

Reviews

Faust. Part I

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Magna Carta Theatre Company

Young Vic Studio

6th February 1986 – 22nd March 1986

The Rude Mechanicals

Young Vic Studio

15th January 1987 – 7th February 1987

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Translated by Nigel M. Fazal

Directed & produced by Margarete Forsyth

The Stage

3rd March 1986

ness which the surface manner of the music suggests, but they make very clear the composer's consistency.

The danger with this particular concert was that No. 8, by far the best known of the whole series, would overtop the rest. So, in a way, it did. No. 6 in the Borodin's hands seemed more enigmatic than usual and No. 7 as an elegy for the composers first wife, was moving in its brevity but No. 8 immediately spoke with an extra concentration to relate it to late Beethoven.

One of the merits of the Borodin series is that the programme book by Alan George (viola player of the rival Fitzwilliam Quartet) helps to guide the listener so surely and here, rightly, he pinpointed the link with Beethoven's Opus 131. The wonder remains that this most closely argued of the quartets, with its maze of references, was completed in a mere three days, and then not in Russia but in Dresden. Hearing for once in sequence brought home its painful intensity all the more.

YOUNG VIC STUDIO

Sheila Fox

Faust Part 1

"WHO'S this prick?" asks one of the revellers in the tavern as Mephistopheles tap-

dances rings around them. He might well ask, for in Magna Carta's production of Goethe's mammoth *Night of the Soul* (an adaptation by Nigel Fazal partly based on the 1835 translation), the Devil plays it fleet-of-foot and very bitchy, pouting his way about his business of negation, and accompanied by a bevy of clowning gargoyles in Halloween masks.

We are thus left in no doubt that Mephistophelian Irony is wreaking its customary havoc. But, in the process, what Lawrence Evans's high-camp Satan gains in easy laughs, he very definitely loses in sustained menace. His squashing of the "germs of life," as evidenced in the seduction of the arch-egoist Faust (Julian Forsyth), is consequently as entertaining as a persistent tickle — but hardly dangerous in metaphysical terms.

Faust himself offers very little contest here, very little evidence of the lofty, caged spirit whose downwards spiral into knowledge and senses might stir up a few celestial eddies. Partially as a result of the adaptor's intensive pruning of the play's early "undramatic" brooding stages, the intellectual rigour of the man, the roots of his discontent and, most importantly, his capacity to strive ever higher, ring hollow and sterile.

Margaret Forsyth's production provides however, a delightful, ambivalently "wholesome" back-drop of music and dance

The Guardian

1st March 1986

YOUNG VIC Faust

MAGNA CARTA'S exhilarating production of Faust Part One surely deserves a larger theatre. Rarely performed this side of the water, one would deduce from the packed studio audience that there could be a large enough bunch of enthusiasts awaiting enlightenment to warrant such a move. Certainly this particular production is in no way wanting in bustle and excitement.

Opening with a scene of God and the angels at the celestial court, we quickly glimpse ironic parallels with the more temporal one with which Goethe was only too well acquainted. Here are sycophancy, fawning, the proud and the devious well exemplified, as Mephistopheles, played with mercurial virtuosity by Laurence Evans, wagers the good Lord that he can seduce the cerebral and aged Faust into the good life. God, and it is rather sporting of him, accepts the wager, thinking the wily Mephistopheles must lose. So we tread the by now legendary terrain of Faust persuaded into bartering his soul in exchange for temporal – and temporary pleasures.

Gretchen (Julia Josephs) first seduced, then abandoned and later imprisoned, descends into her Ophelian

madness and personal hell from which she seeks redemption. In doing so, Miss Josephs gives a harrowing and heart-rending performance, involving us so completely that we thoroughly understand Mephistopheles' passing qualms.

Julian Forsyth plays the aged Faust with a suitably bitter disillusionment: as the younger Faust, however, he rather lacks the necessary energy and lust.

The company gives sanguine and bucolic support. Devils and gargoyles are deliciously grotesque.

Paul Chand

BRIGHTON Joseph and Mary

PETER TURRINI'S "Joseph and Mary", presented at the Nightingale by the Umbrella Theatre Company, is one of those uncomfortable plays that first alerts and then leaves you with the feeling that you have missed something.

It is set after closing time amid the Christmas opulence of a Viennese department store where an ageing woman cleaner named Mary encounters an elderly security man named Joseph. They launch into a Pinteresque dialogue of reminiscence about more colourful days with both following an independent line of thought, apparently talking to each other but seldom about the same thing. She has been a variety

City Limits

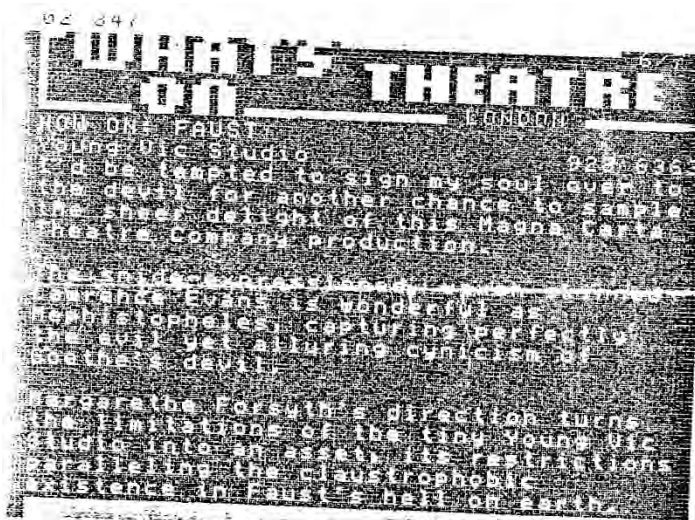
12th March 1986

■ **'Faust'** by Goethe, presented by Magna Carter (Young Vic)

The contest for Faust's soul can seldom have been given a more colourful presentation than this at the Young Vic. In one corner—God and his angels in dazzling white; In the other—Mephistopheles, cousin of Satan, luxuriant in his purple gown and accompanied by grotesque monsters. Their stage—both Faust's dusty, book laden study, and a wider world dominated by beer, dance and song. The production benefits from some judicious editing and lively translation when depicting Faust's feverish desires 'to slip away at heavenly life'. And the company gives a versatile performance of dancing, singing, juggling, music and magic, at the heart of which is a Mephistopheles both slimy and seductive, with an occasional penchant for blood. Without Part II and Faust's redemption the evening is left frustratingly open-ended, but Magna Carta capture well the horror and pathos of the tragedy in a skilled synthesis of incense, language and spectacle. (Demetrios Matheou)

Oracle Teletext

10th March 1986



Time Out

12th March 1986

'Faust' (Young Vic Studio)

They say the Devil always gets the best lines — in this production he gets the best costumes too, and just loves every moment of it. Dapper in his sweeping gold lurex cape Mephistopheles easily tempts the boorish, bookish Faust away from his tinkerings with test-tubes and the occult to more fleshy pleasures in the arms of the virginal Gretchen. This is by no means a spectacular production by Magnet Theatre, but the individual elements of lighting, sound, costume and set design are brought together with such precision by Margaret Forsyth as to create an impressive and highly entertaining piece. The delight of the play is Laurence Evans' Mephistopheles — a rather fay, arrogant extrovert his evil has the sting of bitchiness as he revels sensuously in Faust's fall from grace. Julian Forsyth (Faust) is a genteel wooer of the sweet Gretchen, and his weakness in desire carries all the pathos of man's hopeless vulnerability to erotic suggestion. An intelligent, accessible and well performed work. (Helen Rose)

Frankfurter Rundschau

18th April 1986

Goethe in Shakespeares Nähe

„Faust“ in London und ein neues Stück von David Rudkin

LONDON. Andeutsche Klassiker trauen britische Theater sich selten heran. Aber kurz nach Robert David MacDonalds glänzender Glasgower Neu- und Zusammenfassung beider Teile des „Faust“ hat jetzt der erste Teil eine fast magische Überraschung auf die Studiobühne im Londoner „Young Vic“ gebracht, gespielt von der jungen Theatergruppe „Magna Carta“ mit nur viertausend Pfund von Spendern, wie der bundesdeutschen Botschaft und der Faust-Brauerei (deren Name jedoch keiner der Bierkrüge propagiert).

Die Regisseurin Margarete Forsyth, eine aus Nürnberg gebürtige Germanistin, hat bisher nur Studenteninszenierungen in Erlangen und London hinter sich. Nun wagt sie als professionelles Debut den „Faust“ und schafft ihn, als stünde sie nicht nur im Ehebunde mit Julian Forsyth, ihrem statischen Faust, sondern auch im Zauberbunde mit Mephisto, um funkelnden Wein aus dem Holze zu zapfen — aber für diese Szene in Auerbachs Keller, wie für viele andere, hat sie sich einen noch farbigeren Zaubertick ausgedacht.

Die neue Übersetzung von Nigel M. Fazal unter Benutzung der alten des irischen Dichters John Anster von 1939 mischt Reim mit Prosa, etwas gestelzte Sprache mit frechen Modernismen, und rückt Goethe in Shakespeares Nähe. Die junge Regisseurin strebt keine eigenwillige Deutung an, nur traditionelle Werkzeuge mit Urväterhausrat, einem richtigen Spinnrad, einer weißen Maus, allerlei Kobolden, Hexen und Höllenqualm, um englischen Zuschauern den Text zum Vergnügen zu machen.

Dazu gehören springlebendige Volkstänze und Lieder, eine schneidige Fechtszene, ein kleines Ensemble von lauter

Unbekannten, denen Spielfreude aus Augen und Gliedern spritzt. Darunter sind Lawrence Evans als ein virtuoser Mephisto von zynischer Brillanz und Maralyn Heathcock als muntere Marthe Schwerdtlein, die eine Kette aus Gretchens Schmuckkästlein flink im Mieder verschwinden lässt.

Mengen solcher kleinen Erfindungen geben diesem liebevoll ausgefeilten und ausgeführten „Faust“ eine frische Lebenskraft, die manche routinierte Wiedergabe überstrahlt. Aber warum nur zwei Wochen in einem Theaterchen mit 125 Plätzen? Ob größere Londoner Theater daran sehen, daß man sich durchaus an fremde Klassiker heranzuwagen kann?

★

„Das liebe heilige Röm'sche Reich, wie hält's nur noch zusammen?“ singt ein Student in Auerbachs Keller. Vor derselben Frage steht das antike Römerreich in David Rudkins mythisch-historischem Drama „The Saxon Shore“ (Die Sachsenküste), das am Hadrianswall, der Nordgrenze der römischen Provinz Britannia, zur Zeit des Abzuges der Legionen etwa im Jahr 410 spielt. Für die Inszenierung von Pierre Audi in seinem stets wagemutigen Almeida-Theater hat Hildegard Bechtler, die aus Stuttgart stammt, eine tragische Lear-Landschaft in fahlen Farben des Verfalls aufgebaut.

David Rudkin hat sich 1962, als er 25 war, mit dem düsteren „Vor der Nacht“ (wie das Stück später in Wuppertal und Frankfurt hieß) als vielversprechender Dramatiker gezeigt, doch nie solchen Ruhm erlangt wie der ähnlich düstere Edward Bond, dem er an intellektuellem Ernst und dramatischer Bild- und Sprachkraft zumindest nicht nachsteht. Aber die eigenwillige Verbiesterung, zu

der auch er neigt, führt oft zur Verwirrung des Zuschauers, auch diesmal.

Die meisten seiner Figuren sind neubritische Kolonisatoren sächsischen Stammes und christlicher Religion unter römischer Herrschaft im Ansturm keltischer Ureinwohner aus dem Norden. Wenn der aus Nordirland gebürtige Autor damit auf die unklare Lage seiner unglückseligen Heimat anspielen will, so trägt er mit der zeitlichen und örtlichen Verlagerung ins England des fünften Jahrhunderts gewiß nicht zu ihrer Aufhellung bei. Dazu kommt die noch krassere Persönlichkeitsspaltung des sächsischen Bauernsohnes Athdard, der tags als Hilfslegionär Wache schiebt und lateinische Vokabeln übt, ohne sich zu erinnern, daß er nachts als blutsaugender Werwolf herumgestreunt ist. Die Liebe einer keltischen Priesterin und Prinzesin macht ihm zwar die Schrecken seiner Nachtnatur bewußt; aber er kann sich nicht enthalten, ihr mit seinen Werwolfzähnen die Kehle durchzubeißen.

Mit dem Versuch, das obskure Milieu des Reichsends mit dem noch obskureren Motiv der Werwölfe zu verbinden, hat Rudkin sich zuviel vorgenommen. Noch konfusier wird die Konfusion durch die Besetzung verschiedener Rollen mit denselben Darstellern. Die Regie verwickelt zwar den starken Eindruck dunkler Bedrohung und einer knorrigen Sprache mit lateinischen und keltischen Brocken; aber wieder einmal hat das bedrängte englische Theater einem Autor, der etwas zu sagen hat, nicht geholfen, aus dem Urgestein seines Textes die wirksame Aussage herauszuseifeln. David Rudkin bleibt auch heute noch, was er zu Anfang war: ein vielversprechender Autor.

D/R/S

JULIAN EXNER

Goethe – Close to Shakespeare

LONDON. British theatres rarely tackle German classics. But following on from Robert David MacDonald's splendid adaptation of both parts of Faust in Glasgow, the "Magna Carta Theatre Company" has surprised the London audience with an almost magical new production of Faust Part I performed at the "Young Vic Studio", with only £ 4,000 from sponsors, such as the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany and the brewers of Faust Lager (who however do not advertise their product on the beer mugs used in the production).

Director Margarete Forsyth, a graduate in German, born in Nuremberg, has so far only produced plays with students in Erlangen and London. Now she attempts Faust as her professional debut and succeeds, as if she were not only in marital alliance with Julian Forsyth, her splendid Faust, but also in a magical alliance with Mephisto, to draw sparkling wine from wood — but for this scene in Auerbach's cellar, as for many others, she has thought up an even more colourful magic trick.

The new translation by Nigel M. Fazal, based on an old one of 1835 by the Irish poet John Anster, mixes verse and prose, rather stately language with cheeky modernisms, and lifts Goethe to the level of Shakespeare. The young director doesn't impose any idiosyncratic interpretation, but settles for a traditional approach, faithful to the text, with a fully equipped dusty book laden study, a real spinning-wheel, a white mouse, various gargoyles, witches and devilry, all designed to make the text a delight for her English audience.

Added to these are a number of sprightly folk-dances and songs, a dashing fencing scene, a small company of unknown actors, whose eyes sparkle with the joy of acting. Among them Laurence Evans as a cynical Mephisto of brilliant virtuosity and Maralyn Heathcock as a cheery and lively Marthe Schwerdtlein, secretly slipping a necklace from Gretchen's casket into her bodice.

A wealth of such little inventions gives this lovingly prepared and performed Faust a freshness and vigour which outshine many a jaded production. But why only two weeks in a studio theatre with 125 seats? Cannot the larger London theatres learn from this that there is something to be said for tackling foreign classics?

Julian Exner

Frankfurter Rundschau

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Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The Rude Mechanicals

Young Vic Studio

15th January 1987 – 7th February 1987

Translated by Nigel M. Fazal

Directed & produced by Margarete Forsyth

The Times

20th January 1987

Faust Part 1 Young Vic Studio

First the better news. After her successful production of *Faust* at this theatre a year ago, Margarethe Forsyth has brought together a company for the express purpose of staging the classics of German drama.

This area is largely *terra incognita* for English-speaking audiences. Brecht is produced here, if less so than formerly; Büchner's *Wozzeck* and Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* appeal to the contemporary relish for staccato writing, and I dare say the open sexuality helps. But Schiller, Kleist and everybody else in the German pantheon is deemed to be untranslatable, and that means unactable too.

The company's happily chosen name is The Rude Mechanicals, after Peter Quince's crew in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, because a version of Shakespeare's story, called *Peter Squenz*,

became one of the earliest successful German comedies. I wish the company well.

Now for the rest of the news, most of which is disappointing, since Goethe's long, quasi-dramatic work contains scenes of theatrical interest whenever Mephistopheles is present and a lot of theatrically lifeless material elsewhere.

Nigel Fazal has made a good stab of updating an 1835 translation. You will not hear a *thou* or a *hast* or any such deadening Victorian translation, and there are amusing rhymes, again mostly for Mephistopheles, such as *Salan/great'un* and *chaos/delay us*.

But for every scene containing dramatic progression or visual excitement, which the company eagerly seizes, Goethe introduces far too many that show Faust musing despondently, or gazing moodily, or musing rather less despondently. Then Gretchen muses a while, Valentine de-

clares his position and Gretchen sings a snatch of song each alone on the stage.

Margarethe Forsyth's direction succeeds in those moments when the human world collides with the supernatural when spirits materialize out of the mist, when the trio of hissing, spitting, farting imbeciles scatter between the actors and when, out of the gloom of cathedral pews, a Walpurgis Night explodes in blood-red light and copulation.

Jonathan Epstein's performance is too low-key to sustain our concern for Faust's future. Chief pleasure of the evening is the presence of Julian Forsyth, a crisp, darting Mephistopheles with a voice that lingers mocking on words like *friend*. Gleaming in purple and gold, he sings a dashing "Song of the Flea" in Spanish style, and is so damned elegant it is quite surprising to find his portable folding contract not in the latest Filofax.

Jeremy Kingstorp

Financial Times

27th January 1987

Faust/Young Vic Studio

Claire Armitstead

Goethe's lifelong obsession with the story of *Faust* has provided red meat aplenty for scholars and translators over the century and a half since his death at the age of 82. His case is now revived by The Rude Mechanicals, a sparky young company devoted to bringing German theatre classics to the English stage (their next project, opening in March, is Buchner's play of the French Revolution, *Danton's Death*). ...

The temptation for a young company to revive a production that has attracted as many critical plaudits as this one, in the same place last year, must be considerable. Director Margarethe Forsyth has succumbed with a reread of *Faust*, Part I that reaffirms many of its original strengths. The translation, by Nigel M. Fazal, harks back to a version by Irish poet John Anster in 1835, sweeping away decades of fusty, prosaic successors. The rhythms are light and unlaboured, giving to the occasional pedestrian rhyme where humour demands, and soaring finally to an articulate anguish.

The production, at its best, is correspondingly bright and lively, the pageant of country dancing and minstrelsie offset by goblinsque gargoyles (in tremendous diabolical masks by Paul Coleman) that strut and fret in their midst as a constant

reminder of Mephistopheles' hellish mission.

So far, so good. The problem, unfortunately, lies bang smack at the top in the portrayal of *Faust* by Jonathan Epstein that does not quite encompass the edifice of a man whose hunger for "not joy, but ecstasy" leads him to damnation. Perhaps because Epstein's performance is pitched a little high to begin with (this is, after all, a small studio space where a little ranting goes a long way), he becomes ultimately tiresome rather than tragic, which is a pity, because Julia Josephs' Gretchen is clear and beguiling: the initial innocence of the wholesome country lass disintegrating touchingly into Opheliaesque madness.

Julian Forsyth, last year's *Faust*, makes an interesting switch of roles to become a satanically sneering Mephistopheles in a louche magician's cloak—as comfortable with the party trick wizardry of turning water into wine for the common folk as he is with the serious business of evil. In an adequate supporting cast Michelle Magorian stands out as a witch who speaks with a gargle in a scene of devilment that conjures the best too from lighting designers John Jenkins and stage designer Ian Millstone. Despite reservations, there is plenty to make this show worth catching.

City Limits

29th January 1987

■ **'Faust Part I'** by Goethe presented by The Rude Mechanicals (Young Vic Studio)
'Faust' is generally taken to epitomise the price of man's lust for knowledge and power; the sacrifice of his soul. But what makes Margarethe Forsyth's atmospheric and on the whole stylish production in the Young Vic's cramped small space particularly arresting is its revelation of the innocent Gretchen's descent as a victim of Faust's physical lust but also society's brittle double-standards. Jonathan Epstein's misanthropic, world-weary stooping scholar—transformed by the Devil into a clean-limbed suitor any woman might fall for—is a nonetheless recognisably sympathetic anti-hero, a dried-up intellectual desperate to lose himself in a feast of the senses; whilst Julian Forsyth's lascivious, sharp-nosed, mocking Mephistopheles makes a perfect foil. Aided by Nigel Fazal's wryly modern adaptation this absorbing evening is a considerable achievement by the new Rude Mechanicals. Plainly, they are neither. (Carole Woddiss)

Daily Telegraph

23rd January 1987

THEATRE

A Teutonic pact with the Devil

CLASSICAL German drama is considered by the British—quite wrongly—to be an endurance test, and many people assume that the plays of Goethe, Schiller, Lessing or Kleist are no more stageable than the verse dramas of their English contemporaries.

Goethe's *Faust Part I* at the Young Vic is the work of an interesting young company calling itself the Rude Mechanicals, and their director Margarethe Forsyth apparently specialises in the field of "*Klassikerzertruemmerung*" (one of those Teutonic compound monstrosities, meaning "demolition of the classics").

In fact she has produced a remarkably straight version of the most famous play in German, and only Mephistopheles (Julian Forsyth) could reasonably be regarded as a send-up of a work which demands to be taken seriously.

The new translation, by Nigel Fazal, apparently draws on the Irish poet John Anster's rendering of 1855. The original, which uses the verse form that in English is called doggerel, is impossible to recreate in all its supple grandeur; and so the innumerable phrases which have become part of modern German flow past almost unnoticed in Mr Fazal's version.

The prominent music and dances, which derive from Bortfeld in Lower Saxony, were splendid; but one missed Schubert's settings for some of the more famous songs, like Gretchen's spinning song.

The sartorial elegance of the Devil belied his more profoundly nihilistic disquisitions, but Mr Forsyth's self-assured wickedness only occasionally descended into caddish stage villainy.

Jonathan Epstein's Faust was a sententious sage in the first act, but, restored to youth by devilish arts in the later scenes, he was a touchingly remorseful lover for Gretchen (Julia Josephs). The latter made the most of her virginal innocence, but overacted somewhat in the final scene when, driven to distraction by her persecution and betrayal by Faust, she is confronted by him and expires, only to have her soul disputed over by God (the positively runcible Ian Armstrong) and the Devil.

Most striking among the

minor characters were the beast-faced Gargoyles, whose ubiquitous leaping and grunting enhanced the rustic quality of the whole production, modelled as it was on an early 19th-century German village.

It was a long evening—7.15pm till 10.30, with only one brief interval—but this is certainly not just a play for A-level school parties to see.

Daniel Johnson

Observer

18th January 1987

A devil rolls out of the dust like Adam from the sand at the start of **Faust, Part One** in Margarethe Forsyth's production for The Rude Mechanicals at the Young Vic Studio, where it was first seen last March. Nigel M. Fazal's new translation—partly based on one of the earliest, that of John Anster from 1835—is properly witty and sharp and skilfully cut for performances led by a Basil Rathbonish Mephistopheles (Julian Forsyth) and a Faust (Jonathan Epstein) given to artful phrasing much of the time. The acting at the preview I saw was proficient and energetic : it did not get in the way.

The important thing is that Mrs Forsyth offers a clear and clean telling of Goethe's dramatic poem, and is strikingly good at suggesting the imminence of the supernatural with the simplest of means : tall, hooded figures materialise from a stiff curl of mist ; water is turned into wine by a disarming novelty-shop trick ; the prowling poodle-familiar of the Easter scenes is located by unidentifiable breathing somewhere behind the walls of the room. Such things are often botched : not here. The prescribed horde of animals, demons and witches is reduced to three acrobats who intervene mischievously throughout, save when they retire to the roof whence their white, silent, horned heads—gargoyle, cat and baboon—gaze thoughtfully down. (Marvellous masks by Paul Coleman.)

MICHAEL RATCLIFFE

Morning Star

28th January 1987

Goethe's Faust

Faust Part One (Young Vic Studio).

LIKE most English people, my vision of the Faust legend has been mostly mediated by Christopher Marlowe.

The universal "new knowledge" that Mephistopheles offered Faust in return for his soul in the 16th century is now a commonplace, the eternity of damnation to which he descends now seen as merely medieval superstition.

Apart from the great speeches, the Marlowe version is at best flawed, at worst often ridiculous.

Goethe, Germany's greatest writer, sees things very differently. Across the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries he poses as central the philosophical dilemma of the "free" Lutheran bourgeoisie.

"In the beginning was the Word," Faust reads; and then: "No! In the beginning was the Thought;" and: "No again! In the beginning was the Deed."

This is the very modern moral conundrum that Mephistopheles homes in on, almost a prefiguring of existentialism.

It is the trap into which Faust falls and discovers with Milton and Sartre that hell is not somewhere else but here and now: "For this is hell nor am I out of it."

Goethe's play, apart from its opening in Heaven and apocalyptic final scene gains enormous power by its simplicity and naturalism.

The Rude Mechanicals give this blazing masterpiece a fluent and often deeply moving interpretation.

Tom Vaughan