

Genius Loci Weimar 2025

Faust.

Exactly 250 years ago, in 1775, Goethe was summoned by Duke Carl August to his court in Weimar. To mark this memorable anniversary, the city of Weimar has dedicated its 2025 theme year to Goethe's most famous literary work: Faust. In this drama, Goethe tells the story of the aging scholar Faust, who, in his pursuit of absolute fulfillment, turns to mysticism and magic and strikes a pact with Mephisto – only to be torn up between desire and moral decay.

At the Bastille, illuminated during Genius Loci Weimar 2025, the intersection between literature and reality becomes palpable. Here, the servant Johanna Catharina Höhn likely spent her final days in a prison cell – because the court official Goethe voted for her execution in 1783 for infanticide

This real-life case directly relates to the Gretchen Tragedy, the heart of Faust I. The pious Gretchen, seduced and driven to ruin by Faust, kills their child – this fate of the literary Gretchen is portrayed by Goethe as a moving tragedy. Yet towards the 'real' Gretchen, Johanna Catharina Höhn, the young Goethe pronounced nothing less than a death sentence.

Goethe's Faust explores the paradox of human existence – the insatiable craving for fulfillment, the fragile boundaries of morality, the inescapability of guilt. These themes become tangible in the infamous Walpurgisnacht, where Faust, lost in a frenzy of intoxicated ecstasy, tries to escape human reason, only to be overtaken by tormenting remorse. In this surreal night of mystical beings and devilish pacts, Goethe unravels the dialectic of good and evil – embodied by the enigmatic Mephisto, who "eternally wills evil and eternally works good." This insight into moral ambiguity sharply contrasts with Goethe's real-life clear-cut legal judgments.

The walls of the Bastille are more than mere backdrop: within their stones lies the question of personal guilt and societal responsibility; the intersection of good and evil. They force us to ask what would be if Gretchen's and Höhn's tragedies were not just historical anecdotes, but a mirror of our own time.

In today's world, the fatal Faustian hedonism seems reignited by Mephisto – this time embodied by populists of every stripe that are gaining momentum and resonance across the globe. Maybe the true devil's bargains are those we do not willingly sign, but silently accept?



The southern facade of the Weimar City Castle and Ensemble Bastille



The Ensemble Bastille



The southern facade of the Weimar City Castle