

Wittenberg

by David Davalos

Audience Guide

researched and written by
the Education Department of
The Shakespeare Theatre
of New Jersey



Cover Art by Scott McKowen



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About the Playwright

David Davalos

The multi-talented David Davalos was born in Auburn, Alabama in 1965. After growing up in San Antonio, Texas, he attended the University of Texas at Austin and in 1988 he received his BFA in Theatre. Only three years later, he received his MFA in Theatre from Ohio University's Professional Actor Training Program. Shortly thereafter, he moved to New York City, where he spent the next 15 years working as an actor, director and writer before relocating to Colorado with his wife Elaine and daughter Delphi.

Some of his plays include DAEDALUS: A Fantasia of Leonardo Da Vinci, THE TRAGEDIE OF JOHNNIUS CAERSON (a comedy in blank verse chronicling the Late Night TV Wars), and DARKFALL (a modern sequel to "Paradise Lost"). For its premiere production at Philadelphia's Arden Theatre, WITTENBERG received the 2008 Barrymore Award for Outstanding New Play. David is also the recipient of the National Theatre Conference's 2008 Stavis Playwriting Award.



As an actor, his credits include MASTER HAROLD...AND THE BOYS at the Cleveland Play House, HAMLET and DEATH OF A SALESMAN at the Utah Shakespearean Festival, and SEASCAPE, RED HERRING and ROUGH CROSSING at The Public Theatre in Lewiston, Maine, where he also directed MARVIN'S ROOM. Other directing credits include PICASSO AT THE LAPIN AGILE at the University of Hartford, THE IMAGINARY CUCKOLD at the Judith Anderson Theatre in NYC and RICHARD III at the Blue Room Theatre. He is a member of Actors' Equity.

IN HIS OWN WORDS:

"As an audience member, I've always loved plays like TRAVESTIES and PICASSO AT THE LAPIN AGILE—plays that take these representatives of certain world views and put them together. It's that very modern idea of the collage, the 'mash up'..."

On his favorite playwrights: *"Well there's the holy trinity of Shakespeare, Shaw, and Stoppard. Shakespeare because it's Shakespeare; Shaw, because of his engagement of big ideas through vivid character; Stoppard because he can take on anything, combining so many interests.*

I write the kind of plays that I want to go see, and I like plays that continue to stimulate you after three or four viewings."

*-excerpts from an interview with Kate Farrington,
Staff Dramaturg at The Pearl Theatre, 2011*



Wittenberg

A Synopsis

It is late October, 1517 and the fall semester at the University of Wittenberg is underway. Prince Hamlet of Denmark, recently returned from studying abroad, is a senior who has yet to declare a major. His rival advisors both have strong opinions on the academic path he should choose. Dr. John Faustus wants the prince to study philosophy under his instruction, while Professor Doctor Reverend Father Martin Luther encourages Hamlet to major in theology.

Although they disagree on almost everything, Faust and Luther are actually close friends. Acting as Luther's doctor, Faust attempts a two-prong approach to cure the Reverend's chronic constipation: a new remedy (an exotic drink called coffee), and a mandate that the reverend write out his frustrations everyday in order to purge them from his mind.

Hamlet comes to Faust for assistance in interpreting a recurring nightmare that has been wreaking havoc on his tennis game. In the dream, Hamlet is standing at the edge of giant grave on the moon. He falls into the abyss, but wakes just before hitting the bottom. The prince reveals that he has been disturbed ever since getting back from studying with Copernik and reading the renowned scientist's revolutionary theory of a heliocentric universe in which the Earth revolves around the sun (rather than the belief that the sun and stars all orbited the Earth). Faust takes Copernik's manuscript for further reading and prescribes Hamlet chocolates to cure his physical symptoms, which Hamlet takes in hopes of improving his tennis game.

Faust meets up with Luther at a local pub following one of the philosopher's open-mic performances. Luther claims to have had a divine epiphany thanks to Faust's treatment. He has realized that God is a god of love and forgiveness not one of retribution and judgment. The Reverend rails against the Pope's sanction for selling indulgences, which claim to excuse all sins committed by the purchaser for a certain allotment of time. Faust encourages his friend to write more directly about the disagreements he has with the church. Luther

encourages Faust to come to confession, but Faust refuses. The friendly banter turns harsh when Luther discovers that Helen (a former nun who Faust corrupted before she became a prostitute) is coming to town and that Faust intends to propose to her. Luther, enraged by the inappropriate relationship, storms out of the pub.

During a tennis match between Wittenberg and a rival French school (Hamlet versus Laertes), Faust meets with and proposes to Helen. She politely declines but agrees to sleep with him when he presents a pouch of money. In response to Faust's repeated requests for her to stay, Helen claims that she wants a freedom that requires money which Faust does not have. She leaves the professor depressed.

When Hamlet consults Luther about his dreams (neglecting to include the information regarding Copernik's findings), the Reverend counsels the prince to have faith. Luther asks Hamlet to peruse the points he has written regarding his disagreements with the church. While he is reading them, Hamlet is visited by a vision of the Virgin Mary who admonishes the Prince for forsaking Christ. Hamlet goes to both of his advisors for their interpretation of this new dream and gets two very different interpretations: Faust believes that Hamlet is subconsciously dealing the "death of god" implied by Copernik's findings; Luther reasons that the Prince's dreams center on his eventual succession of the Denmark throne and the question of what kind of king he hopes to be. After some prodding, Hamlet gives Luther's writings to Faust in exchange for Copernik's findings, which he gives to Luther.

On All Hallows' Eve Luther discovers Faust drinking in the local graveyard. Faust reveals that he has posted copies of Luther's 95 theses in various areas around town, including on the doors of the church. Furious, Luther tells Faust that he has burned Copernik's "sacrilegious" findings, and then the Reverend rushes off to check that Faust has translated his writings into German correctly. Hamlet arrives and tells Faust that he has finally decided on a major; he will follow God and give up his right to the throne of Denmark. Faust is distraught. A messenger arrives from Denmark and informs the Prince that King Hamlet is dead. Hamlet quickly reverses his decision and is determined to take up his kingly duties in Elsinore. He and Faust bid farewell to each other. Faust goes to play his last gig at the pub before sabbatical, while Hamlet and Luther go to face the consequences of their respective actions.



From the Director *Joseph Discher*

“Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed at Wittenberg, under the presidency of Reverend Father Martin Luther, Monk of the Order of Saint Augustine, Master of Arts and of Sacred Theology, and Lecturer in Ordinary on the same at that place.”

–Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther
on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences
(a.k.a the 95 Theses)



Martin Luther and the 95 Theses
Ferdinand Pauwles, 1872.

“Then, gentle friends, aid me in this attempt; / And I, that have with subtle syllogisms / Gravell’d the pastors of the German church, / And made the flowering pride of Wittenberg / Swarm to my problems as th’ infernal spirits / On sweet Musaeus when he came to hell, / Will be as cunning as Agrippa was, / Whose shadows made all Europe honour him.”

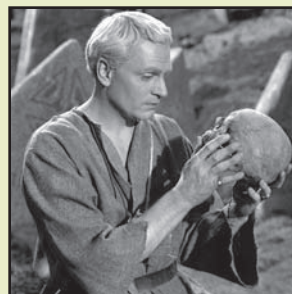
–*The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*



Dr. Faustus makes a deal with the Devil

“You are the most immediate to our throne; / And with no less nobility of love / Than that which dearest father bears his son, / Do I impart toward you. For your intent / In going back to school in Wittenberg, / It is most retrograde to our desire; / And we beseech you, bend you to remain / Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye, / Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.”

–*The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*



Laurence Olivier as Hamlet
Two Cities Films, 1948.

A prince, a philosopher and a priest walk into a bar...

That may sound like the beginning of a joke, but in the case of *Wittenberg*, it is the start of a witty, entertaining and provocative debate about the forces that drive us, and in what we choose to place our trust. What happens when you put a character who would sell his soul for what he desires, the man who sparked the Protestant Reformation, and a young prince suffering from a severe case of indecisiveness in the same place at the same time? They wrestle with philosophy and theology, they grapple with doubt and faith, and they dance between fate and free will—all in their ultimate quest for Truth.

Hamlet and his two professors, Doctor Faustus and Father Martin Luther, each stand at a crossroads in their lives. It is a crossroads with which we are all too familiar. We stand there ourselves on many occasions, troubled, doubting, wondering which path to choose, what to believe (or not to believe), and wondering how much control we have over our own lives. Sometimes we have faith that our problems will resolve themselves. Sometimes we struggle to be the master of our own destinies, and sometimes we question our very existence and purpose. Some of us may listen to Faustus’ advice: “Remember: you write the drama of your life, not some unseen hand.” Some might heed Luther’s: “It is vital always to remember that God has a plan for us.”

Is it your own inner voice you listen to, or is it God’s? Are you exercising your free will, or are you merely part of a divine plan? Do you believe in doubt or faith? You might choose one over another, or you might want to strike a balance. Or perhaps you stand at the crossroads and the implications are just dizzying.

Not to worry, the doctor is in. So is the priest. They can help whatever ails you.



Who's Who in Wittenberg

WITTENBERG UNIVERSITY was founded in 1502 by Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony. Building upon the works of Martin Luther, it became the birthplace of the Protestant Reformation. Wittenberg was also the center of the German Enlightenment. Notable attendees included Dorothea Erxleben, Germany's first female medical doctor, and Georg Joachim Rheticus— a mathematician and cartographer best known for his trigonometric tables, and as the sole student of Nicolaus Copernicus. Rheticus facilitated the publication of Copernicus' *On the Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres*. In fiction, attendees of Wittenberg include Hamlet and Horatio from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Shelley's Victor Frankenstein, and Marlowe's Doctor Faustus.



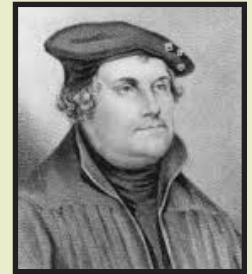
DOCTOR FAUSTUS— the protagonist and tragic hero of Christopher Marlowe's play of the same name. Faustus is a man of grand ambition willing to sacrifice his soul for ultimate knowledge and power. He represents the spirit of the Renaissance, particularly in regard to his shunning of the medieval God-centered universe and his embracing of human potential. Faustus

makes a pact with Lucifer and is ultimately damned for all eternity. Perhaps the best known speech from the play begins:

*Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships, / And burnt the topless
towers of Ilium— Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.— /
Her lips suck forth my soul: see, where it flies!—
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.*

MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546)— German monk, Catholic priest, and professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg. He strongly disputed the claim that freedom from God's punishment for sin could be purchased monetarily. He challenged John Tetzel, a Dominican Friar selling indulgences for the forgiveness of sin (as sanctioned by Pope Leo X) and credited with the

saying "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from Purgatory springs." Luther's debate took the form of *The Ninety-Five Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*, which argues that forgiveness is a gift from God, not a monetary transaction. Luther posted his *Ninety-Five Theses* on the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg, which sparked the Protestant Reformation and led to his excommunication.



*"I cannot and I will not recant anything,
for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe."*



HAMLET— the title character of Shakespeare's most famous tragedy; Prince of Denmark, heir to the throne, "the Melancholy Dane." Right or wrong, Hamlet is most often painted as lacking the will to act decisively. In Shakespeare's play, he wrestles with his conscience amidst a "sea of troubles" torn between courses of action such as revenge or mercy, and living or "shuffling off this mortal coil," uncertain whether to subscribe to a divine plan or to his own free will.

"The readiness is all..."

THE ETERNAL FEMININE— a psychological and philosophical construct that represents an immutable concept of "woman," or what is at the center of femininity. The idea springs from a belief that men and women have different core "essences" that cannot be altered by time or environment. Within this idealized concept they are often angelic, responsible for drawing men upward on a moral and spiritual path. Specific virtues such as modesty, gracefulness, domesticity, purity, civility, compliancy and reticence, were regarded as essentially feminine. French philosopher and feminist Simone de Beauvoir regarded the eternal feminine as a patriarchal construct that limits women within a passive "erotic, birthing or nurturing body" and denies a woman's individuality, trapping her inside unrealizable ideals.



"I want more. I choose more."



A Brief Look at *Faust, Faustus and Dr. Faustus*

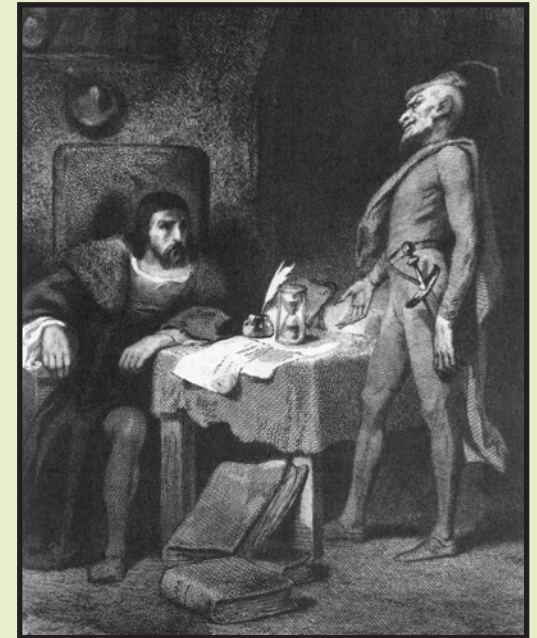
Though many variations have appeared in folklore and in literature over the centuries, the core of the Faustian story has remained the same: an ambitious man makes a pact with the devil, exchanging knowledge and power for his eternal soul. Most variations depict Faustus (or Faust) as man who has risen from modest beginnings to become a scholar of great note. Frustrated by the limitations of the world around him, he has dismissed religious thought in favor of philosophy and science.

There are records of an historical Faust—believed to have been a practitioner of alchemy, astrology and sorcery—who died around 1540. The first literary appearance of this iconic figure occurred posthumously in 1587 in *Faustbush*. This collection of stories of the ancient magi was crudely narrated and filled with clumsy humor at the expense of Faust. The book quickly became popular and was translated and read throughout Europe. A 1592 English prose translation became the inspiration for Christopher Marlowe's play written in 1604 entitled *The Tragical History of D. Faustus*. In Marlowe's play, Helen of Troy is summoned to seal Faust's damnation. Marlowe kept most of the coarse humor and clownish episodes found in the original. The interconnection of tragedy and buffoonery continue to be an integral part of Faust dramas.

During the Romantic age, Faust was one of the most recognized characters, and his story of self consciousness, identity crisis and conflict of character continued to inspire a wide range of writers. The publication of literature with the character of Faustus became a lucrative business, and stories, plays, and poems quickly began to appear. The most well known of these was the play *Faust* written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Inspired by German writer Gotthold Lessing, who sought to provide salvation for Faust, Goethe saw Faust's pursuit of knowledge as noble and wanted the character to have reconciliation with God. The serious yet ironically commentative play provides Faust with redemption and purification in the end.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the story of Faust continued to be retold, but many preferred to revert to the original tale of damnation for the titular character. The most noted Faust drama of the 20th century is Thomas Mann's novel *Doktor Faustus*, written in 1947. Like Mann, most writers used the tale to express the dangers of absolute knowledge and power.

The Faustian legend has inspired countless writers, musicians, and artists over the centuries. The iconic and conflicted character of Faust has even been envisioned as a comic book character by both DC Comics and Marvel Comics and has appeared in numerous video games. In international cinema, the legend of Faust has spurred several films from countries such as Spain, Germany, The Czech Republic and Russia. Along with theatre, there have been both operatic and musical versions of the folktale.



"I wanted Faustus to be able to move between Marlowe's and Goethe's conception of him — to leave it ambiguous as to whether or not my Faustus goes on to suffer Marlowe's damnation or Goethe's redemption."

-David Davalos



Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation

Even though roots trace as far back as the fourteenth century, the push for the Protestant Reformation was not truly set in motion until Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg. Luther was convinced that the Catholic Church had become corrupt in both its teachings and conduct, and that it had lost sight of the values of Christianity it was expected to uphold. His religious outburst against the corruption of the Catholic Church caused many churches to break away and establish their set of beliefs.

In 1516, Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar and papal commissioner of indulgences visited the German Roman Catholic church to sell indulgences. The funds received were to be used to help rebuild St. Peter's Basilica. The Roman Catholic Church believed that good deeds, such as donating to the church, could constitute as a way to get into heaven. A year later, Martin Luther wrote his bishop and protested the sale of these indulgences. In this letter he enclosed a copy of "Disputation of Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences," which would later become his 95 Theses. He believed that only God alone could grant forgiveness, that those who believed otherwise



were wrong, and that Christians should not compromise their faith by purchasing these false "good deeds." Luther's Theses focused on his arguments against the

Roman Catholic Church, the idea of Purgatory, and the sale of indulgences. In 1581, with the aid of the newly invented printing press, Martin Luther and his followers distributed these ideas at a rapid speed throughout Germany and beyond. Students and believers flocked to the city of Wittenberg to hear Luther speak on his theses and to protest the Roman Catholic Church. Luther's desire to share his convictions with the masses brought about great conflict and dissatisfaction that, though temporarily silenced, was not resolved during his lifetime, even after his excommunication.

The rally for reformation was continued by John Calvin who sought to create a united front. Calvin's writings stretched to Switzerland, Scotland, Hungary, and elsewhere. In 1592, under the crown of Henry VIII, the separation of church and state occurred, and England sided with the Protestant reformers. This separation led to denominations of Christianity, each with varying beliefs: Lutheranism, Reformed/Calvinists/Presbyterians, and Anabaptists.

"Before I started, I had the same ideas about Luther that most people have—the nailing up of the 95 Theses and what that represented in a broad historical sense, and how he's venerated—rightly so—as being one of the first people to stand up for the individual.

But I didn't have a sense of how complex and contradictory a character Luther was. He has this devotion to the idea of a God that loves, and to grace being a gift; and at the same time (he) was capable of such vituperation towards people who disagreed with him."

-David Davalos



Glossary

of Words, Names and Phrases

A-fünf-sechs-sieben-acht: German for “a five-six-seven-eight,” as in an intro to a song

Apostasy: the abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief

Astrolabe: an instrument that predated the sextant and was once used to make astronomical measurements

Bräu: German for “brew” or ale

Consummatum est: Latin for “It is finished”

Ego te absolvo: Latin for “I absolve you.”

Gethsemane: a garden between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, where Jesus went with his disciples after the Last Supper and was betrayed by Judas. (Matt. 23:36-46)

In vino veritas: Latin for “In wine there is truth”

Indulgences: in the Catholic tradition, a partial remission of the temporal punishment, especially purgatorial atonement, that is still due for a sin or sins after absolution. It was believed by some that one could pay monetary atonement to the church for sins yet to be committed.

Johann Tetzel: (1465-1519) a Roman Catholic German Dominican friar and preacher. He was also a Grand Inquisitor of Heresy in Poland. He later became the Grand Commissioner for indulgences in Germany. He was reputedly known for granting indulgences in exchange for money, a position heavily challenged by Martin Luther.

Mea culpa: Latin for “My mistake”

Memento mori: Latin for “remember you will die”

Nikolai Copernik: (1473-1543) (also known as Copernicus) a Renaissance mathematician and astronomer who created what is now known as the heliocentric model of the universe. This model placed the Sun at the center of the universe rather than the Earth.

On kai me on: Greek for “to be or not be”

Phantasmagoria: a sequence of real or imaginary images like those seen in a dream.

Qahfe: coffee

Scala Sancta: The Holy Steps; a set of 28 white marble steps believed to have been sanctified as Jesus walked them prior to his crucifixion. Once located in the praetorium of Pontius Pilate, they were relocated to Rome around 328 AD.

Sclerotic: becoming rigid and unresponsive

Tartarean: of or pertaining to Tartarus; in Greek mythology it is both a dark abyss that is below Hades and the offspring of Chaos

Tenez: French for “hold”

Wittenberg: a small town in Germany, Bundesland Saxony-Anhalt, at the Elbe River with a relative population of 50,000. Rallied by Martin Luther, the Protestant reformation began here and it has since become the location for the premier museum dedicated to him

Wittenberg University: founded in 1502 by Frederick the Wise, Prince-Elector of Saxony and was closed in 1813 by Napoleon; now merged to include Martin Luther University and University of Halle; renamed as the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg



Commentary & Criticism

"While *Wittenberg* ends where *Hamlet* begins, Mr. Davalos does more than toss the occasional — or more than occasional — Shakespeare pun into his play. (Faustus's office? Room 2B.) The sight of Hamlet wrestling with Luther's notions about purgatory casts new light on his subsequent reluctance to kill Claudius mid-prayer, while Faustus's rather disingenuous protests of humility serve as a welcome counterweight to Polonius's palaver."

Eric Gorde
The New York Times

"Davalos has written a clever and witty comedy, but he wants more than laughter. He clearly wants the audience to think, particularly about hypocrisy and the need for man to question everything, including religion."

Jeff Davis
Broadwayworld.com

"In the pot, Davalos throws fiction and fact, real historical figures and those from literature, and with Tiggerish enthusiasm gives it a stir. The japes come thick and fast. Who really nailed Luther's 95 theses to that church door? Will it be Hamlet or Laertes who is the victor in the Wittenberg versus Paris college tennis tournament? How many Poles does it take to make the world go round?"

Lyn Gardner
The Guardian

"A cocktail of brainy allusions, absurdist plot twists, sly wordplay and disarming anachronisms, fortified with serious ideas, *Wittenberg* should delight Tom Stoppard fans, recovering English majors, disillusioned academics and anyone who has ever wondered what Helen of Troy was like in the sack."

Celia Wren, *The Washington Post*

"For all its high-brow philosophizing and monologues about morality and free will, *Wittenberg* is also devilishly low-brow. One of the first scenes involves Faustus trying to help Luther with his constipation, which has been plaguing him for six days. "Even God created the universe in six days!" Faustus teases, and then prescribes him a laxative — the exotic liquor known as coffee. Apparently, the father of Protestantism did really suffer from constipation, and Davalos takes full advantage of bathroom humor whenever possible."

Anna Pulley, *East Bay Express*

WHY WITTENBERG UNIVERSITY?

"Wittenberg was recognized as a center of Protestant teaching because of Luther's association with it, and a place of magic because of the historical Faustus' connection to it.

Shakespeare draws attention to Hamlet being from a place where dissent, foment, and a certain amount of rebellion have been institutionalized. It's a bit like setting a play in 1968 and saying your hero is coming from Berkley or Kent State. An audience would immediately know that this guy is a malcontent— someone educationally disciplined to question authority."

-David Davalos

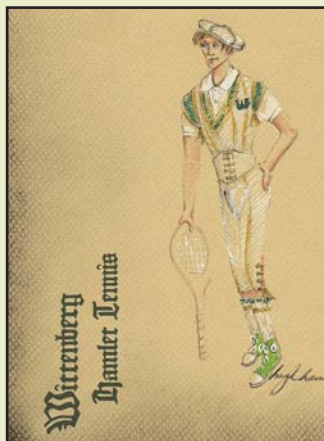
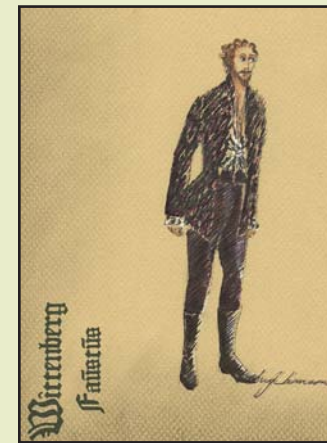


In This Production

Design renderings for
The Shakespeare Theatre of
New Jersey's Main
Stage production of
WITTENBERG, 2014,
directed by Joseph Discher.

SCENIC DESIGNER:
Brittany Vasta

COSTUME DESIGNER:
Hugh Hanson





Wittenberg Online



To find out more information about the playwright and his works visit:

<http://www.daviddavalos.com/>



To read more on the Reformation and Martin Luther visit:

<http://www.history.com/topics/reformation>



To read Project Gutenberg's free PDF version of *Doctor Faustus* along with footnotes visit their website :

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/779>



Sources & Further Reading

Hamlet by William Shakespeare

Martin Luther and The Reformation by Dorian Sanderson

Martin Luther: The Life of the Man and the Legacy of the Reformer
by Charles River Editors

The 95 Theses by Martin Luther

Faust by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Christopher Marlowe and the Renaissance of Tragedy by Douglas
Cole

The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus by
Christopher Marlowe

DavidDavalos.com

“A Chat with Playwright David Davalos” by Kate Farrington, Staff
Dramaturg at The Pearl Theatre, 2011. *Wittenberg Audience
Supplementary Materials* ©The Pearl Theatre.