

Faust:
My Soul be Damned for the World

Volume I

By
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Books by the same Author:

A Compendium of Essays:
Purcell, Hogarth and Handel, Beethoven, Liszt, Debussy, and Andrew Lloyd Webber

Handel's Path to Covent Garden: A Rocky Journey

“The praise of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment. If his pride mount up even to heaven, and his head touch the clouds: in the end he shall be destroyed like a dunghill, and they that had seen him, shall say: Where is he?”

(Job 20: 5–7)

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Chapter 1

The Historical Faustus: the Man behind the Myth

Faust, the notorious reprobate who willingly forfeited his immortal soul to the devil in exchange for the fleeting illusory pleasures of the world as depicted and recounted in famous works of art, literature, drama and music, did not originate as the imaginary brainchild of a literary genius. A *historical* figure named ‘Faust’ did exist, but with the passage of time, this individual faded into semi-obscurity, gradually becoming immortalised as a mythical character — the original name, *Faustus*, became confused in a barrage of theological, philosophical, political, and artistic literature that continually reshaped his legend through the centuries up to the present day.*

Retracing the life of Faustus is not a simple task; the facts are shrouded and distorted in the mists of time and speculation, presenting a formidable challenge for any dedicated researcher who endeavours to compile an accurate biography. The proof of his existence survives in university and city records, letters, private journals, chronicles and other similar documents. Furthermore, the meagre historical documentation referring to him is limited and often tainted, it contains partial and oftentimes inaccurate information, or is permeated with the subjective opinions of the chroniclers. For example, the important details pertaining to the time and place of Faustus’ birth and death remain subject to scholarly conjecture. Nevertheless, through these various sources we discover the nature of the career he embarked upon, and in certain documented instances, where he travelled. We also discover through these diverse accounts contemporaries whom he influenced or who regarded him with contempt and derision; an important point to observe, for these individuals affected the opinions of those affiliated with their particular social and intellectual circles. As time progressed, these scholars enhanced, magnified and embellished the original accounts — a process that ultimately encouraged the proliferation of the Faustian legend. Our search for the real Faustus must also commence with these existing documents, for they are all that remain of this enigmatic and sinister individual.

One particular bibliography by Hans Henning presents a list of one hundred and eighty-three references¹ documenting the historical Doctor Faustus; however, many of these documents are considered unreliable due to the obvious assimilation of legendary folklore with historical facts. Therefore, scholars found it necessary, for practical purposes, to limit the number of documents in their research to records that originated during his lifetime and certain events recorded by close contemporaries. This condensed criterion generally commences with documents that first mention Faustus, for instance, Trithemius’ letter dated 1507, branching to various accounts dated after the assumed year of Faustus’ death, (c. 1539 or 1540), extending to

* **Editorial Policy:** this study is presented in British spelling. Material with braces, { }, indicates editing or comments made by the present author. Material with brackets, [], also marks editing and comments of the present author, with the exception of stage directions in the succeeding Chapters.

¹ Hans Henning, *Faust–Bibliographie* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1966), I, 87–105, in Frank Baron, *Doctor Faustus: From History to Legend* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1978), p. 7.

1617 with an excerpt from Fynes Moryson's *Itinerary*. In 1913, Karl Schottenloher presented an additional document to Faustus scholars for their consideration, an entry from the registration records of Heidelberg University dated January 9, 1483.² Frank Baron discovered a new Faustus document in 1989.³ Hence, by following a time-line method of categorisation using these same records, we have approximately twenty-nine documents for our particular study. (See Appendix One.)

We may consider twenty-nine sources of information a substantial number to commence with, however, difficulties begin to emerge as we study each respective document. For example, not one, but *two* Faustus figures surface: one who entitled himself "Master Georgius Sabellicus, the younger Faustus", and a second individual recognised as "Johann Faust" (or Johann Faustus / Faustum). This revelation generated significant confusion: who is the real Faustus? Baron identifies the academic culprit who initiated this anomaly — Johannes Manlius, a student from the University of Wittenberg and a pupil of Martin Luther's successor, the famous Philipp Melanchthon.⁴ Manlius edited a book entitled *Locurum communium collectanea* (1562), a compilation of anecdotes transcribed from Melanchthon's lectures; it is here for the first time that we note the name "Johann" associated with Faustus, nearly twenty-five years after the assumed year of his death.⁵ Apparently, Manlius employed artistic licence in his editorial endeavour, for Baron notes that "[...] Manlius did not handle the original material from his teacher very scrupulously; he changed it and added to it to make his presentation more interesting reading."⁶

Further compounding this confusion, we observe the name "Johannes Faust" in an entry dated 1509 in the matriculation records of Heidelberg University. Therefore, discovering the true identity of this infamous magician becomes complex: was Manlius referring to this individual? Eminent scholars have suggested that possibly two Faustus-figures existed and were simultaneously practising the occult. Will-Erich Peuckert presented a controversial argument suggesting these two men, Gerog and Johann, were father and son — an explanation not generally accepted.⁷

Baron's response to this Faustian dilemma was to isolate these two individuals and concentrate on George in particular, basing his argument on the observation that the earliest sources record the name "Georg" in both German and Latin accounts, while "Johann", as mentioned, appeared many years later.⁸ Baron states the earliest sources are perhaps the most

² Karl Schottenloher, *Münchener neuste Nachrichten*, July 5, 1913 (no. 338), in *Doctor Faustus: From History to Legend*, pp. 17–22. Baron observed this particular document was not previously registered in serious scholarly articles.

³ I wish to thank Prof. Frank Baron for bringing his discovery to my attention. See 'Faustus his Life and Legend', (November 12, 2009) *Historicum.net*: http://www.historicum.net/themen/hexenforschung/lexikon/personen/art/Georg_Faustus/html/artikel/7114/ca/693f7c07ad/ See also Frank Baron, 'Who was the Historical Faustus? Interpreting an Overlooked Source', *Daphnis* 18, (1989), S. 297–302.

⁴ *Doctor Faustus, from History to Legend*, p. 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Will-Erich Peuckert, 'Dr. Johannes Faust,' *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 70 (1947), pp. 55–74, in *Doctor Faustus, from History to Legend*, p. 11.

⁸ See *Doctor Faustus, from History to Legend*.

reliable due to the fact they were recorded before the phantasmagorical aspects of the legend gained momentum. He also highlighted an important detail, the earliest sources, in Latin *and* German, included the Latin word “Faustus” (meaning ‘fortunate’ or ‘auspicious’), and not the German word “Faust” (translated ‘fist’); a distinction people of the sixteenth century would be cognizant, yet is not generally recognised in this era, particularly when the works of Lessing and Goethe blurred this nomenclature.⁹ Baron states that earlier research incorporating the Heidelberg entry “Johann Faust ex Simern” is a direct result of this erroneous assumption that the Latin appellation was synonymous with the German word “Faust”, hence he elected not to include this entry in his argument.¹⁰

For his study, Baron concentrated on the following nine¹¹ documents:

January 9, 1483:	<u>Heidelberg University:</u> “Georgius Helmstetter”
August 20, 1507:	<u>Johannes Trithemius:</u> “Magister Georgius Sabellicus Faustus iunior”
October 3, 1513:	<u>Conrad Mutianus Rufus:</u> “Georgius Faustus Helmitheus Hedelbergensis”
February 12, 1520:	<u>Hans Müller:</u> “Doctor Faustus philosoph(us)”
June 17, 1528:	<u>An Ingolstadt scribe:</u> “Doctor Jörg Faustus von Haidlberg”
July, 1528:	<u>Kilian Leib:</u> “Georgius Faustus Helmstet(ensis)”
May 10, 1532:	<u>Hieronymus Holzschuher (Junior Burgomaster of Nuremberg):</u> “Doctor Fausto” (i.e. Doctor Faust[us])
August 13, 1536:	<u>Joachim Camerarius:</u> “Faustus”
January 15, 1540:	<u>Philipp von Hutten:</u> “Philosophus Faustus”

These nine sources of information are of particular importance: they either record the name “George” and / or “Faustus”, disclose his place of origin, and reveal the social circles he

⁹ Ibid. p. 13.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 12.

¹¹ Ibid. pp. 13, 17.

was affiliated with. A number of these authors became acquainted or associated through their scholastic studies in humanism and the occult. Baron therefore declared, “On the basis of these sources it is possible to make reliable generalizations about the name, birthplace, and studies of Faustus.”¹² As mentioned, Baron discovered an additional manuscript describing how a certain ‘Magister Georgius Helmstette[r]’ drafted a horoscope in 1490 for a student named Peter Seuter, (also spelled Suitter), in Heidelberg. For our study of the historical Faustus, we will focus initially on these ten documents.¹³

Baron notes from the onset of the magician’s career, Faustus was reluctant to disclose his family name. If “Faustus” was indeed his name, its Latin origin implies it was an assumed identity as humanists adopted the custom of creating pseudonyms by modifying their appellations upon Latin names or Latin phonetics.¹⁴ For an academic occupied in the practise of divination, this Latinised name, ‘Faustus’, would be advantageous as a method of self-promotion. Supporting this theory is the fact that George also used the name “Sabellicus” according to one of the earliest sources. Baron emphasises the name “Sabellicus” is not German in origin but Latin, and therefore this indicates Faustus designed an affiliation with the land of the Sabines, a region north of Rome that from ancient times became infamously associated with occult practises. By adopting the title “Sabellicus”, Faustus claimed an ancestral lineage descending from magicians of antiquity, an appropriate name “[...] for one who claimed to be a *magus*,” as Baron observes.¹⁵

An additional and equally questionable title Faustus assumed was “junior”, or “the younger Faustus” depending on the translation of the source. As “Faustus” is evidently not his true family name, George deliberately intended contemporaries to associate him with some personage in particular. It is possible George desired a connection with the famous humanist, Pomponius Laetus (d. 1508), who first promoted the ideal that humanists should adopt Latin names. This desired affiliation may also have extended to the students of Laetus: Marcus Antonius Sabellicus (d. 1506) and Publius Faustus Andrelinus (d. 1518).¹⁶ Marcus Antonius Sabellicus, a famous contemporary Italian historian and poet, adopted the name “Sabellicus” as he was born in the Sabine region. Faustus Andrelinus, a professor of rhetoric in Paris, lectured on astronomy with emphasis on astrology. Baron supports Gustav Schwetschke’s thesis that George Faustus was therefore directly or indirectly influenced by the new humanist practise of adopting names, and perhaps “Faustus junior” was inspired by Faustus Andrelinus.¹⁷

While Faustus may be reluctant to disclose his family name, he was obviously proud to proclaim his place of origin. Early sources list two separate locations, Helmstadt and Heidelberg, however Baron notes there is no contradiction — both are in the same geographical area, and for the sake of convenience, Faustus on occasion may have simply referred to the larger town, Heidelberg, as his birthplace.¹⁸ Baron observes this practise of generalisation was common for

¹² Ibid. p. 13.

¹³ ‘Faustus his Life and Legend’.

¹⁴ *Doctor Faustus, from History to Legend*, p.14.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 91.

¹⁷ Gustav Schwetschke, “Wer was Faustus senior? Ein Beitrag zur Faustgeschichte,” *Deutsches Museum*, Oct. 11, 1855, pp. 548–551, in *Doctor Faustus, from History to Legend*, pp. 32–33, 91.

¹⁸ *Doctor Faustus, from History to Legend*, p. 15.

the sake of clarity, when people would not be familiar with smaller geographical townships. In addition, Mutianus Rufus' letter (1513) featuring Faustus' curious title of "Helmitheus Hedelbergensis" may in fact be misspellings for "Helmstadius / Helmstetius" and "Heidlebergensis". Baron therefore concludes, "[...] the primary sources indicate clearly that the place where the historical Faustus was born was not Kundling or Knittlingen, as it was asserted in later sources, but rather Helmstadt near Heidelberg."¹⁹

From this evidence, it is obvious George Faustus of Helmstadt deliberately fabricated a reputation to reflect his occult knowledge and academic learning. In addition, there are several academic titles associated with Faustus that indicate a university education in the faculty of arts; master (*magister*), philosopher (*philosophus*), and *doctor*. While the master's degree was the foremost qualification a student could attain in philosophy at that time, masters in this field were on occasion referred to as *doctor*, hence this title is not an inaccurate self-proclamation invented by Faustus.²⁰ Attempts to discover the extent of Faustus' academic studies, as previously discussed, are obstructed by the entry of "Johann Faust" in the records of the University of Heidelberg. Baron observed this student commenced his studies in December 1505 and graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1509, while George Faustus already claimed the title of Master a considerable period before this timeframe, and therefore this particular source cannot refer to the historical Faustus.²¹ Of immediate interest is the 1483 entry naming a certain "Georgius Helmstetter" as Baron relates:

"It is reasonable to assume that a young man who lived in Helmstadt would choose Heidelberg rather than another place for his university studies. [...] Although the name Faustus is not linked anywhere in the records with the name Georgius Helmstetter, there are certain indications that this Heidelberg student was the same Faustus referred to in the primary sources. [...] Students of that time usually indicated their surnames, and during the semester in which Helmstetter registered at Heidelberg, only one other student from a total of sixty-seven elected not to do so. Thus the young Helmstetter demonstrated the same reluctance to reveal his surname that Faustus later consistently displayed.

Very few young men from small villages like Helmstadt ever had the chance to attend the university. During the years 1460 to 1520 a total of thirteen students came from Helmstadt, four graduating with bachelor's degrees and only two obtaining master's degrees. There is no trace of another Georgius Helmstetter at this time. Under these circumstances it is unlikely that the exact correspondence of name and scope of academic training is simply a coincidence. Moreover, the kind of education the Heidelberg graduate of 1487 had received manifests

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ George Kaufmann, *Geschichte der deutschen Universitäten* (Stuttgart, 1888), II, pp. 274–5, in *ibid.*, p. 16.

²¹ *Doctor Faustus, from History to Legend*, p. 16.

itself in a number of ways in the subsequent activities of the historical Doctor Faustus.”²²

The University Years

Georg Helmstetter registered at the university on January 9, 1483 and graduated with a bachelor’s degree on July 12, 1484. However, he encountered a minor complication when he applied to partake in the final examination for this degree. At the end of June 1484 (*ultima mensis Junii*), the Faculty of Arts examination commission deliberated his application as he apparently lacked several of the prescribed requisites, preventing him from proceeding with the final examination.²³ His attendance record was one particular issue as the statutes of the university required at least one and a half years of study. Baron notes Helmstetter actually completed the minimum time specified, and therefore suggests the unfulfilled requirements referred to may be the result of Helmstetter’s late arrival in the academic year of 1482–1483. It is reasonable to assume the young student did not attend all the obligatory lectures at the commencement of this term, and therefore was absent for the introductory segments of this course.²⁴ A certain Magister, Johannes Hasse, supported Helmstetter and vouchsafed for the student’s ability to complete the requirements within a reasonable period. The faculty finally permitted Helmstetter to proceed with the examination and he graduated sixteenth of the seventeen students who participated in July 1484.²⁵ He subsequently commenced studies for the master’s degree: a course that may require a further three years. Prior to receiving this higher degree, Helmstetter, for a second time, came under the scrutiny of the examinations committee concerning his non-fulfilment of the expected requirements — he participated in two of the three prescribed disputations, and was informed of the necessity to complete the third before the faculty would permit him to graduate.²⁶ On March 1, 1487, he graduated second in his class of ten candidates.²⁷

On closer inspection, Helmstetter’s erratic attendance at the university reveals valuable information that requires further analysis. Baron observes that the prodigious speed by which this student earned his bachelor’s degree is unusual as Heidelberg required an average study period of two years for the first degree.²⁸ Paradoxically, Helmstetter invested a considerable length of time to acquire his master’s degree (1484–1487): in general, students obtained this degree within one year, or one year and nine months.²⁹ Baron offers two possible explanations

²² Ibid.

²³ University of Heidelberg Archives (UHA) I, 3, No. 49, fol. 113v. (Akten der Artistenfakultät, vol. 2, 1445–1501), in *ibid.*, pp. 17, 92.

²⁴ *Doctor Faustus, from History to Legend*, p. 17.

²⁵ UHA I, 3, No. 49, fol. 114r. (Akten der Artistenfakultät, vol. 2, 1445-1501), in *ibid.*, pp. 92–93.

²⁶ *Doctor Faustus, from History to Legend*, p. 17

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. p.18.

²⁹ Ibid.

for this apparent temporal irregularity; Helmstetter may have been absent for a certain period, or, was prevented from applying for the master's examination due to his age.³⁰ The second theory would appear in character with Helmstetter who had previously opted to spend the minimum amount of time possible in pursuit of his first degree. In this timeframe in Germany, a minimum age policy existed³¹ for those aspiring to achieve a master's degree, for example, the minimum age stipulated by the Universities of Ingolstadt and Greifswald was twenty years.³² Other universities cited twenty-one years as the accepted minimum.³³ Despite the fact that an age criterion was not recorded in the statutes of Heidelberg for this period, Baron assumes a similar desideratum of age must have been upheld. He observed the study periods several scholars had committed to during the 1450s and 1460s share similarities with that of Helmstetter. Baron presents the humanist Hartmann Schedel as one example, who "[...] having registered at Leipzig in 1456, obtained his bachelor's degree one year later, after which time he spent three years in pursuit of a master's degree before graduating in 1460 at the age of twenty."³⁴ If a similar age restriction was specified at Heidelberg resulting in Helmstetter's delay in obtaining his master's degree, it is possible to assume the year of this student's birth was either 1466 or 1467³⁵ — a considerable period before the previously accepted supposition of 1480 as the birth date of George Faustus.³⁶

Focusing on Helmstetter's character and temperament, we may deduce he was an ambitious student who displayed a profound confidence in his academic abilities. This observation may be denoted by his application to take the bachelor's examination with the support of Hasse before the specified time; Hasse certainly must have been convinced of the student's competence before taking his position of recommendation. Helmstetter's proficiency is also evident in his leap from the penultimate rank for the bachelor's degree to his rating as second in his post-graduate class. This was a noteworthy accomplishment and reflects an assiduous effort on his part to become an adept academic, particularly when we consider that in addition to his studies as a master student, he was expected to fulfil the remaining curriculum required to complete his undergraduate degree. Helmstetter's tenacity is evident in his application for the master's degree having completed only two disputations — perhaps he was notably accomplished in this area and therefore his peers' admiration encouraged him to assert that he had adequately presented his debating abilities on these two occasions. Alternatively, one might hypothetically suggest that he had audaciously presumed he could circumvent this stipulation for the master's degree as simply as he had manipulated the time specified to allow him to partake in the bachelor's examination. According to the university statutes, all newly graduated masters were

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ From Georg Kaufmann, *Geschichte der deutschen Universitäten* (Stuttgart, 1888), II, p. 304, in *ibid*, p. 18.

³² *Doctor Faustus, from History to Legend*, p. 18.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Wilhelm Wattenbach, "Hartmann Schedel als Humanist," *Forschungen zur deutschen Geschichte*, 11 (1871), pp. 351–374, in *Doctor Faustus, from History to Legend*, p. 18

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Baron: "Hans Henning assumes that Faustus was born in approximately 1480. He does not explain the reasons for making this assumption. In fact, Faustus could have been born much earlier." Baron, n. 8, p. 93.