Polemical Magic: Early Faust Literature and Skepticism in the Reformation

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Richard Popkin's epochal work on the history of skepticism in the Early Modern period[1] identifies the seminal gesture of the Reformation, Luther's rejection of the Catholic church's entire framework of authority at the Diet of Worms, as the opening of a "Pandora's Box" that sparked a skeptical crisis, or "*crise pyrrhonienne*," which soon engulfed the Western world (5). Popkin's narrow understanding of the term skepticism and his emphasis on the role of the printed Latin translations of Sextus Empiricus's work in the 1560s in the birth of modern science have become controversial, but whether one adopts Popkin's view of an acute crisis in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries or takes a longer and broader view of skepticism,[2] the Reformation marks a moment of profound transformation in the history of European thought. As Stuart Clark notes, the temptation "to think of the [Early Modern] period as one of radical epistemological instability" does not exist without reason (1997, 257). In rejecting the authority of the pope and church councils, which had previously arbitrated the nature of truth, in favor of "what conscience is compelled to believe on reading Scripture" (Popkin 3) Luther was redefining the criteria for religious orthodoxy. For centuries, the Catholic church alone had defined the nature of and means of achieving theological principles such as grace or repentance. The spiritual confusion that resulted from Luther's repudiation of numerous Catholic doctrines finds its reflection in many literary works of the time but perhaps nowhere more potently than in the legend of Faust, which emerged and developed in the early Reformation era into a vehicle for Luther's radical skepticism toward Catholic doctrines ranging from intercession and repentance to the saints' cults and miracles. The early Faust texts, however, do not function like the openly polemical, Pyrrhonic treatises Popkin describes in the *History of Skepticism*. Instead, the first German chapbook, its translations, and Marlowe's theatrical adaptation, which make up the earliest works of Faust literature, employ a subtler polemic, intending to sow doubt in Catholic doctrine by parody rather than outright attack.

With the 1587 publication in Frankfurt of the anonymously written *Historia von D. Johann Fausten, dem weitbeschreyten Zauberer und Schwartzkünstler*, the Faust legend entered literature[3] and was followed within a year by an English translation done pseudonymously by one P. F. Gent, *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Dr. John Faustus*, which in turn inspired Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, both within just a few years of the *Historia*'s publication. By 1612 the first Faust book had been printed in at least eight European languages, making it an important transnational literary phenomenon in a period marked by sectarian strife.

The *Historia* itself never states its sectarian allegiance openly, and this no doubt contributed to its ability to find popular success across denominational lines in Lutheran Germany,

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[1] Popkin's magnum opus first appeared in 1960 as *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Descartes*, was expanded and revised the first time as *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* in 1979, and appeared in its ultimate form as the further revised and expanded *The History of Skepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* in 2003.

[2] To give one illustrative example, in "The 'Skeptical Crisis' Reconsidered: Galen, Rational Medicine and the *Libertas Philosophandi*," Ian Maclean positions Early Modern skepticism as part of a longer tradition of doubt and anti-authoritarianism in pedagogy that stretched back to at least the thirteenth century.

[3] A manuscript version of the story with minor variations entitled *Historia und Geschicht* Doctor Johannis Faustj *des Zauberers*, known as the Wolfenbüttel manuscript, seems to predate the first printed edition, but its circulation was significantly smaller.

Anglican England, and Catholic France simultaneously. Nevertheless, scholars now almost univocally recognize it as a Lutheran text.[4] Historiographic and textual research done in the late nineteenth century has done much to buttress this conclusion, revealing that not only did the publisher of the first edition, Johann Spies[5] of Frankfurt, otherwise publish strictly orthodox Lutheran material (Zarncke 289–99), but the *Historia* contains numerous quotations and paraphrases of Luther worked into the text (Milchsack cciic–cccxciv). Even without this knowledge, however, the *Historia*'s text evinces a clear anti-Catholic bias most explicitly expressed in part II when Faust journeys to Rome and enters St. Peter's Basilica, noting along the way all the wealth being brought to the pope: "D. Faustus sah auch drinnen alles seinesgleichen, wie Übermut, Stolz, Hochmut, Vermessenheit, Fressen, Saufen, Hurerei, Ehebruch, und alles gottlose Wesen des Baptes und seines Geschmeißes[6]" (*Historia* 65). The critique of the Catholic church here is, as an exception, far from subtle, and the lack of reference to a specific pope serves to generalize the criticism to the institution of the papacy itself, as well as to associate Faust's sins with those of Catholicism as a whole. In recognizing himself in the debauchery within St. Peter's, Faust draws an analogy between his corruption and that of the church. Such depictions of the papacy and Curia provided a literary justification for Luther's skeptical view of papal and conciliar authority and helped spread it among the public.

Nevertheless, in his 1598[7] translation of the *Historia*, *L'Histoire prodigieuse et lamentable du Docteur Fauste*, the Calvinist Reformer turned Catholic Counter-Reformer Pierre-Victor Palma-Cayet simply excised the most obviously anti-Catholic content, such as the passage above, and makes it clear in his introductory epistle that he blames the rise of such figures as Faust on "la nouveauté, introduicte en la Réligion, contre l'usage ancien des saincts Peres ancies Docteurs" (49) and hopes to see Germany "une bonne fois bien reunie en la foy Catholique, au giron de nostre mere saincte Eglise Romaine, pour delaisser tant d'opinions monstreuses, qui y ont pellulé depuis cette miserable defection"[8] (53). Without engaging explicitly with the text's Protestant origins, Cayet simply attempts to reframe the Faust book as a polemical argument against Protestantism based on the implication that rejection of Catholicism must necessarily result in figures like Faust. Were the *Historia* merely a polemical text meant to inspire skepticism in Catholicism as an institution by calling into question the papacy and Curia or presenting Faust as a product thereof, such a reframing reversal might have sufficed and would have fit into Popkin's presentation of skepticism as a polemical tool in the early skirmishes of the Reformation. However, the *Historia* did not just function on a polemical level but on a subtler parodic and didactic level not meant to show that Faust was the result of Catholicism but rather that Catholicism resulted from figures like

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[4] Margerite de Huszar Allen provides a list of major scholars who have argued for a Catholic perspective in the text (1986, 592, endnote 10), and in volume one of *Le thème de Faust*, Charles Dédéyan rebuts some specific arguments to this effect (28–9).

[5] Some scholars suspect that Spies, sometimes Spiess, either wrote the *Historia* himself (Hawkes 28) or at least commissioned it (Baron 542).

[6] "Dr. Faustus also saw inside everyone like him, as with presumptuousness, pride, haughtiness, impudence, gluttony, intoxication, whoring, adultery, and all of them godless creatures of the Pope and his vermin."

[7] There is some suggestion that Cayet's translation first appeared in 1589 while he was still a Calvinist (Meek 102; Cazaux 19). This would of course enormously complicate his anti-Reformation rhetoric in the introduction to the 1589 and subsequent editions of his translation, casting it in a cynical, even subversive light. However, no copies of any earlier editions survive to substantiate their supposed existence.

[8] "the novelty introduced in religion against the old usage of the saintly fathers and ancient doctors" . . . "reunited one fine day in the Catholic faith, in the bosom of our saintly mother Roman Church, in leaving behind all the monstrous opinions that have proliferated there since that miserable defection."

Faust. *Pace* Popkin, Reformation skepticism in works like the *Historia* did not aim solely to question the criteria behind Catholic institutions and doctrinal claims but also the popular stories by which Catholicism justified itself.

Faust and the Reformation

The Faust tradition seems to have originated with a minor historical figure named Johannes Faust[9] whose reputation as an itinerant charlatan and public nuisance early in life seems to have transformed by his death into that of a powerful necromancer, making him into a figure of folklore and local legend with a surprisingly intimate connection to Lutheranism's own origins. Faust was a contemporary of Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon and both referred to him by name. Luther, for example, mentioned him twice during discussions of conjurers in the 1530s, which were recorded in his *Tischreden* (*Table Talk*). In the first, Luther explains to his followers after Faust is mentioned that the devil did not send sorcerers against him because they could do him no harm, and in the second from 1537, that Faust "welcher den Teufel seinen schwoger hies und hat sich lassen horen : „Wenn ich, Martin Luther, im nur di handt gereicht hette, wolt er mich vorterbet haben; aber ich wolde in nicht gescheuet haben"[10] (93). In this, Luther used Faust's reputation for *maleficium*, i.e. harmful magic, and association with the devil to shape his own legend as a fearless man of faith in the New Testament tradition, evoking Philip before Simon Magus (*Acts* 8:9–24) or Jesus confounding the Sadducees (*Lk.* 20:19–47). Equally important in Luther's remarks is what he does not claim, namely to have cast out Faust's servant, the devil, as Jesus did (*Mt.* 9:33, *Lk.* 11:14) or as Catholic clergy claimed they could. Exorcism was a thorny topic for early Reformers, many of whom, including Lutherans like Johann Georg Gödelmann, considered exorcism as depicted in the Bible a miraculous gift granted to the early Church to inspire faith, but one which had vanished once Christianity had established itself (Cameron 40).

Though divisive amongst Reformers, exorcism remained central to Catholic practice in the Early Modern period, particularly during the witch craze. Catholic exorcism rites of the sixteenth century, such as Girolamo Menghi's popular *Flagellum Daemonum*, often involved non-Scriptural incantations, the preparation of special oils and implements, and ritual gestures (Cameron 45). Practices such as these drew the skepticism of Reformers to whom they were redolent more of magic than religion. There was a general tendency among Reformers to associate Catholic rituals, including the mass, with magic and priests with enchanters (Parish 104; Cameron 38). Protestant theologians often used scripture, e.g. *Mt.* 24, *2 Thes.* 2, to stoke skepticism toward Catholic claims of miracles, recasting them as diabolical "wonders" (Parish 103). In the case of exorcism, they needed only to point to *Mt.* 9:34 or *Lk.* 11:15 where the Pharisees claim Jesus "casteth out devils through the prince of devils" or "Beelzebub chief of devils" respectively. This gave Reformers, who naturally believed Jesus had genuinely performed a miracle but believed the age of miracles had long since ended, a ready explanation for any supposed efficacy in Catholic exorcisms: they were using devils to drive out other devils.

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[9] The historical Faust (?–ca. 1540) is thought by most scholars to have used various assumed names during his travels, including Georg Faust and Georgius Sabellicus, Faustus junior, among other configurations of these names. Johannes Faust does seem to be his real name, however, as that is what appears in the records of Heidelberg University, where he received his B.A., and in most later references (Wiemken xv, Ziolkowski 47).

[10] "who called the devil his brother-in-law and made it known: If I, Martin Luther, had but given him my hand, he would have destroyed me, but I would not have shied away."

This is not to say that Luther and his followers denied all forms of exorcism. Philip Melanchthon, for example, thought demons might be expelled by using the name of Christ and publicly preaching about the punishment devils would receive on Judgment Day (Clark 1996, 417), and Augustin Lercheimer reports Luther saved a student who had made a pact similar to Faust's by forcing the devil through admonition and prayer to return the pact[11] (111). However, Lutheran attitudes toward exorcism tended to focus on the prophylactic power of faith and piety to ward of malignant spirits, as above, and Job-like forbearance in the face of their assaults (Clark 2015, 229). Thus, the *Historia*'s opening "Preface to the Christian Reader" draws particular attention to *James* 4:7: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you," and the book's chapter 43 memorably models this Lutheran ideal of pious forbearance.

In that chapter, Faustus plagues the old man who attempts to get him to repent late in the book by sending a devil into his house. The devil acts as poltergeist, trying to frighten the old man as he sleeps, but, as Gent's English translation explains, "this godly man was strong in the Holy Ghost, that he could not be vanquished by any means." The old man merely mocks the devil who must return to Faust and explain that "the old man was harnessed, and that he could not once lay hold of him," after which the chapter ends with the statement: "Thus doth God defend the hearts of all honest Christians, that betake themselves under his tuition" (*Historie* 185). Where the *Historia* opts to parody exorcism rites by replacing them with jokes, Christopher Marlowe's theatrical adaptation, *Doctor Faustus*, instead adds more heroism and pathos to the scene by leaving the old man's fate more ambiguous. In the face of Faustus's devilish minions, the old man declares:

> Satan begins to sift me with his pride.
> As in the furnace of God shall try my faith,
> My faith, vile hell, shall triumph over thee.
> Ambitious fiends, see how the heavens smiles
> At your repulse and laughs your state to scorn!
> Hence, hell! For hence I fly unto my God. (5.2.113–18)

It is unclear whether the last line signifies the old man seeking spiritual refuge in God or expecting to be killed by Faustus's devils and so announcing the departure of his soul. Regardless, the old man in Marlowe's retelling, like his precursor in the *Historia*, serves didactically to model the Protestant ideal of piety in the face of demonic persecution without turning to forms of exorcism deemed magical in their own right. Implicit in these depictions is the skeptical attitude toward exorcism, outlined above, key to undermining Counter Reformer's arguments that Reformers only argued for the cessation of miracles because they could produce none of their own (Parish 103). Figures like the old man in the Faust book were meant to demonstrate that the pious had no need of such "false" miracles and to shine a skeptical light on the claims Counter Reformers made to justify their religious position.

More so than Luther, whose brief mentions of Faust mostly uses the sorcerer's name to illustrate the power of faith, particularly his own, as a defense against the demonic, Philip Melanchthon, one of the founding figures of Lutheranism and the developer of the Lutheran university curriculum, contributed significantly to the development of Faust's legend. In fact, when

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[11] Counter Reformers parodied such claims by Luther, describing him instead as driving out demons through the power of his flatulence (Cameron 42).

Lercheimer relates the above story about the attempt to convert Faust in his *Christlich Bedencken und erinnerung von Zauberey*,[12] he does not speak of an "old man" but of Melanchthon himself (86). However, aside from a few other surviving mentions of the sorcerer by Melanchthon, his connection to the Faust legend lies primarily in the first fulsome account of Faust's life, which appeared in the *Locorum communium collectanea*, a collection of Melanchthon's anecdotes compiled by his student Johannes Manlius and printed in Latin in 1562, with a German translation appearing in 1565. Melanchthon's sketch shows the broad outlines of the Faust legend had already been laid by the mid-sixteenth century:

> Ich habe einen gekennt / mit namen Faust von Kundling [. . .] derselbige da er zuo Crockaw in die schuol gieng / da hatte er zauberey gelernet [. . .] Er ging hin unnd wider allenthaben / und sagte viel verborgene ding . . . Vor wenig jaren ist derselbige Johannes Faust / den tag vor seinem letzten ende / in einem Dorff im Wirtemberger land gantz traurig gesessen [. . .] da ist er neben dem Bette tod gelegen gefunden / und hatte jm der Teuffel das angesicht auf den rucken gedrehet.[13] (Qtd. in Bräuer 17, 94)

Melanchthon's brief biography serves didactically as a cautionary tale, warning against the consequences of pursuing magical studies and making a pact with the devil. As the first full account of Faust's life, it also, no doubt, provided the basis for the *Historia*. While Melanchthon focuses on the wickedness of Faust's magical pursuits and does not elaborate on what the "secret things" he learns are, these surely represent the seeds of Faust's quest for knowledge, which becomes so essential to the further development of the legend, and which creates so much ambivalence around the question of skepticism in the early Faust literature to be explored below.

Importantly, however, the *Historia* alters Faust's places of birth and death: "Kundling" (Knittlingen) becomes "Rod bei Weinmar" (Stadtroda) and "Wirtemberger land" (Württemberg) becomes Wittenberg. These changes remove Faust from his probable historical roots in Southwestern Germany and place him squarely in the heartland of the Reformation. This new *mise-en-scène* as the Faust story made the jump from folktale to literature necessarily deepened its connection to Lutheranism but left the nature of that connection ambiguous. It has been suggested that, because Spies, the *Historia*'s publisher, belonged to the more conservative sect of Lutherans in favor of the 1577 Formula of Concord and opposed to the Philippist successors of Melanchthon in Wittenberg, the move represents an intra-denominational polemic (Ziolkowski 55, 60). The removal of Melanchthon in the *Historia* from the Faust anecdotes originally so closely associated with him does seem ideologically motivated (Baron 542; Hawkes 33). However, once must look to the symbolic importance of Wittenberg as the birthplace of the Reformation. Whatever the anti-Phillipist sentiments of its publisher, the *Historia* risked implicating Luther himself by relocating Faust to Wittenberg out of spite, offering writers like Pierre Cayet a polemic opportunity to frame the Faust book as essentially anti-Lutheran. Yet, the association between Luther and Faust may

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[12] Frank Baron has argued that Lercheimer's *Bedencken* of 1985 served as a source for the *Historia*, which collapses two anecdotes Lercheimer tells about attempts to convert Faust, one by Melanchthon and the other by a "pious old man," into one, likely removing Melanchthon's name for ideological reasons (532–3).

[13] "I knew a man with the name Faust from Knittlingen [. . .] the same who went to school in Krakow / where he learned magic [. . .] He went here, there, and everywhere / and said many secret things . . . A few years ago, this same Johannes Faust / on the day before his end / sat very sadly in a village in Württemberg [. . .] where he was found lying dead next to his bed / and the devil had turned his head completely around."

have been intentional, for it has also been suggested that Faust represents a sort of anti-Luther.[14] This argument has the virtue of uniting the move to Wittenberg with the *Historia*'s strong reliance on the biographical form, first suggested by Melanchthon's account above, in its opening chapters and throughout its second half.[15]

Such an argument also finds some support in the *Historia*'s text. After Luther rejected the authority of the Catholic church at the Diet of Worms, he presented a new criterion for establishing religious knowledge, which Popkin summarizes as "that which conscience is compelled to believe on reading Scripture is true" (5). Scripture and conscience are paramount in Luther's teachings, and also among the first two concepts Faust rejects in the *Historia*. In fact, the very first chapter of the *Historia* recounts how, after becoming a Doctor of Theology, Faust "hat die H. Schrift eine Weil hinter die Tür und unter die Bank gelegt und ruch- und gottlos gelebt"[16] (15). Shortly thereafter, as Faust cuts his hand to attain the blood necessary to sign his pact with Mephistopheles, in his hand "eine gegrabene und blutige Schrift gesehen worden, O Homo fuge; das ist: O Mensch, fleuch vor ihm und tue recht, etc."[17] (23). Faust, of course, does not heed his conscience's warning, thus betraying Luther's core principles from the beginning. However, the parallels between Luther and Faust quickly exhaust themselves. A more likely explanation for the *Historia*'s structure is that it is meant to parody a saint's *vita*, making Faust less an anti-Luther and more an "anti-saint."[18] Whatever the reason for the move to Wittenberg, whether the result of ideological infighting or the mere desire to put reader's in a Lutheran frame of mind, this reading suggests the *Historia* takes Melanchthon's biographical sketch and extends it into an anti-*vita* meant to satirize the popular literature of saints' lives, undercutting their value to Counter Reformers by making their claims the object of skepticism.

Faust the Anti-Saint: Skepticism by Example

As a work of anti-Catholic skepticism, the *Historia* largely does not function like the learned treatises Popkin discusses in *The History of Skepticism*. Despite the occasional Biblical citation, the *Historia* does not engage directly with specific questions of theological doctrine and so does not explicitly argue against any sect's tenets or the criteria by which they were established as true. Such high-level debate would likely have made the *Historia* inaccessible to a popular readership. Instead, the skepticism the *Historia* intends for extra-scriptural Catholic beliefs functions meta-textually. Specifically, parodying the form of hagiographic *vita* allows it to criticize the cult of saints while also sewing doubts about central Catholic doctrines including intercession and miracles by implication and example rather than dissertation. As such, the skepticism embodied by the early Faust literature should be thought of as different in kind from what Popkin

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[14] By Charles Dédéyan in his monumental *Le Thème de Faust*, for example, but earlier in *Das Spies'sche Faustbuch und seine Quelle* of 1885 by Maxim Schwengberg, whose argument Zarncke already rejects in his 1897 *Goetheschriften* as not apparent in the text (299). Baron likewise dismisses Milchsack's argument that Faust is meant as a satirical representation of Melanchthon as overly speculative (543).

[15] The *Historia* (and its translations) is divided into four labeled parts: I: Faust's early life, studies, conjuration of Mephistopheles and signing of pact, and "disputations" on theology and demonology II: Disputations on astrology and astronomy (including meteorology), vision of hell, journey through the sky, journey around the world III: Faust's magical adventures and pranks IV: Faust's lamentations, admonishment, and death.

[16] "put the Holy Scripture behind his door and under his bench and lived heinously and godlessly."

[17] "an engraved and bloody script was seen, O *homo fuge*; that is: flee, O man, from him and do right, etc."

[18] André Jolles first used this term to describe Faust in *Einfache Formern* in 1930 (53–5)

describes, less erudite and Pyrrhonic and more popular and general, but ultimately similar in purpose: to make one's theological rivals question what they think they know.

Saints' *vitae* followed a stereotyped, biographical format, generally beginning with the saints' early life, then narrating the saint's adventures, virtuous actions, and miraculous deeds, and ending with the saint's martyrdom and posthumous miracles. The formula is so simple that the *Historia* does not need to change it in most of its biographical chapters,[19] instead inverting it as Marguerite de Huszar Allen observes:

> The holy life of the saint striving to imitate Christ is inverted into the unholy life of Faustus who makes a pact with the Devil. The deeds and miracles Faustus performs become misdeeds and magic […] Emulation by the reader is explicitly discouraged by the portrayal of Faustus' terrible end and by the polemical framework which transforms an exemplary biography into a cautionary tale. (1986, 588)

Correspondingly, the *Historia* opens with a description of Faust's youth and education before describing his turn away from theology to magic. Instead of having a vision of Jesus or Mary to inspire him to devote his life to God, Faust receives a fiery vision when he conjures Mephistopheles in the forest outside Wittenberg and subsequently signs his soul over to the devil. Part 3 of the *Historia* details Faust's adventures and the wonders he achieves with magic, including among many others: eating inhuman quantities of hay, flying, making a roasted veal's head talk, and most importantly for later adaptions of the story, the conjuration of spirits representing historical figures. Finally, the *Historia* changes the traditional end of sorcerers[20] given by Melanchthon into an exaggeratedly gruesome "martyrdom" by the devil that once served him, whereby Faust's brains are dashed against his study walls and his disjointed corpse is found outside near the manure.

Choosing hagiography as the form to parody was by no means arbitrary. Saints' *vitae* were an incredibly popular form of religious literature in the sixteenth century, and perhaps the most exemplary collection, Jacob de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, was second only to the Bible as the most often printed work of the time (Allen 1985, 39). Moreover, Counter Reformers relied on the popular credulity of these stories to support the legitimacy of their theological positions (Cameron 44; Parish 101). If the public became skeptical of the saints' legends, it would mean a loss of legitimacy for the doctrines of miracles, good works, and intercession, and this is precisely what the *Historia* hoped to achieve. Lutherans saw the imitation of saints' lives from the legends as so much pernicious superstition, in the older sense of the term meaning improper religious observance, unsupported by scripture. Luther, who had himself loved the *vitae* as a younger man and even after the Reformation longed for their "corrigirn" ("correction"), used the self-coined term "*Lügende*" (instead of *Legende*, from the German *lügen*, "to lie") to describe their current state, decrying the absurd fantasticality of the stories under the Catholic church as the devil's corruption of the true original stories and anathematizing the veneration of a special category of saints capable of interceding for others as idolatry and the culture of spiritual merit they promoted as the source of indulgences (Allen 1986, 590–91; 1985, 26–32). Rather than attempt to correct the "false,"

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[19] Nevertheless, it does deviate from it in chapters 11–17, known as "the disputations," which address questions about the nature of hell and its devils, as well as chapters 18–22, 24–25, and 28–32, which address contemporary natural philosophy.

[20] The snapping of sorcerers' necks all the way around goes back at least to canto XX of Dante's *Inferno*.

Catholic versions of these stories, the *Historia* presents a polemical counter-narrative meant to undermine them by sewing doubt about their veracity in the minds of potential converts.

The parallels between the *Historia* and some of the *vitae* in the *Golden Legend* are often quite direct[21], and among the figures most often cited in connection with the Faust story, St. Theophilus and Simon Magus are particularly illustrative. The fate of the former has a direct bearing on Faust's and relates particularly to the crucial chapters with the old man mentioned above. Theophilus, whose pact with the devil written in blood is likely the source of Faust's, comes to regret his infernal transaction and expresses his regret in prayers to the Virgin Mary who intercedes on his behalf:

> [T]he Blessed Mary appearing to him in a vision, rebuked him for his impiety, and commanded him to renounce the Devil, and to profess Christ the Son of God and the whole Christian faith. Thus she restored him to her favor and the grace of her Son; and in token of his pardon she appeared to him again, and returned to him the paper which he had given to the Devil, placing it upon his breast, that he might no longer fear the bondage of Satan, and might rejoice at his deliverance by the Virgin. (Voragine 529)

After the *Historia*, Faust's damnation seems a sure thing, spelled out in black and white (and red) in his contract with Mephistopheles, but the bad doctor's ultimate damnation was rather novel in 1578 and represents a Lutheran break from Catholic tradition.[22] Before the beginning of the Reformation, stories of selling one's soul to the devil were more likely to end as does Theophilus's: with eleventh-hour *Maria ex machina*. Obviously, this sort of salvation out of left field depends upon belief in intercession, which Luther abhorred as idolatry and so could have no place in Lutheran literature. Theophilus is able to trade acts of penance for grace, in a manner of exchange that would have rankled Lutheran sensibilities as much as the idea that one could buy indulgence. Faust, trying to make a similar trade, finds himself once more facing his personal devil who confronts him the nature of his first exchange and bullies him into further damnation.

After he speaks to the old man in chapter 52 of the *Historia*, Faust, too, seeks to repent, but it is not Mary who comes to him: "Er wollte Buße tun und dem Teuffel sein Versprechen wieder aufsagen. In solchem Gedanken erschien ihm sein Geist, griff nach ihm, als ob er ihm den Hals umdrehen wollte, und warf ihm für, was ihn dazu bewogen hätte, daß er sich dem Teuffel ergeben"[23] (108). This reversal of Theophilus's experience not only implicitly denies the existence of intercession but casts the ease with which figures in the *Golden Legend* receive absolution in a skeptical light. Faust expresses regret and seeks to do penance like Theophilus, but instead of having his contract with the devil annulled: "sinser solle sich […] von neuem mit seinem Blut verschreiben und versprechen […] Wo nicht, wolle [Mephistopheles] ihn zu Stücken zerreißen"[24] (*Historia* 109). Mephistopheles redoubles Faust's damnation with a second contract, of which Allen notes: "In the popular folklore of pacts with the Devil, the second pact is considered

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[21] For further examples linking of the *Historia*'s episodes to individual saints' *vitae*, see Meeks 1930, 59–99. Spatial constraints limit the present article to focusing only on the most exemplary connections related to its argument.

[22] The thirteenth century *Speculationes Historicae* seems to be the first to record the story of a magician, in this case the eleventh-century priest Palambus, who made an infernal pact and was not saved by intercession and ultimately faced damnation, but this fate remained the exception pre-Faust (Wiemken xxv).

[23] "He wanted to do his penance and retract his promise to the devil. His spirit appeared to him amidst such thoughts and seized him as if he would snap his neck, and reproached him for what had caused him to submit himself to the devil." The allusion to the older version of Faust's death here is also clear.

[24] "he was […] to commit and promise anew with his blood […] If not, [Mephistopheles] would tear him to pieces."

irrevocable" (1985, 36). Faust's quaking at Mephistopheles's threats and decision to sign his soul away a second time despite his show of repentance clearly intends to raise doubts about the conversion narratives found in the *vitae*. If it were so easy to commit grave sins and then repent, why not have one's cake and eat it too? One might just as well sell his or her soul to the devil, reap the benefits, and then make last-minute penance. The Lutheran *Historia* clearly rejects this formula and the economy of grace that underlies it, and because Faust approaches repentance in this *pro forma* manner, he is doomed to fail.

Even after signing the second contract, Faust attempts to repent as the hour of his death draws near, telling his assembled students that he dies, at least in part, a good Christian in that "ich eine herzliche Reue habe und im Herzen immer um Gnade bitte, damit meine Seele errettet werden möchte"[25] (*Historia* 126), but when it comes time to actually pray: "er wolle beten; es wollte ihm aber nicht eingehen"[26] (127). Although Faust can speak the language and perform the outward signs of repentance that might have sufficed for absolution in the old Catholic economy of grace, at least from a Lutheran perspective, he has not done the essential internal work necessary to effect his salvation in the new Lutheran weltanschauung. As Robert Petsch summarizes: "[Luther] setzte anstelle des äußern Bußmechanismus die völlige Umwandlung des Herzens auf Grund der *contritio*, d.h. durch die Aneignung des Wortes Gottes erweckten Zerknirschung über die Sünde"[27] (xxxi). Faust has not achieved inner transformation corresponding to his outward show of remorse, nor can he because he never rectifies his original acts of willfulness: abandoning the scripture and ignoring his conscience. Faust never picks the Bible back up and never maintains his conviction to repent in the face of Mephistopheles' threats. Instead, he focuses on outward forces and signs, as wonderfully expressed in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* when he gives his final speeches with the lines: "O, would I had never seen Wittenberg, never read book!" (5.2.18–19) and "I'll burn my books" (5.2.115). Faust places both the blame for his damnation and his hope for last-minute redemption in the outward signs of his inward rot.

H. G. Haile nicely sums up the lesson readers of the *Historia* were meant to draw from its parallels to redemption narratives in the saints' lives: "Faust went to Hell for the same reasons that all good Catholics were going there: for the abominable arrogance, namely, of seeking salvation on his own hook, for the sin of doubting the exclusive sufficiency of God's Grace, for the vain presumption that he might try to *deserve* redemption" (1965, 88). Thus, on one level, Faust's parodic *vita* intended to inspire skepticism toward the Catholic doctrines of intercession, repentance, and works-based grace by indicating that the imitation of the saint's lives in collections like *The Golden Legend* does not represent righteous deeds but rather sinful presumption. However, the Faustian *vita* served other aspects of the Reformers' polemical program as well. As mentioned above, many sixteenth-century Reformers, Lutherans among them, were intent on debunking the Catholic belief in the continuance of miracles, and by associating Faust with another figure from the *vitae*, Simon Magus, the *Historia* sought to show that what credulous Catholics took for miracles were in fact wonders wrought by diabolic magic.

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[25] "I have a heartfelt regret and always ask for mercy in my heart, so that my soul may be saved."

[26] "he wanted to pray; but he couldn't bring himself to."

[27] "In lieu of the mechanism of outward repentance, [Luther] placed the complete transformation of the heart by reason of *contritio*, i.e. contrition over sin aroused by the adoption of God's Word."

presumption that he might try to *deserve* redemption" (1965, 88). Thus, on one level, Faust's parodic *vita* intended to inspire skepticism toward the Catholic doctrines of intercession, repentance, and works-based grace by indicating that the imitation of the saint's lives in collections like *The Golden Legend* does not represent righteous deeds but rather sinful presumption. However, the Faustian *vita* served other aspects of the Reformers' polemical program as well. As mentioned above, many sixteenth-century Protestants, Lutherans among them, were intent on debunking the Catholic belief in the continuance of miracles, and by associating Faust with another figure from the *vitae*, Simon Magus, the *Historia* sought to show that what credulous Catholics took for miracles were in fact wonders wrought by diabolic magic.

Wonders not Miracle: Magical Skepticism

The third part of the *Historia*, and its translations, recount the various adventures Faust undertakes during his life. These adventures read very much like the deeds of saints elaborated in their *vitae* only perverted such that they are accomplished with diabolical magic rather than the miraculous gifts of God. In fact, many of the magical feats have direct parallels in various *vitae*, from flying horses and objects to appearing in flames and producing portraits seemingly from nowhere, as well as to the legends of other magicians.[28] In the context of the Reformation, the distinction between supernatural miracles (*miracula*), which could only be performed by God or gifted as to the apostles in *Acts*, and preternatural wonders (*mira*), which could be accomplished by demonic magic, was essential. (). As miracles had become essential to the popular cults of the saints, control over the distinction between divine miracle and diabolic wonder became essential to the Catholic church's control over doctrinal truth, and any doubts about the source of saints' powers risked breaking "the hagiographic chain that linked the heroes of the past with the apostles and with the church of the present" (Parish 101). Moreover, by establishing the similarity of saints' deeds with the diabolical magic of Faust, the *Historia* bolstered the Reformers' case that the Catholic church no longer served God but the devil. Drawing comparisons between Faust and the figure of Simon Magus, found in both the Bible and *Golden Legend*, presented the *Historia* with one particularly illustrative means of making this case that has resulted in some of the most potent imagery to emerge from Faustian literature.

There is no need to infer a connection between Faust and Simon Magus in the *Historia*. In the crucial scene of Faust and the old man, the old man makes the connection himself as he attempts to convert Faust:

> Wie Ihr das Exempel seht in der Apostelgeschichte, im 8. Capitel von Simone in Samaria, der auch viel Volks verführt hatte, denn man hat ihn sonderlich für einen Gott gehalten und die Kraft Gottes oder Simon Deus sanctus genannt; doch als er die Predigt S. Philippi gehört, ließ er sich taufen, glaubte an unseren Herrn Jesum Christum und hielt sich hernach viel bei Philippo; dies wird in der Apostelgeschichte sonderlich gerühmt.[29] (*Historia* 107)

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[28] For a thorough exploration of these parallels see Meek 62–99.

[29] "As you see the example in the *Acts of the Apostles*, in chapter 8, of Simon in Samaria, who also mislead man people, for they especially believed him a God and called him the Power of God or Simon *Deus sanctus*; yet, when he heard the preaching of St. Philipp, he had himself baptized, believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, and thereafter spent a great deal of time with Phillip; this is especially celebrated in the *Acts of the Apostles*."

This passage is a bit strange. The old man who is otherwise portrayed as the ideal of a pious Protestant, displaying knowledge of scripture, solicitude for Faust's soul, and forbearance in the face of demonic assault, departs markedly from scripture in describing the worship of Simon. While the Bible does describe the Samarians proclaiming Simon "the great power of God" (*Acts* 8:10), the details about him being worshipped come not from scripture but from his legend, contained within the *vita* of St. Peter in the *Golden Legend*: "[W]hile Simon was still with Nero in a room, a devil who had assumed his shape harangued the populace in the Forum. In the end he won such respect from the Romans that they raised a statue to him, with the inscription: 'To the holy god Simon'" (334). This deviation from scripture apparently bothered the English translator enough that he mostly removed the extra-scriptural details, having the old man say only that Simon "was led out of the way, affirming that he was *Simon homo sanctus*" (*Historie* 214). Cayet, translating from a Catholic perspective, had no issue including the details from legend, only noting that Simon's deification was "*à la façon des Payens*[30]" (*Histoire* 190). Both translators seem to have missed the polemical point of the old man's departure from scripture.

Given the *Historia*'s Lutheran origins, and Lutheranism's marked opposition to the cult of saints, this obvious allusion to a saint's *vita* should strike the reader as odd, especially considering the chapter in *Acts* is given for the reader's reference. It seems more likely that the juxtaposition of scripture and legend is meant to remind the reader, just how much the saints' legends deviate from actual scripture. As the old man states, Simon is saved in the Bible by Philip, whereas in the *Golden Legend* Simon appears unsaved and goes on to fight a back-and-forth duel with Peter in which Simon's magic is pitted against Peter's miracles to the detriment and ultimate demise of the former. The reference the old man makes linking Faust, whose magical antics are meant to parody saints' miracles, and Simon Magus being worshiped idolatrously as a god ought, no doubt, to be understood meta-textually as a reference to the idolatrous worship of saints for their false miracles. Moreover, a reader of the *Historia* who opened the Bible to the chapter indicated by the old man would find what the old man omits: that, even after his baptism, Simon Magus attempts to buy the miracle of passing on the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, is condemned by Peter for doing so, and asks the apostles to pray to God for him, so he might avoid the consequences of his wicked heart" (*Acts* 8:18–24). In other words, Simon attempts to engage in the same economy of grace and intercession for which the *Historia* implicitly condemns Catholics. However, Simon extends this economy to miracles as well by attempting to purchase one, thus showing a fundamental misunderstanding of the difference between magic and miracles doubtlessly intended to implicate Catholicism as well. After all, did the saints' *vitae* not, in the Reformers' eyes, encourage the faithful to try to earn miracles in the same way they tried to earn grace?

Before he begins practicing magic, in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Faust consults with two friends well versed in the black arts, one of whom, Cornelius,[31] tells him that "The miracles that magic will perform / Will make thee vow to study nothing else" (1.1.138–9). Although these lines have no antecedent in the *Historia*, the slippage between miracles and magic here, serves the same function as the implicit allusion to Simon's attempt to buy a miracle from the apostles. Confusing magic with miracles is a category error. As mentioned above, magic can produce wonders and can be purchased from the devil at the cost of one's soul, but miracles can never be bought. Luther made a distinction between the "miracle of the soul that is transformed by faith," which never ceases, and "miracles of the body" like those described in *Acts*, which had ceased in the apostolic

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[30] "In the pagan manner."
[31] No doubt an allusion to Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535), contemporary of Faust and Luther and infamous author of the *De occulta philosophia*.

age, and declared that to expect the latter again was akin to doubting "the truth of the Gospels" (Walker 111–2). Just as the attempt to trade repentance for forgiveness in the form of intercession rankled early Protestant sensibilities, expecting saints' faith to earn them the ability to perform miracles while alive, let alone after death in return for prayers, struck Reformers as equally unseemly and equally impossible. Marlowe's contemporary, the Reformer John Foxe, called the saints' *vitae* "lying histories faining false myracles" (Qtd. in Parish 102). For cessationist Reformers, the more rational explanation for Catholic claims of miracles was magic, and so it was through comparison to magic that they sought to stoke skepticism of the saints and thereby of miraculous claims.

As puzzling as it may seem to modern sensibilities to think of magic as a rational explanation for phenomena, let alone a skeptical tool to debunk dubious claims, it must be understood that, throughout the sixteenth century and even into the eighteenth, magic was generally regarded as part of the natural world and thus a subject of natural philosophy, the historical precursor to the modern natural sciences.[32] Magic took its place within natural philosophy in the early thirteenth century when scholars like William of Auvergne began employing the term "natural magic" to explain certain natural "wonders" that occurred by occult, i.e. not readily explicable, means (Bailey 61). Effects considered natural but occult included: "gravitation, magnetism, the generation of lower animal forms, the ebbing and flowing of the tides, the effects of electricity, the working of poisons and their antidotes, and the strange behavior of many individual plants, minerals, and animals" (Clark 2015, 259). Before the development of natural magic as a concept, such phenomena had been attributed mostly to demons (Bailey 61). Afterward, the study of occult phenomena split between natural magic and demonology, the study of demons and their "black" or diabolic magic. Because only God and his actions were considered supernatural, demons, too, were considered a part of the natural world, albeit in the special category of "preternatural"[33] (Bailey 66). Thus, within the framework of sixteenth-century natural philosophy, however, all magic was understood to be bound by the physical laws of the universe, especially those of causality, and spells, incantations, and ritual gestures could produce no magical efficacy on their own because they were insufficient causes for the effects they were supposed to generate.

Despite the diversity of magic presented, the early Faust texts, as a rule, respect this law of causality. Hence, as the play *Doctor Faustus* demonstrates, Faust's conjuration of Mephistopheles has no real connection to the rite he performs, as Mephistopheles explains when Faust presses him about the effectiveness of the conjuration rite: "That was the cause, but yet *per accidens*. / For when we hear one rack the name of God, / Abjure the Scriptures and his Savior Christ, / We fly in hope to get his glorious soul" (Marlowe 1.3.46–9). Faust's gestures, incantations, and the symbols he uses, have no effect on the result of his conjuration because they possess no inherent efficaciousness. Moreover, Faust's Latin incantation, incomprehensible to the uneducated, and his ritual gestures present a parody of Catholic rites, particularly the mass. The implied parallel between Faust's conjuration and the mass played on popular associations of the mass with magical protection from evil and miracles like those of St. Odo who supposed transformed the eucharist

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[32] Whether the relationship between natural philosophy and modern science is intellectual as well as diachronic is the matter of some contention, generally focused on whether the former can have a "secular outlook" or is essentially of a "different character," i.e. too intertwined with Christian theology (Maclean 260).

[33] Not all natural philosophers of the era accepted the idea of demonic agency in the natural world, or even demonic existence, most notably the Aristotelian Pietro Pomponazzi. This view, however, remained a minority opinion in the sixteenth century.

into literal body and blood to prove the truth of transubstantiation (Parish 104). Reformers used the natural philosophical arguments of demonology to raise skepticism about such miraculous claims and to cast any magical associations in a diabolic light.

Because words and rituals had no inherent efficacy, they required the intervention of demons to produce their intended results. Although demons could not actually perform miracles, their superior strength, speed, and the magical proficiency they had gained from millennia of experience and study since their fall from grace, allowed them to produce wonders that might seem miraculous (Clark 1996, 161–4; Bailey 61). In an episode common to the early Faust texts, for example, the Countess of Anhalt wishes to eat fresh fruit in January, so Faust sets two bowls outside a window and within half an hour they are filled with fresh grapes, apples, and pears. When the Count asks Faust how this is possible, he explains that "[W]hen with us it is Winter, in the contrary circle it is notwithstanding Sommer […] I have a swift Spirit, the which can in the twinckling of an eye fulfill my desire in any thing, wherefore I sent him into those Countries, who hath brought this fruit as you see" (*Historie* 204). The seemingly miraculous appearance of the fruit thus finds a rational explanation in black magic. Such lengthy explications of what Faust could accomplish with the aid of devils were no doubt aimed, at least in part, in showing how the seemingly *ex nihilo* appearance of objects or the swapping of one object for another, say a cup of wine with a cup of blood, could be accomplished without recourse to miraculous explanations. However, devils' powers did not stop at physical acts of prowess. The devil and his servants were also understood to be capable of beguiling the senses with false wonders, illusions produced by their great magical skill (Clark 2015, 262). Having such powers of illusion at their command allowed sorcerers like Faust to feign even greater miracles.

The conjuration of Helen of Troy remains perhaps the most celebrated magical feat in the early Faust literature. It is also another moment that connects Faust back to his infamous precursor, Simon Magus. In the legends, Simon was said to have a concubine named Helena, who in some tellings was the reincarnation of Helen of Troy (Meek 92; Cazaux 13), and Faust likewise takes Helen for his mistress in the last years of his life after first conjuring her at his students' request. However, the *Historia* makes it clear that this is not accomplished by reincarnation or miraculous resurrection. Earlier in the text, Faust explains a similar marvel wherein he makes Alexander the Great and his consort appear before the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. This episode likewise has a precedent Simon Magus's legend, but where Simon fails to make a dead man rise in Nero's court, Faust succeeds in bringing back the long-dead Alexander in Charles V's. When the emperor first voices his desire to Faust to see his ancestors, Faust explains: "[Y]our Maiestie shall know, that their dead bodies are not able substantially[34] to be brought before you, but such Spirits as haue seen[35] *Alexander* and his Paramour aliue, shall appeare vnto you in manner and forme as they both liued in their most flourishing time" (*Historie* 195). In fact, the likeness is so exact that Charles V is even able to find a fabled mole on the consort's neck. Again, Faust breaks the cardinal rule of magic and explains how his trick is performed. However, he does so to serve the implicit polemical goal of the *Historia*. Explaining how diabolic illusions could be used to make the dead appear to the living in perfect likeness, would have provided sixteenth-century readers with an alternative to

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[34] "[…] the true substantial bodies of these two deceased princes, which long since are consumed to dust" (Marlowe 4.1.44–5)

[35] The exceptional knowledge devils had of secret things was attributed to their great age. Having seen much over the course of the millennia, they could reveal this information to those who made pacts with them (Bailey 68; Clark 1986, 365).

miraculous explanation of resurrections and visions that would have given them reason to doubt the saints' legends that depended on those explanations.

Conclusions

What made possible the *Historia*'s polemical vision of casting Faust as a wonder-working anti-saint promoting skepticism toward Catholic doctrines is another side of the same coin that made it so readily translatable across cultural and sectarian lines: the confluence of shared natural philosophy and interest in witchcraft. Whatever their theological differences, in the second half of the sixteenth century Lutherans, Catholics, Calvinists, and Anglicans all shared a largely similar understanding of natural philosophy inherited with some modifications from medieval Scholastic thought (Cameron 37; Feingold 74). This included the views on magic and demonology outlined above, which meant the readers of the *Historia* and its translations saw Faust's magical deeds through a shared understanding of what magic and devils could do. Moreover, the second half of the sixteenth century was also a time when the witch craze was raging in Europe, and the practice of demonic magic drew vital interest. The witch trials drew skepticism of their own, of course, but with the exception of some total skeptics, like Reginald Scott and his followers, and some entirely credulous figures, like Nicolas Rémy and Jean Bodin, most demonologists of the time took a balanced view toward the demonic wonders supposed to have occurred (Clark 1986, 358). Even demonologists famously skeptical of the witch trials themselves, like Johannes Weyer and Augustin Lercheimer, still believed in the reality of diabolic magic and merely shifted the blame from female witches, out of a certain benevolent sexism, and onto learned male sorcerers, like Faust (Clark 1996, 201; Baron 531). It is into this climate and into this role that the literary figure of Faust emerged in the *Historia*, both of which made him understandable and his deeds believable enough to readers across that sectarian schisms that one might believe he could produce that greatest of wonders: conversion.

Whether the Faust of the early literature ever achieved that particular wonder, is hard to say. No records of such conversions on the road to Wittenberg have come to light. This may in part be due to the subtlety of the early texts' polemical subtlety. As Meek wrote in summarizing their subversive approach:

> The Catholic parallels to Faust's adventures are not obvious at first glance […] The writers aimed only at producing doubt in the minds of expected converts as to the Catholic claims to divine power, and this they did under the guise of an amusing story which incidentally attributed the same supernatural feats as appeared in Roman Catholicism, not to God but to the Devil. (158)

The parallels between Faust and the saints certainly seem to have escaped the notice of the Catholic censors in France when it came to the repeated and successful printings of Cayet's translation of the *Historia*. Did they also escape readers' attention? Regardless, as Meek points out, the *Historia* never aimed to construct a grand Pyrrhonic argument like those described in Popkin's *History of Skepticism*. It only ever meant to sow skeptical seeds in readers' minds about the Catholic economy of grace and the similarities between saints and sorcerers. Nevertheless, whatever the *Historia*'s contribution to the skeptical polemics of the Early Modern period, the tale of Faust, "widely decried magician and master of the black arts," has endured more than 400 years mostly as "an amusing story," long outliving the virulence of the sectarian feuds that defined its

origins. Catholicism, saints, intercession, and all, still endures, so perhaps the *Historia* failed on its own polemical terms, but in literary terms, it represents an unmitigated success.

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