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To the Wary but Not Unwilling Reader

THE PERSONALITY of Faust, like that of his fearful partner, has an indefinite right to fresh incarnations.

It might seem as if the act of genius which first redeemed these two from their state of puppetry, in legend or sideshow, and raised them, as if by the action of its own temperature, to the highest degree of poetic being, must prevent any other inventive imagination from ever again taking their names, reanimating them, and bringing them forward in a fresh train of words and events.

However, there is no surer index of creative power than the creature's refusal to submit or remain constant to his creator's intentions. The greater the creature's life, the greater his freedom. His very rebellion exalts his author: God knows. . . .

The creator of Faust, and of the Other, brought them to birth so that they might, through him, become the instruments of the world's imagination: they transcend the roles they fill in his work; or better, he gave them tasks, rather than roles. He put them to the immortal purpose of expressing certain extremes of humanity and the inhuman; and in so doing he liberated them from any particular plot. That is why I have been bold enough to make my own use of them.

So much has changed in this world in a hundred years,

PLAYS

that the idea of taking Goethe's two famous protagonists and plunging them into an element as remote as ours is from that of the first decades of the nineteenth century, proved to be more than tempting.

It was one day in 1940 that I found I was talking to myself in two voices, and began to write accordingly. I sketched out these acts for two very different plays—if plays they are to be called—very rapidly and, I confess, with little care for plot, action, or ultimate scope. I had vaguely in the back of my mind the plan of a *Third Faust* which might comprise an indefinite number of works of a dramatic nature: melodramas, comedies, tragedies, pantomimes, according to the occasion; in verse or prose, as mood might require; a whole series of parallel yet independent productions which I knew, nevertheless, would never come into existence. . . . But it was in this spirit that *Luste* and *The Only One* were written scene by scene, act by act, up to the completion of three fourths of the one and two thirds of the other, as they are now assembled in this volume.

P. V.

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Luste
or
The Crystal Girl
.A Comedy

PERSONAGES

Faust

Luste

Mcphistopheles

The Student

Belial

Ashtaroth

Gongoina

A Servant

ACT I

Faust's study. Faust and his secretary, Luste. As the curtain rises, she is in fits of laughter.

Faust

Enough, Luste! Stop it! This is no place for laughter. (*She stops.*) If you knew what laughing really is! (*She laughs harder than ever.*) Enough, I tell you. . . . Enough! It's unbearable. Or else go and laugh in the garden. . . .

Luste

Forgive me. . . .

Faust

And what are you laughing at?

Luste

Well . . . just an idea.

Faust

What idea?

Luste

(again shaken with a fit of laughter)

An . . . i-de-a. . . . (*She stops.*) Don't you see? An idea. . . . It would be hard to explain. . . . To begin with, it's not quite

PLAYS

that; and I feel I should have another attack if I tried to think what it really is, a sort of mental itch that tickles me all over at once. . . . Don't imagine I enjoy laughing. It hurts!

Faust

It bores me, rather. And I'm wasting my time waiting for your electric charge of merriment to use itself up.

Luste

Forgive me. . . . It's your fault in a way. I know all too well what laughter is. From your dictation. You said the other day that it is a refusal to think, a riddance by the mind of some notion which it finds impossible, or beneath the dignity of its function . . . just as . . . the stomach rids itself of what it no longer feels responsible for—and in a similar way: with a spasm, a gross convulsion.

Faust

Well, isn't it true? And isn't it remarkable enough that mind and stomach both rely on a kind of brute force in order to . . . expel?

Luste

Yes, but laughter's a less repellent function.

Faust

It depends on the laugher. . . . But what was your idea?

Luste

Forgive me. . . . I happened to think all at once, a moment ago, of your noble definition. . . . I don't know what you said to bring it back; and thinking over your words, *a gross*

'MY FAUST'

convulsion, something made me laugh, and that was that! No use resisting. The more so, because at every pause I kept repeating: "Gross convulsion, gross convulsion." So much for my Master, he's an observer of gross convulsions! . . . Could anything be sillier? And I laughed again!

Faust

Laugh then, laugh. (*She laughs.*) Not bad, not bad, for a gross convulsion. . . . You have very white teeth, young lady, and when you throw back your head and it releases all that uncontrolled excitement in your lovely throat, it might lead to one of those refusals to think that can go a long way. . . . Beware of laughing in front of any Tom, Dick, or Harry.

Luste

But laughter is supposed to be disarming.

Faust

Disarming, yes. But not disarmed.

Luste

Forgive me once more. I won't do it again.

Faust

I'm as sure of it as you are. Good. Now, do you feel inclined to grant me a little help in the way of work? Let's begin from where I was dictating yesterday.

Luste

The *Memoirs*? Or the *Treatise*?

PLAYS

Faust

But I explained to you as lately as yesterday that the two are one and the same.

Luste

I didn't understand. Your mind flies off so high and so quick at times, that . . .

Faust

You are not here to understand, my child. You are here to write at my dictation and read back what I dictate . . . and in addition to that, you are here to be agreeable to look at when I'm not thinking. You understand?

Luste

But if I'm not here to understand . . .

Faust

Understand what I tell you, and don't try to understand what I dictate. Is that clear? Or must I go on to explain that I dictate my thoughts? While I am thinking, or waiting for thought to come . . . or for some happier expression than the best that have come to mind, it helps me to have my eye on some particularly agreeable, some innocently beguiling object, just as, when one's thoughts are far away, it flatters one's hand to be able to caress something, an ornament, a familiar piece of ivory. . . .

Luste

It's I who am flattered, dear sir, to play the modest but honorable part of the thing that discreetly helps to oil the

'MY FAUST'

machinery of your thought. . . . But don't you think a beautiful cat, a soft warm puss, would be more agreeable to stroke than something as hard and cold as a piece of ivory?

Faust

A cat? Soft, warm? By no means a ridiculous notion! Be careful. . . . But let's to work. . . . First of all I must give you my outline again, so that you don't make any more mistakes over the ordering of the parts. Keep a firm idea of the general design. I could write my memoirs. . . . I could, on the other hand, compose essays on a great variety of subjects. But that's what I don't want, what it would bore me to do. Besides, I think there is a kind of falsification in separating thought, however abstract, from life, however . . .

Luste

Living?

Faust

Lived, let us say. . . . So I've decided, purely and simply, to insert my observations, speculations, theories, ideas as they occurred to me, into the sufficiently remarkable narrative of my life and my dealings with men and things. . . .

Luste

Only with men?

Faust

With women, too, of course.

Luste

Only with men and women?

PLAYS

Faust

And with certain personages, very highly placed or very low, who are neither men nor women.

Luste

I see. . . . I've heard that all the really superior beings were of neither sex, or of both.

Faust

Well then, read over the beginning.

Luste

(she takes up a notebook and reads)

"*The Treatise on Aristia*. Aristia is the art of superiority. . . ."

Faust

No! Aristia comes only in the tenth or eleventh chapter.

Luste

(taking another notebook)

Sorry. . . . This, then? *(Reads.)* "Eros Energoumenos. . . ."

Faust

What is that you say? . . . What is that the title of?

Luste

You must have dictated it. I'm reading what's there. Perhaps I didn't hear properly.

Faust

Eros Energoumenos? . . . Impossible! Eros Energoumenos? . . . That's not mine. But it isn't bad. Eros Energoume-

'MY FAUST'

nos! . . . It must be mine. It may be pure accident, a result of mumbling on my part or fumbling on yours, but I like it; yes, I'll have it! Eros Energoumenos, Eros as the source of the highest energy. . . . I can see what I could make of it! Good. Note it down on a sheet of the pink paper. . . . Those two words prompt a whole orgy of ideas. By themselves. Eros Energoumenos! . . . One day we'll unlock the treasure they are the key to!

Luste

I've noted them. . . . Well, there's genius for you! . . .

Faust

Yes. You see how simple it is. It's only a question of keeping your mind open to pure chance. And now, have you found the real beginning of the *Memoirs*?

Luste

Ah, now I've got it! Here we are. (*Reads.*) "The Memoirs of My Self, by Professor Doctor Faustus, Member of the Academy of Dead Sciences, etc. . . . Hero of several literary works of repute. . . ."

Faust

I like the title. . . . But add: "highly esteemed literary and musical works. . . ."

Luste
(*reads*)

"To the wary but not unwilling reader. . . ."

PLAYS

Faust

That's the ideal reader. . . . I shall put this into Latin. . . .
Go on.

Luste

(reads)

“So much has been written about me that I no longer know who I am. True, I have not read all the many works in question, and doubtless there are more than one whose existence even has not been made known to me. But those with which I am acquainted are enough to give me a singularly rich and complex idea of myself and my destiny. Thus I can choose freely among a variety of dates and places for my birth, all equally attested by irrefutable documents and proofs, put forth and discussed by critics of equal eminence. In the same way I can sincerely doubt whether I ever married or not, whether once or several times, and whether my wife conducted herself in the usual way. . . .” Excuse me, sir, but that is a little . . . ambiguous. . . .

Faust

So is everything where I am concerned. . . . The “usual” means what you will, in matters of conduct. . . . Go on.

Luste

(reads)

“. . . in the usual way or the natural way; but the same doubt applies to my own conduct, of which anything may and must be said, since I am a very famous man. . . .” Is that true?

'MY FAUST'

Faust

Of course. . . . Such are the facets of glory. . . . Go on.

Luste

(reads)

"As a result of all this, my life, so far as I can recall it, is a blend of all these attributed lives, as imaginary as they are authentic. But it matters little. Such is what I am. . . ." How marvelous . . . to declare that you exist . . . and how utterly like you.

Faust

What do you know of that? . . . Go on.

Luste

(reads)

"But it matters little. Such is what I am. The past is simply a question of faith. And faith is an abdication of its powers on the part of the mind, which refuses to formulate every conceivable hypothesis on absent things and give each one the same degree of truth. But I have never shirked the duty of fashioning my history as it ought to have been; and in consequence I have, strictly speaking, no past at all. What I did, what I wanted to do, and what I could have done, all exist with equal force as ideas in my mind; and I feel myself equally capable of all the adventures which my memory brings back to me or which my biographers have so generously lent me. Nevertheless. . . ."

Faust

"Nevertheless"?

PLAYS

Luste

That's all. We stopped there. . . . Someone came to remind you it was time for the grand dinner at the Ministry of Intelligence. You had to put on your fancy costume with the sword and ribbons, and your stars and plumes. You looked so splendid, a real Prince of the Realm of Ideas!

Faust

They are my slaves! . . . Tell me, young lady, don't you find all this very abstract?

Luste

Must I tell you the truth?

Faust

I leave you free to choose whatever lie you think worthiest to be the truth.

Luste

Alas, my dear sir, I'm not intelligent enough to have all that choice. You want to know if the piece I have read isn't too abstract, and what can I say? I can only confess that I scarcely listen to what I read back to you. . . . And when you are dictating, my mind is always on something else, even while I am writing.

Faust

So. . . . I can't really count on you?

Luste

On the contrary! If my mind were on what you dictated,

'MY FAUST'

I should be so much worse. . . . I would spoil your fine style with things of my own.

Faust

That might be beneficial in a way. . . . A few trickles of fresh water in my dry sands. . . . Give me an idea of what comes into your head.

Luste

Oh . . . silly things. Naturally. Anything. Inquisitive questions, sometimes. One cannot sit next to you without thinking of lots of things. . . .

Faust

Such as? Tell me a few.

Luste

No.

Faust

Yes. You must. I insist. I am dictating my memoirs, and that means I'm laying myself open to all your inquisitiveness. . . . By the way! I must warn you—it's my duty—that in these memoirs there will be some pages you may find embarrassing to listen to. Even more so to read back to me. But I want to give the strongest, the most penetrating effect of sincerity that ever a book has given, and that can't be achieved if one shirks any of the horrors, the secret humiliations, the appalling experiences—true or false—which a man can have taken heed of. There's nothing too vile or too silly to lend the color of truth to an autobiography. So, if your chaste ears . . .

PLAYS

Luste

My ears? . . . What, even my ears? I never suspected that, that even one's ears might not be chaste! My nice little ears. What an invention! What on earth can one do to ears, except pierce a tiny hole in them, for pearls? . . .

Faust

That is exactly what they call for. . . . They are charming little ears. (*He takes hold of one.*) Like marvelous flowers unfolding, made for listening without understanding, and for catching all that isn't said. I am sure this one can hear, perfectly, all I am telling it this minute. (*He takes his fingers away.*) Nature has a weakness for spiral shells of mother-of-pearl, she makes strange ocean jewels with them, as well as the ornaments of hearing on a pretty head. . . . But we were talking of quite other matters. I wanted to say that if you do not feel sure, quite sure, of never being embarrassed or shocked or too . . . interested, too . . . yes, interested by what I may happen to dictate to you, it will be better for us both if you turn your mind at once to some less trying use for your talents. . . .

Luste

My dear sir, if I understand what you dictate, I can hear it, and if I don't . . .

Faust

If you don't understand, you will try to, and that's worst of all. Who knows what you'll invent? The innocent mind is a terror. You've already confessed to an indiscreet inquisi-

'MY FAUST'

tiveness, and so far I've dictated nothing which isn't perfectly pure.

Luste

Inquisitiveness? I've only thought of one question.

Faust

What was that?

Luste

Oh! . . . I should never dare!

Faust

But I want you to. I insist. We must go to the limits. Otherwise . . .

Luste

Otherwise, what?

Faust

Otherwise your unconfessed thoughts would weigh on you, and the sense of them might go on troubling my mind. From then on there would be no more trust, and work would suffer. Whereas I would so like to be certain of a full and clear confidence between us. I want my secretary to be . . . a crystal girl.

Luste

What a charming name! . . . The Crystal Girl! I could make myself a splendid title with it: *Luste de Cristal* . . . *Vicomtesse Luste de Cristal*. . . With a name like that I could be a novelist.

PLAYS

Faust

Well, would you like it? Will you take it? . . . If so, deserve it! Learn to be transparent. Go on. Tell me.

Luste

Since I must. . . Since you insist. . . Since I must be transparent. . . I will ask you. Don't hold it against me. . . The spirit blows where it lists. . .

Faust

A common fallacy. The spirit blows where it can, what it can. Come on, tell me!

Luste

Well, then, is it true that you have had dealings with . . .

Faust

The Devil? (*She nods.*) Naturally. Like everyone else. Do you know anyone who has not had personal dealings with him? It's impossible. How could one not? You would have to give up thinking, dreaming, feeling. . . For instance, what about yourself at this moment, my child? You are burning, burning with curiosity. . .

Luste

Well, then, *have* you seen him?

Faust

So people say. And write. And sing. Especially sing! So much has been said, written, and sung about it that I finally believed it myself. But now . . . I begin to disbelieve.

'MY FAUST'

Luste

After three thousand performances? Why?

Faust

Because it is my fate to make a complete circuit of all possible points of view, to experience in succession every delight and every disgust, to make and unmake and remake all the knots which are the events of a lifetime. . . . I've passed the limits of age. . . . And my life won't be complete until I have finally destroyed all I have worshiped and worshiped all I have destroyed.

Luste

I pity the ladies who have loved you! You must have put them all in your laboratory stove.

Faust

No. Life was enough for them. Besides, women don't burn well. You have to keep an eye on them all the time, keep the fire continually stoked. Very costly, and tiring.

Luste

You know, you remind me of my mother's doctor, with your complete circuit of ideas. He warned her off salt, on pain of death, for ten years. Then he put her back on it; and I am sure he is going to take her off it again, soon. . . . But I'm still waiting for an answer to my question. . . . Have you seen, really seen him? What is he like?

Faust

He is like what you like. Understand? What you like. Anything one likes, whatever one likes, may be him.

PLAYS

Luste

I'm still without an answer. That is a mere rejoinder.

Faust

And besides, he can change to many things, in whose guise you can always detect him, if you have clear sight. Yesterday, for instance. It was lovely weather, warm and tender, after showers. . . . That was him. That little bench in the sun, suggesting all that a softly sun-warmed seat, discreetly sheltered under caressing leaves, *can* suggest in the way of languid dreams, that was him. A certain flavor of strawberries or, more potent still, the memory of it, that's him again. . . . You yourself, my dear Luste, when a passer-by, driven wild by the scent of you, turns round to track your flight, that's him again. . . . in your own person.

(A knock at the door.)

Luste

No, dear sir. It's all very fine and literary. But it's not him.

Faust

Literary? Alas, he isn't always there to inspire literature. As has been said of something else, literature is all too often without either his charm or his profundity. . . . *(A knock. Enter the Typical Servant.)* What is it?

Typical Servant

It's a gentleman, sir.

Faust

Did he give his name?

'MY FAUST'

Typical Servant

It's a gentleman who said he's a friend of yours, sir. . . .
Rather tall, rather lean. . . . I didn't quite catch his name. . . .
He talks with a queer accent, foreign.

Faust
(*reciting*)

He speaks Italian with a Russian tongue?*

Typical Servant

I don't know, sir.

Faust

Very well. Show him up. (*To Luste.*) Young lady, would you kindly await me in the laboratory, where a suspicion of cleanliness, a touch of order, would do the place no harm?

Luste

I'm off, dear sir. . . . (*To herself.*) This must be him! (*Exit.*)

(*Enter Mephistopheles, as an English clergyman, frock-coated, very elegant, with sharp, goaty ears.*)

Mephisto

She's all agog about the devil, that little piece. Should I have come in crimson, complete with horns, wings, claws, and tail?

Faust

You do very well as you are. . . . And you come in by the door! . . . *And* what a perfume you've brought with you!

*Verlaine's definition of the Devil's language. [P.V.]

PLAYS

Mephisto

Good, isn't it? The merest modulation to the classic sulphur fumes, and I regale the most flattering flower scent. (*He sits down queerly on the table.*)

Faust

You know too well that there's nothing more treacherous in the world than a perfume. It's the soul of seduction! Hinting and promising all that's most delightful in the way of schemes. A great saint declared that smells put a stop to meditation.

Mephisto

So much the better. Meditation is a solitary vice. It digs a black hole in boredom, and folly fills it up. I owe a lot to meditation. . . . What's to be done about this girl?

Faust

Not so fast! It's not a case of picking another Marguerite to pieces.

Mephisto

You promised her pearls?

Faust

No, no. . . .

Mephisto

Here you are. (*He opens his fist; a pearl necklace drops out.*)

Faust

No, no, no. . . . You listen to everything one thinks, but

'MY FAUST'

I've noticed before that you often pick it up wrong. You are full of preconceived ideas.

Mephisto

Own up now. Wasn't it a lovely preconceived idea, when I slipped into your pile of papers that one about Eros Energoumenos?

Faust

It's delightful. Can I have it?

Mephisto

Take it. . . . What would I do with it? The genius of your evil genius, at your service. But I don't think you will ever get much out of those two magic words. . . . Though they gave the young lady the shivers. As for you. . . . You, Eros Energoumenos . . . ha, ha, ha! Gross convulsion! (*He laughs again.*)

Faust

I must warn you once more. There's no question of another affair à la Marguerite.

Mephisto

So glad. I hoped that type was finished with. It's no longer a case of you and me (each in his fashion) contriving a supplementary juvencence and a complementary virginity. Still . . . it's a possibility. . . . I always think of everything. Well, tell me what you do want, since you summoned me.

Faust

I?

PLAYS

Mephisto

Yes, you. You've had your ancient servant in mind at least three thousand two hundred times in the last eight days, since you took this crystal girl into your employ. I could feel it quivering away off, an echo of the idea you have of me. . . . But I couldn't make out why, or for what. You've got such a learned, abstruse, complicated head, so befogged with weird erudition and riddled with acute analysis, so packed with contradictions, so supernaturally lucid and so ultra-delirious at the same time that . . . it beats me. I never know where you are heading or what you want, since you don't know yourself. How can I guess better than you? Nevertheless, I could make out, three thousand two hundred times, in the chaos of your intelligence, a certain need or a wish to see me; a wish or need all mixed up with this Luste business. I too have ears. Goat ears, of course, no pearls in 'em.

Faust

You may be right. I have certain plans. No question of love. As for Luste, my intentions are simple and pretty well pure.

Mephisto

Just a suspicion of Eros, a tremor of a convulsion. . . .

Faust

I don't know if this is beyond your bestial mind. Minds are as brutal as the pure acts which they essentially are. But my need, if you can conceive it, is simply for a gentle, devoted presence near me, sweet and complaisant, and almost but not quite tender. Or even . . . well, tender enough. A need for tenderness in fact.

'MY FAUST'

Mephisto

For tenderness in the nude.

Faust

No, no, no. . . . For tenderness nicely dressed. Nothing excessive, demonstrative. No love. I know where that ends, in ruin, disgust, disaster; the game of flesh and hearts ends up in coldness, hatred, or death, just to restore the balance of pleasure. No, I repeat, all I want is a gentle presence near my thought, a sensitive and efficient presence. Because she'll have to work, will Luste. . . .

Mephisto

Under you.

Faust

Keep your coarseness to yourself. You are nothing but pure mind, I tell you! And no mind was ever understanding. To be is not to have. . . . In short, my need is for a young person, comparatively serious in her gaiety, comparatively gay in serious matters, comparatively tender at her task, comparatively industrious . . .

Mephisto

. . . in her tenderness. . . . You'll have to advertise!

Faust

But I think I've got what I want.

Mephisto

And I think that what you've got has got you. . . . All this doesn't explain what I've got to do now in your already

PLAYS

overloaded case. What do you want me for? What am I doing here? You are no longer an active business, where I'm concerned; we've settled our accounts. As for this relatively gay, et cetera, young person, she'll go just as far as is wanted. She'll run to it. No need to bother about that. So what, then?

Faust

You can be useful to me.

Mephisto

I know. No one ever thinks of me otherwise. That's the sad fate of all the truly powerful. People take us on as temporary helps in emergencies that call for more than natural talents. They call down the saints or raise the devil, they aren't too particular. So long as they get out of their fix, they don't worry whether their help comes from above or below.

Faust

True. You see, man is halfway between the two. But I haven't finished. I do want your help; but in rather a different undertaking from the kind in which you're usually employed.

Mephisto

Evil is good for anything.

Faust

Wait! I want your services, but I want to render you a service in return.

Mephisto

Who? Me?

'MY FAUST'

Faust

Listen. I must tell you that your reputation in the world isn't quite so grand as it used to be.

Mephisto

You think so?

Faust

I'm certain. Oh, I don't mean your annual returns, or even your bonuses. I mean your credit, consideration, dignity. . . .

Mephisto

Maybe, maybe. . . .

Faust

You are no longer a terror. Hell is relegated now to the final curtain. You don't haunt men's minds nowadays. True, there are a few amateurs, a few backward areas. . . . But your methods are out-of-date, your physical make-up is comic. . . .

Mephisto

Could you be having an idea of rejuvenating me, maybe?

Faust

Why not? Everyone should have his turn.

Mephisto

Tempter! . . .

Faust

I really do want to freshen you a little. And it would make a diversion for me. We could exchange functions.

PLAYS

Mephisto

This is beyond me. You have the audacity to suppose that I need *you*?

Faust

I know what I am saying. You are locked in Eternity, my dear Devil, you are nothing but a mind. And so you are without thought. You don't know how to disbelieve, how to look for what you haven't got. Fundamentally you are very simple. Like a tiger who is all beast of prey, nothing but a ravening instinct. He owes everything to sheep and goats: his muscles and his fangs, his *cunning and his terrifying* patience. You're nothing more than that, you Devourer of souls, who don't know how to relish them! You don't even suspect that there are many things in the world besides Good and Evil. I won't explain. You wouldn't be able to understand me. All I will say is that you may need someone to think and reflect for you. Pure mind, even when it's impure, is quite incapable of that.

Mephisto

No one has ever talked to me this way before. At least . . . not for a long time. . . . You say I'm incapable of thought when I can penetrate every one of yours. . . .

Faust

No. You move like lightning down all the shortest paths of human nature. The paths of Evil.

Mephisto

All this remains to be seen. . . . You are such a queer character. I've known few indeed who wanted to or could

'MY FAUST'

or have known how to put themselves outside the rules of the game, as you do. Billions of souls have passed through my claws, and whether they got away or whether they stayed, I've noticed how very few out of all that number were really unique. I've seen ten thousand Caesars, all as brilliant as Julius, cartloads of Sophocleses, Archimedeses, Platos, Confuciuses, Praxiteleses. Not to mention all the beauties who thought they were unparalleled, the virtuosos of the topmost rank, the anchorites of the last excesses, and all the sublimity seekers. . . . If you knew what an entertainment it is to watch a mass of unique individuals, all stuck together like swarming bees! It's one of my showpieces. Every one of them thinks there's no one else to touch him, and no doubt he's done all he could to ensure that he will have no equal for talent, finish, passion, profundity. Down there, I only have to put two geniuses of the same species together to throw all the really high and mighty ones into eternal despair, and keep them in it. . . . They're like diamonds, whose carbonized glitter would mean no more than glass to you, if they strewed the beaches, or if you knew the insides of old volcanoes as well as I do. The superabundance of rarity, the sum total of men of the first order through all the millenniums, is enough to make the value of human pride, like the diamond, drop to zero. . . . But you, you puzzle me. Your case may be, well, without precedent. . . .

Faust

I can breathe again.

Mephisto

Yes. Neither Heaven nor Hell could hold you. They said you vomited up the honey of their promises along with the

PLAYS

gall of their threats. That is why you can astonish me. Which is an astonishing thing.

Faust

Very well, let us make a pact. . . .

Mephisto

You haven't said anything yet.

Faust

Listen: I want to create a great work, a book. . . .

Mephisto

You? Aren't you satisfied with *being* a book?

Faust

I have special reasons for this one. I want it to be an inextricable blend of my true and my false memories, my ideas, my intuitions, my well-conducted hypotheses and deductions, my experiments with the imagination: all my many voices in one! A book one could begin at any point and leave off at any other. . . .

Mephisto

Nothing very new there. Any reader will do that for you.

Faust

Maybe no one will read it; but anyone who does will never be able to read another.

Mephisto

He'll be dead of boredom. . . .