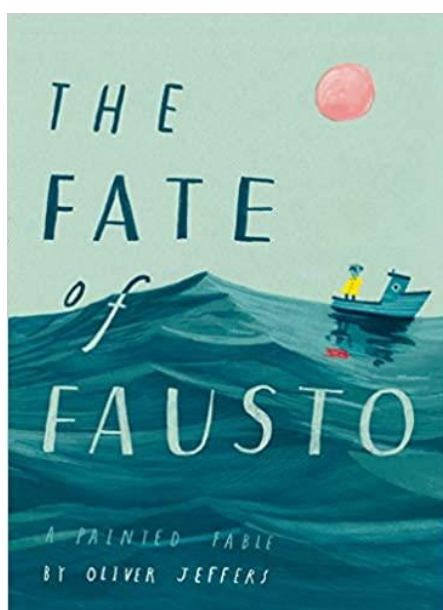


The fate of Fausto: a painted fable



Title: The fate of Fausto: a painted fable

Author and illustrator: Oliver Jeffers

Translator: Anna Llisterri

Publisher: Andana

City: Picassent (Valencia)

Year published in Spain: 2019

Number of pages: 96 pags.

Book cover: Hardcover

ISBN: 978-84-17497-61-3

Anyone unfamiliar with Oliver Jeffers' work should not be carried away by the appearance of illustrations with simple, innocent strokes, because his stories go beyond a mere succession of events. They leave that trace which, if left to macerate could well be a life lesson.

In our short existence as the La Espumadera group, it is not the first time we have dedicated our time to reflect about the work of this renowned author and illustrator of children's picture books, who is born Australian, raised Irish and currently living and developing his work in the United States. Some of the titles we have already analysed are: *Stuck*, *Lost and found* or *The day the crayons quit* (this time only as illustrator).

And once again we have in our hands an incredible work of this author – artist as he defines himself, and which is displayed in his works in where the simplicity and expressive sobriety stand out above all.

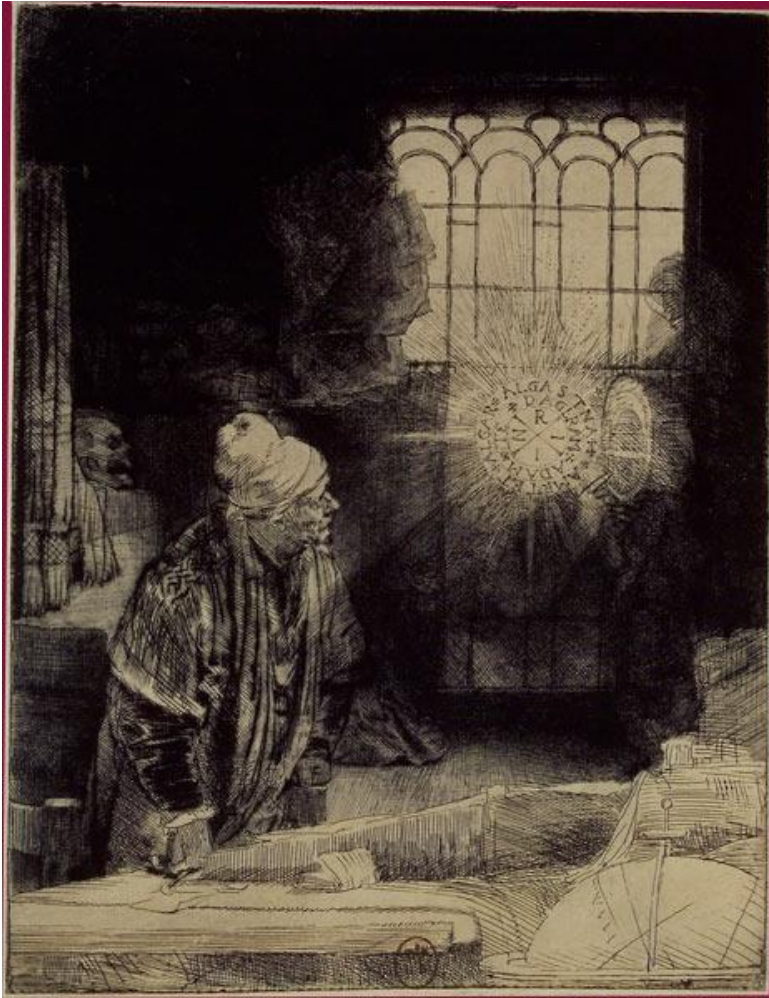
In this book Jeffers takes Fausto as the main character, a legendary figure from Germany in the late XV and early XVI (Johann Georg Faust), that has become a myth due to the numerous literary, musical, cinematographic and artistic versions – among others, an

etching by Rembrandt or a painting in the Prado Museum, that have been created throughout history. Undoubtedly, the importance of the myth is because of the magnificent versions made by great authors, highlighting Goethe's *Faust* in literature (between 1808 and 1832) or Murnau's *Faust* in cinema (from 1926). To name but a few.



El doctor Fausto, 1890 by **Miguel**

Hernández Nájera. Museo del Prado



Dr Faustus in his Study,

1652 by Rembrandt

The myth of Faust

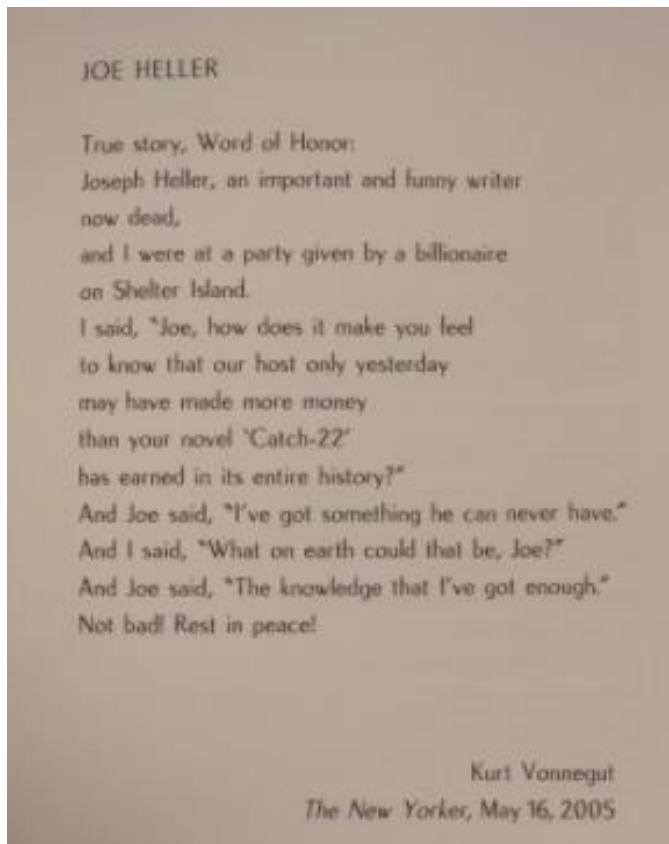
A long road has been travelled and many versions of this myth have been created and recreated up to the present day. That is why we have resorted to the *Diccionario de iconografía* by Federico Revilla (Cátedra, 1990), to outline its main characteristics:

Protagonist of a Nordic legend taken up by Goethe which tells how a man sells his soul to the devil in exchange for mundane goods and pleasures. Illustrates the lack of sense of the proportion between

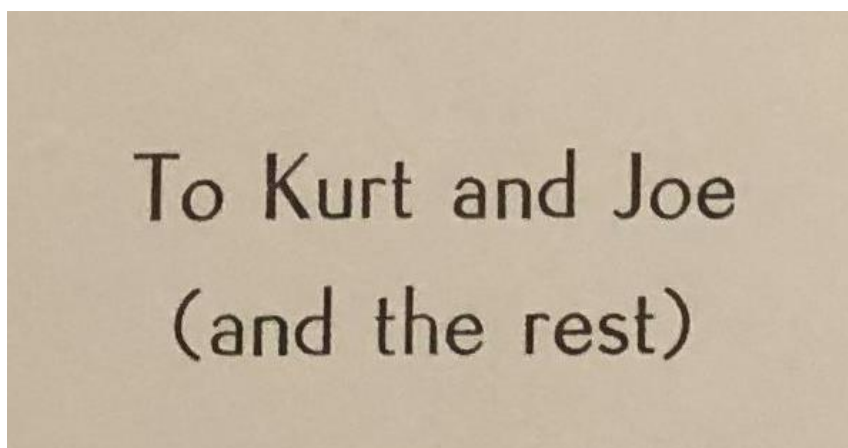
what is really worth and what is not, the blindness of the mortal who falls into the clamp of appearances. [...] This motive [of the pact] is mixed with the one of eternal youth.

«By accepting the Mephistopheles' proposition, Faust falls down into the power of a "shadow" which Goethe describes as "part of that power that, willing evil, finds good"...Faust failed to live fully an important part of the beginning of his life. Consequently, he was an unreal and incomplete person who lost himself in a fruitless pursuit of metaphysical goals that could never materialize. Was not yet ready to accept the challenge of life to live the good and the bad». Joseph L. Henderson”

In the picture book *The fate of Fausto* we come across a new interpretation of the myth, whose clues can be found in the quote that Jeffers includes in the last page. It is a commentary published in *The New Yorker* in May 2005 by the writer Kurt Vonnegut on a conversation he had with his colleague Joseph Heller.



Furthermore, he dedicates the picture book to "Kurt and Joe". We are sure they are the above-mentioned writers themselves.



The "and the rest" in brackets and included in the same dedication..., we would like to think that it refers to those who, like us, make the story their own.

Readers' licences.

Analysis

Summary. Fausto believes he owns everything. To ensure, he tells it to those he believes belong to him, receiving a satisfactory answer: the flower, the sheep the tree agree and say that that if he thinks so it must be true. Without further questioning. But when he feels he is being contradicted he makes a fist and puts up a fight.

As he takes possession of things, he discovers that nothing is enough and sets off to sea to dominate it too and proclaim himself as the owner.

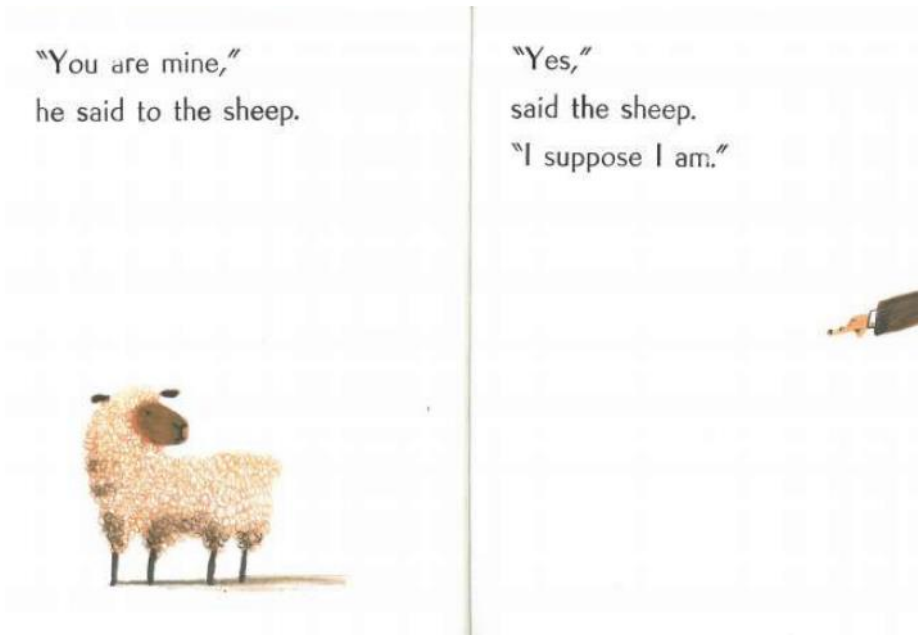
Iconographic or visual aspects. With illustrations that leave a lot of space for the white background on each page, Oliver Jeffers introduces us to the protagonist of the story: Fausto, a bald, mustachoid gentleman who wears Brown clothes and has an angry face.



With hardly any scenery, only the elements that are part of the story, sometimes a simple line is enough to illustrate the scene.

Also notable is the lack of margins; sometimes the figures are leaving the book to go to the next scene.

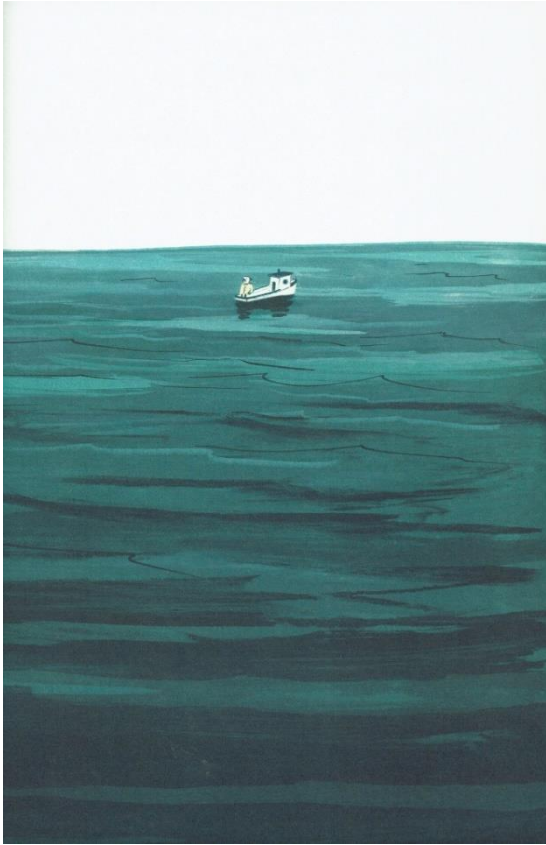
He combines throughout the book double pages fully drawn with blank ones where only the text is present, thus achieving the creation of moments of pause, silence and expectation.



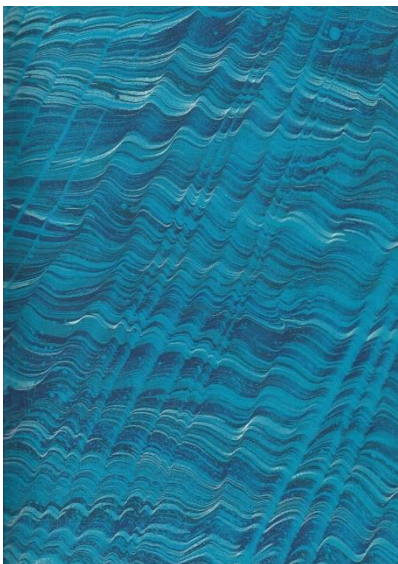
As for the colour palette used, it is rather limited: brown tones for the landscape on earth and blue for the sea. To this are added elements in fluorescent shades (yellow and pink), on which the attention is focused.

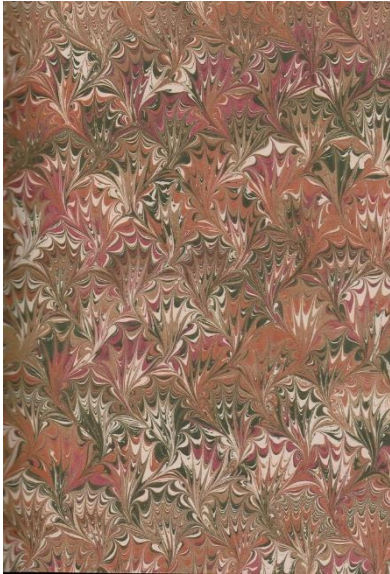


Noteworthy is also the frugality of detail, especially in the first pages, where the represented elements are just the needed ones for the story (the tree, the flower, the mountain...), in contrast to the magnitude and detail with which he presents the encounter with the sea, for example, through brushstrokes that manifest its volume, its grandeur and its great power.



We do not want to overlook the use of marbled endpapers, by Jemma Lewis, whose brown and blue tones function as a prologue and epilogue.





Finally, as far as illustration is concerned, for this album the author chose the technique of lithography or “drawing on stone” – created in the Idem Press workshop in Paris, where some of the masterpieces in painting of the XX were conceived.

Textual aspects. In the title, the story is presented as a “painted fable”, this comes as a possible clue to the tone of the story, from which everyone can draw their own conclusions and perhaps some lessons.

There is little text. With brief but forceful sentences that sometimes take the form of dialogue, we know clearly how great the protagonist’s ambition is, how he wants to eat up the world and make it his own.

One of the distinctive characteristics of Oliver Jeffers’ work is that he likes to add his own typefaces to his work. However, in this album this is not so significant, being more printed-like than others (except for the cover, where his signature typeface is used), perhaps indicating that the story is not so childish and is aimed at a more adult audience, although it can also be enjoyed by younger children.

Conclusion

There are many qualities to be found in this picture book: the simplicity of the images, the great effectiveness of the almost blank pages, the present chromatic palettes in both if the story’s scenarios, the great ability to play with pauses and silences. With these elements – a beautiful and simple illustration, a powerful and succinct text, Oliver Jeffers shows a considerable courage in tackling a difficult and complex subject such as the relationship between mankind and nature.



With his self-importance and excessive eagerness, Fausto the protagonist seeks to extend his dominion over everything within his reach, he wants to possess everything. His arrogance and greed lead him to misunderstand nature, to try to dominate it, which will lead to his own destruction.

Although we have found this picture book classified in the children's and young people's section of some libraries, we are facing a character full of complexity, dominance, arrogance, greed...who leads us to a vision of the most modern consumerist society, a metaphor for capitalism, while at the same time taking us to a non-childish view of a world of destruction and evil.

From *La Espumadera* we reflect once again on the importance of this type of material which, through a good reading mediation, can become a great picture book that can lead the first ages to see it from another point of view, and that in later ages can lead them – can lead us, to a reflection on the role played by humans in their relationship with nature, so essential in these times we are living in.

Without being given to looking for any message in the stories we include in our blog, on this occasion it seems to us that perhaps Oliver Jeffers is making a wake-up call: nature does not bow before anyone, does not wait and does not adapt itself to the timetables and needs of the human species, which we don't know why has always labelled itself as the superior being. The same being that in its "infantile egocentrism" stage uses tantrums and insults to obtain whatever it desires; it owns everything all around and assures it with "it's mine" "it's mine".

An acid but good-humored story. A fable made for the small and big ones to ponder and which can create interesting and fruitful dialogues.