what the blog manager does, you may post your own entry rather than respond to theirs.

Class Participation: Participation is vital for a seminar like this. If you are having troubles making yourself heard, let me know and we can come up with a solution (such as having me call on you more often). If you find you are talking a lot, take a breath and make sure that others are getting a chance to speak.

Grading

Grade Structure for Papers:

A: An “A” paper will have a clear and original thesis. It will be well written, with a lively sophisticated style. Arguments will be comprehensive, take into account obvious objections, and buttressed by strong evidence. There will be virtually no errors in grammar, punctuation or spelling.

B: A “B” paper will have a clear thesis and be solidly written.

C: A “C” paper will lack a clear thesis. Many arguments will not follow from the evidence given, or will be asserted, rather than proven. There will be errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

D: A “D” paper will have a topic, but no thesis. Many arguments will lack structure and not be to the point. Others will not follow from the evidence given or will be asserted rather than proven. There will be numerous errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

F: An “F” paper will scarcely have a topic. Arguments will lack structure and not be to the point. There will be numerous errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Grade Structure for Participation:

A: advances the discussion; contributes complex insights; will be articulate and engaging; and enhances and encourages the participation of others.

B: expresses text-based, substantial ideas; stays with the topic and continues the discussion; actively volunteers; asks good questions; shows genuine effort; but might fluctuate between “A” and “C” behavior.

C: shows acquaintance with the text if called on; tends to offer personal opinions without textual references; does not advance discussion; actively listens, but does not participate.

D: continued refusal to participate in discussion; exhibits signs of disengagement, such as sleeping, zoning out, or non-attendance; and reveals no evidence of having done the reading.

F: “D” behavior carried to the extreme.

Grade Structure for Managing the Blog:

A: original, clever links, well-written, snappy commentary, useful information

B: useful information, clear and lucidly presented

C: just the most basic information, showing little original thought

D: some important information lacking

F: little or no information provided

Grade Structure for Responding to the blog:

A: frequent, insightful, in-depth comments, cleverly and amusingly written

B: clear, thoughtful responses to entries

C: response tends to rely heavily on the entries of others, without adding much original

D: very cursory, not well-thought out, response

F: no response, very curt response (such as “I agree” or “right on”), flaming.

Two Final Notes:

Attendance: Attendance is vital for a seminar class. More than three absences may result in the lowering of your final grade by a whole letter.

Lateness: Late papers complicate the grading process. Therefore, I will take off a half grade for each day of lateness. I leave the calculation up to you whether the extra work you put into a paper will be worth the grade erosion caused by lateness.

Day by Day

Sept. 2 “The English Faust Book”

Sept. 9 Marlowe, Doctor Faustus

- Sept. 16 Goethe, Faust I, pp. 1-66 (lines 1-2604)
- Sept. 23 Goethe, Faust I, pp. 67-119 (lines 2605-4612)
- Sept. 30 Goethe, Faust II, pp. 121-253 (lines 4613-10,038)
- Oct. 7 Class Cancelled (Tobin at German Studies Association)
- Oct. 14 Goethe, Faust II, pp. 254-305 (lines 10,039-12,111)
First Short Paper Due
- Oct. 21 Gounod, Faust
- Oct. 28 Mann, Doctor Faustus, Chapters I-XX (pp. 5-182)
- Nov. 4` Mann, Doctor Faustus, Chapters XXI-XXXIII, pp. 183-370
- Nov. 11 Mann, Doctor Faustus, Chapters XXXIV-Epilogue, pp. 371-535.
- Nov. 18 Class Cancelled
- Nov. 25 Thanksgiving
- Dec. 2 More Mann
Or Bulgakov, Master and Margarita, Book 1, pp. 7-214.
Or Havel
- Dec. 9 Mann, Bulgakov, or Havel
- Dec. 14 Research Paper Due*

To make up for the two cancelled classes, there will be two movie nights, consisting of showing of movie and follow-up discussions. One of the movies should be Pabst's expressionist classic from 1928. The other could be "Damn Yankees," but we can discuss it.