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Shakespeare Bewitched

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For the great witchmongers of the late middle ages and early Renaissance, those who wrote that there should be more fear, more denunciations of women, more confessions extorted under torture, and above all more executions, the initial discursive task was to reverse a dangerous current of literate disbelief. They saw themselves as beginning less with a confused mass of folk practices that they had to sift through and organize into a coherent demonology than with well-established and socially acceptable doubt. Indeed the doubt was not only socially acceptable but had for centuries been theologically sanctioned, for in a series of important medieval texts church authorities had attacked those people—for the most part, as the church conceived it, women—who had been seduced by what Reginone of Prüm in the tenth century called “the phantasms and illusions of demons” (*daemonum illusionibus et phantasmatis seductae*).¹

Reginone's phrase leaves unclear the exact status of the seductive fantasies: they could refer to a mistaken belief in the existence of certain demons who do not exist or to illusions caused by demons who do in fact exist or to a belief in nonexistent demons caused by Satan. His work, *De Ecclesiasticis Disciplinis*, is not, it needs hardly be said, a thoroughgoing skeptical critique of supernatural agency, but it vigorously encourages skepticism about a whole series of claims associated with the witch cult:

Wicked women who have given themselves back to Satan and been seduced by the phantasms and illusions of demons believe and declare that they can ride with Diana the pagan goddess and a huge throng of women on chosen beasts in the hours of night. They say that in the silence of the night they can traverse great stretches of territory, that they obey Diana as though she were their mistress and that on certain nights she calls them to her special service.²

For Reginone, the world of the ancient gods is not a solid, undeniable reality that must be proven demonic rather than divine but a mirage, a set of vain, seductive dreams behind which lurks the Father of Lies. Reality is leached out, as it were, from the old beliefs and concentrated in the figure of Satan.³

This project was furthered in the early eleventh century by Burchard, bishop of Worms. In his influential penitential canon, known as the *Canon episcopi*, Burchard wrote that belief in witchcraft was itself a sin, a heretical relapse into paganism. He is, like Reginone, particularly contemptuous of dreams of night flying with Diana, Hecate, or the German Holde, and his skepticism extends to tales of horrific acts:

Do you believe this, in common with many women who are followers of Satan? Namely that, in the silence of the night, when you are stretched out upon your bed with your husband's head upon your breast you have the power, flesh as you are, to go out of the closed door and traverse great stretches of space with other women in a similar state of self-deception? And do you believe that you can kill, though without visible arms, people baptized and redeemed by the blood of Christ, and can cook and eat their flesh, after putting some straw on a piece of wood or something in the place of the heart? And then that you can resuscitate them after you have eaten them and make them live again? If yes, then you must do forty days of penance, that is, a Lent, on bread and water for seven consecutive years.⁴

It is important to note the relative leniency of the penalties Burchard assigns here and elsewhere. These penalties, ranging from forty days to two years,⁵ reflect a conviction that witches have no real malevolent powers but rather have succumbed to illusions of diabolic agency, vain dreams of night flying and animal metamorphosis, impotent fantasies of murderous potency. The fact that such fantasies are widespread does not, for Burchard, testify to their reality but rather suggests that they are the stuff of nightmare: "Who is there who has not been taken out of himself in dreams and nightmares and seen in his sleep things he would never see when awake? Who is imbecile enough to imagine that such things, seen only in the mind, have a bodily reality?"⁶

By the later fourteenth century, in the wake of the Black Death, intellectual convictions and institutional alignments had shifted, skepticism was no longer officially encouraged, and nightmares began to assume once again a bodily reality. But the *Canon episcopi* remained on the books and there must have been a considerable reservoir of doubt, for in the famous *Malleus maleficarum* of 1484, the Dominican inquisitors Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger evidently believe that they can swing their hammer at witches only by swinging it simultaneously at skeptics. The *Canon episcopi*, they argue, has been completely misunderstood; it condemned a narrow range of heretical beliefs but was never intended to deny the actual existence of witchcraft practices attested to in the Holy Scriptures and credited by a wide range of unimpeachable authorities. Indeed, write Kramer and Sprenger, it would be heretical to deny the real menace of witchcraft (4); hence "all Bishops and Rulers who do not essay their utmost to suppress

crimes of this sort . . . are themselves to be judged as evident abettors of the crime, and are manifestly to be punished."⁷

The *Malleus maleficarum* then sets as its task the transfer of a set of concepts, images, and fears from the zone of the imaginary to the zone of the real. What is the zone of the imaginary? In the late sixteenth century Spenser imagined it as a chamber of the mind filled with "leasings, tales, and lies" (*FQ* 2.9.9), a jumble of images that sober reason or common sense or those in positions of power deem misshapen, confused, forged, incredible, or simply false. Churchmen like Reginone and Burchard had painstakingly crated up and moved into such a chamber the whole vast furniture of pagan belief, and with it the nightmare images of witch cults. Now Kramer and Sprenger take it upon themselves to unpack those images and officially confer upon them once again the unfeigned solidity of embodied reality. But the task is not uncomplicated.

Dogmatic assertion is, of course, the inquisitor's stock-in-trade—as Empson put it, "heads I win, tails I burn you alive"⁸—but to confer the air of truth on practices that had been earlier condemned by the Church itself as pernicious fantasies called for a supplement to threats of "terrible penalties, censures, and punishment . . . without any right to appeal" (xlv). Such threats by themselves were more likely to bully men into grudging, silent compliance than to inspire them to robust belief. Hence Kramer and Sprenger are drawn to supplement their affirmations with something like evidence, the evidence of narrative. "There was in the diocese of Basel," a typical passage begins, "in a town called Oberweiler situated on the Rhine, an honest parish priest, who fondly held the opinion, or rather error, that there was no withcraft in the world, but that it existed in the imagination of men who attributed such things to witches." This sentence characteristically introduces not simply a theory (in this case, the rationalizing theory of imaginative projection that Kramer and Sprenger oppose) but an anecdote, an instructive tale in which the misguided doubter is brought to a correct view of the matter: "And God wished so to purge him of this error that . . ." (103).

We do not need to rehearse the nasty little story that follows, but the point is that they did. They evidently felt that scholastic arguments and belligerent appeals to authority were not enough to establish witchcraft doctrines on a stable footing; Kramer and Sprenger needed to confer on what their own church had labeled fantasies the solidity of palpable truth, to give invisible agents, secret compacts, obscene rites, spectacular transformations both a compelling general theory and a convincing local habitation. After all, they wanted men and women not merely to assent formally to a set of abstract theoretical propositions about the operation of evil but to denounce and kill their neighbors. Faced with the necessity of producing the effect of the real out of the material of fantasy, the inquisitors turned to narrative. The *Malleus maleficarum* rehearses dozens of tales crafted to

redraw the boundary between the imaginary and the real, or rather to siphon off the darkest contents of the imagination and pour them, like a poison, into the ear of the world.

Why should we not say the same thing about Shakespeare's *Macbeth*? Why should we not say that the play, with immeasurably greater literary force, undertakes to reenchant the world, to shape misogyny to political ends, to counteract the corrosive skepticism that had called into question both the existence of witches and the sacredness of royal authority? Recent criticism has come close to saying this: *Macbeth*, writes Peter Stallybrass, "mobilizes the patriarchal fear of unsubordinated woman, the unstable element to which Kramer and Sprenger attributed the overthrow of 'nearly all the kingdoms of the world.'"⁹ And in a compelling analysis of the play's fantasies of masculine vulnerability to women, Janet Adelman has suggested that "the final solution, both for *Macbeth* and for the play itself, though in differing ways, is . . . [a] radical excision of the female." "The play that begins by unleashing the terrible threat of maternal power and demonstrates the helplessness of its central male figure before that power," Adelman argues, "ends by consolidating male power, in effect solving the problem of masculinity by eliminating the female."¹⁰ Why should we not say then that *Macbeth*, with its staging of witches and its final solution, probably contributed, in an indirect but powerful way, to the popular fear of demonic agency and the official persecution and killing of women? Why should we not say that this play about evil is evil?¹¹

There are important and cogent reasons why we should not say anything like this. First, though it gestures toward history, *Macbeth* is a self-conscious work of theatrical fiction, an entertainment in which nothing need be taken as real, in which everything can be understood, as Shakespeare suggested elsewhere, to be "shadow" or "dream." Second, no one in the period, least of all the players themselves, understood the designation "King's Men" to imply an official, prescriptive function, the equivalent of the papal bull that was printed with the *Malleus maleficarum*. Neither Shakespeare nor his company were speaking dogmatically or even indirectly on behalf of any institution except the marginal, somewhat disreputable institution of the theater, disreputable precisely because it was the acknowledged house of fantasies. Third, there is no attempt in the play to give counsel to anyone about how to behave toward the witches and no apparent sanctioning—as in Dekker's *Witch of Edmonton*, for example, or in Shakespeare's own *I Henry VI*—of legal prosecution or execution. It would have been simple enough to have the victorious Malcolm declare his determination to rid the kingdom of witches, but he does no such thing. Instead, with none of the questions answered that their existence poses, they simply disappear: "The Witches Dance, and vanish." Fourth, within *Macbeth*'s representation of the witches, there is profound ambiguity about the actual significance and power of their malevolent intervention. If the strange prophecies of the

Weird Sisters had been ignored, the play seems to imply, the same set of events might have occurred anyway, impelled entirely by the pressure of Macbeth's violent ambition and his wife's psychological manipulation. (Macbeth, Hecate complains to her followers, is a "wayward son" who "loves for his own ends, not for you" [3.5.13]).¹² And fifth, even if we could demonstrate that witch prosecutions in England were somehow prolonged or intensified by *Macbeth*—and, of course, the actual proof of such horrible consequences is almost impossible to establish—in the absence of evidence of malign authorial intention, we should not, I think, deem Shakespeare's play evil, any more than we should hold Salmon Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* to be evil because of the deaths that occurred in the riots caused by its publication.

It is possible to identify evil texts—the *Malleus maleficarum* is one, I believe—and these in principle may include works of art. Such a judgment would involve, at a minimum, the demonstration of a calculated attempt to produce by means of discourse effects that are morally reprehensible—for example, to incite racial hatred and murder.¹³ But it is notoriously hazardous to submit works of art to political or moral judgment or to calculate their practical consequences. If it is perilous to try to gauge the political valence of works of art written in our time, how much more implausible is it to apply a test of progressive politics to works written almost four hundred years ago? I should add that I think it important, in the interest of preserving the small breathing space of the imagination, to resist the recent tendency to conflate, or even to collapse into one another, aesthetics, ethics, and politics.

And yet, and yet. What is the point of speaking at all about the historical situation of works of art if ideological entailments and practical consequences are somehow off-limits, and if they are not off-limits, how can we avoid moral judgments? What is the point of interrogating the status of literature—of challenging the cult of autonomy, undermining the illusion of aesthetic aloofness, questioning the very existence in the Renaissance of an independent aesthetic sphere—if we are not to insist that the power of a work like *Macbeth* must be a power *in* the world, a power *for* something? We may tell ourselves that its power is to produce a specific form of pleasure and that a distinction between the production of pleasure and other purposes such as exchange or functional utility is quite important.¹⁴ But a radical distinction between pleasure and use is difficult to maintain, especially for a Renaissance text. The period's defenses of the stage routinely include accounts of the social power of drama, accounts echoed in Hamlet's deployment of *The Murder of Gonzago*, and if the claims seem extravagant to the point of absurdity, there is ample evidence of a significant, if less spectacular, cultural and political power. More important, perhaps, the specific pleasure produced by *Macbeth* is bound up with the representation of witches, and that representation was only possible in and through a

evil
of
play

particularly fraught cultural negotiation with theological and political discourses that had a direct effect on the lives of men and women. The play may not be reducible to its political and ethical consequences, but it cannot escape having consequences, even if those consequences are difficult to trace and to evaluate.

→ In the early seventeenth century it was impossible to contain a depiction of witches strictly within the boundaries of art, for the status of witches—the efficacy of their charms, their ability to harm, the reality of their claims or of the charges brought against them, their very existence—was not a fixed feature in the cultural landscape but a subject of contestation. The contestation was not, of course, due to any censoring power possessed by those who were called or who called themselves witches: one of the central paradoxes of the discourse of witchcraft, widely recognized in the period, is that the women identified as wielding immense metaphysical power were for the most part socially powerless.¹⁵ One of the marks of their powerlessness was that they had no control over their representations (let alone access to the means of self-representation in print), so that a playwright, for example, could figure them as he wished without calculating any conceivable objections from them. It was principally among the educated elite, among those who had it in their power to punish, to pardon, and to represent, that there was serious disagreement about how witches should be conceived or even whether they should be said to exist at all.¹⁶ To represent witches on the public stage was inevitably to participate in some way or other in the contestation.

Let us recall the anonymous parish priest who claimed that “there was no witchcraft in the world, but that it existed in the imagination of men who attributed such things to witches.” The skeptics against whom Kramer and Sprenger write had withdrawn witchcraft from the real world and relocated it in the “imagination,” the place haunted by what Reginone and others had called demonic illusions and phantasms. “It is useless,” the *Malleus maleficarum* replies, “to argue that any result of witchcraft may be a phantasy and unreal, because such a phantasy cannot be procured without resort to the power of the devil, and it is necessary that there should be made a contract with the devil, by which contract the witch truly and actually binds herself to be the servant of the devil and devotes herself to the devil, and this is not done in any dream or under any illusion, but she herself bodily and truly cooperates with, and conjoins herself to, the devil” (7). The reality of witchcraft here is secured by the reality of the demonic contract—a contract insisted upon dogmatically, I suggest, precisely because it is the one thing (unlike withered arms, dead cattle, or male impotence) that is *never* actually witnessed. That founding reality, theoretically necessary and secured by inquisitorial authority, then licenses a sophisticated blurring of the boundaries between reality and illusion: Kramer and Sprenger concede that allegedly demonic harms may at times be fantasies

because they claim that such fantasies are themselves consequences (and hence evidence) of the demonic contract.¹⁷

According to the scholastic psychology of the *Malleus maleficarum*, devils provoke and shape fantasies by direct corporeal intervention in the mind: demonic spirits can incite what Kramer and Sprenger call a "local motion" in the minds of those awake as well as asleep, stirring up and exciting the inner perceptions, "so that ideas retained in the repositories of their minds are drawn out and made apparent to the faculties of fancy and imagination, so that such men imagine these things to be true." This process of making a stir in the mind and moving images from one part of the brain to another is, they write, called "interior temptation" (50).¹⁸ It can lead men to see objects before their eyes—daggers, for example—that are not in fact there; conversely, it can lead men not to see other objects—their own penises, for example—that are still there, though concealed from view by what Kramer and Sprenger call a "glamour" (58). Hence, they write, "a certain man tells that, when he had lost his member, he approached a known witch to ask her to restore it to him. She told the afflicted man to climb a certain tree, and that he might take which he liked out of a nest in which there were several members. And when he tried to take a big one, the witch said: You must not take that one; adding because it belonged to a parish priest." "All these things," they soberly add, attaching the ribald anticlerical folktale to their humorless explanatory apparatus, "are caused by devils through an illusion or glamour . . . by confusing the organ of vision by transmuting the mental images in the imaginative faculty" (121).¹⁹

One hundred years after the publication of the *Malleus maleficarum*, an English country gentleman, Reginald Scot, was tempted to regard much of the work as a "bawdie discourse," a kind of obscene joke book. But he checked the impulse: "these are no jestes," he writes, "for they be written by them that were and are judges upon the lives and deaths of those persons" (45). Scot's response to Kramer and Sprenger and Bodin and the whole persecutorial apparatus is *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, the greatest English contribution to the skeptical critique of witchcraft. The *Discoverie* attacks witchcraft beliefs across a broad front, but at its center is an attempt to locate those beliefs not *in* but *as* the imagination. That is, Scot's principal concern is with the boundary between the imaginary and the real, and where Kramer and Sprenger had viewed that boundary as porous, Scot views it as properly closed. The sickness of his own times is precisely its inability to distinguish the projections of troubled fantasy from the solid truths of the material world. The principal cause of this sickness—spiritual weakness—turns out to be one of its principal consequences as well: "The fables of Witchcraft have taken so fast hold and deepe root in the heart of man," the book begins, "that fewe or none can (nowadaies) with patience indure the hand and correction of God."

It is, Scot's language suggests here, fables rather than devils that have

taken possession, invading the body and fixing themselves in the heart: the world, he writes, is "bewitched and over-run with this fond error" (3). This shift from demonic agency to the vicious power of human fictions is the crucial perception of the *Discoverie*.²⁰ Hence Scot's obsession with the exact operation of sleights of hand, his tireless description of what from this distance seem to us jejune parlor tricks, his careful exposition of the hidden mechanisms by means of which certain theatrical illusions, such as decapitation, are achieved. For these tricks, in Scot's view, have fueled the spiritual impatience and shaped the anxious fantasies of men,²¹ until maddened crowds, deluded by fraudulent spectacles, call for the death of witches and magistrates hang unloved, vulnerable, and innocent old women.

Scot's project is disenchantment in the interest of restoring proper religious faith: he must take away from the witches themselves and from the culture that has credited (and, as Scot perfectly understands, largely created) their claims and confessions their air of wonder. To succeed it is not enough to challenge the authority of the eyewitness. Scot must not only demystify vision, but also expose the extent to which the experience of wonder—the thrilled recognition of the presence of supernatural power in the material world—depends upon language. "Naturall magic," Scot remarks, "consisteth as well in the deceit of words, as in the sleight of hand" (250). Hence he writes portentously of two "most miraculous matters." Of one of these, he says, he has himself been "*Testis oculatus*," of the other he has been "crediblie and certeinlie informed"; that is, one comes to him via sight, the other via words. The extended descriptions of the exotic objects—a "peece of earth" from Russia that shrinks from heated steel but pursues gold and silver and an Indian stone that contains within it a substance of "marvellous brightnes, puritie, and shining"—are an anthology of the verbal cues for wonder, but the wonder lasts only as long as the reader fails to realize that Scot is describing man and fire. Once the reader understands what is going on, admiration vanishes, leaving a sense of irony that borders on contempt: these are, after all, deliberately bad jokes. In both of them, it is the language of description that confers upon the objects their supernatural strangeness,²² and, Scot observes, the "deceit of words" here need not involve any outright falsehood: "plaine lieng is avoided with a figurative speech, in the which either the words themselves, or their interpretation have a double or doubtfull meaning" (176).

It is figurative speech then, supported by visual illusion, that for Scot lies at the heart not only of the discourse of witchcraft but of the practices and persecutions that are linked with this discourse. Men cannot stand the experience of certain powerful emotions—uncertainty, for example, or fear—that are not attached to figures, and they are consequently vulnerable to anyone who offers them the satisfaction of figuration: "Men in all ages have beene so desirous to know the effect of their purposes, the

sequele of things to come, and to see the end of their feare and hope; that a seelie witch, which had learned anie thing in the art of cousenage, may make a great manie jollie fooles" (197). And what makes men vulnerable also makes them murderous. In their impatience or their terror or their desire, men compulsively cross the threshold of figuration; they have fashioned metaphors and then killed the crazed women who have been unprotected or foolish enough to incarnate their appalling fantasies. Hence the force of the word-play, ironically re-enchanting what he most wishes to disenchant, to which Scot is repeatedly drawn: "the world is now so bewitched . . . with this fond error" (3) or again, the whore's "eie infecteth, entiseth, and (if I maie so saie) bewitcheth" (172) or again, "illusions are right enchantments" (9). For it is this figurative capacity of language that has led men to take witchcraft literally and even to find support for their fatal mistake by misreading the Scriptures.

The Scriptures are driven by the grossness of human understanding to express spiritual truths in figurative expressions that men characteristically misinterpret; many men are "so carnallie minded," observes Scot, "that a spirit is no sooner spoken of, but immediatlie they thinke of a black man with cloven feet, a paire of hornes, a taile, clawes, and eies as broad as a bason" (507). To be "carnally minded" is to have a mind that is flesh, a mind inextricably linked to the material world, a mind that resists the saving, bodiless abstractions of the spirit. Such a mind cannot pass, as it properly should, from the Bible's figures to immaterial, other-worldly truths but moves instead in the opposite direction: from imaginary figures to literal bodies. And the key to this fatal error is the dangerous power of human language, its capacity to figure what is not there, its ability to be worked into "double or doubtfull meaning," its proneness to deceit and illusion. Witches are the immaterial figures of the mind made flesh; behind the twisted belief and fear and killing lurks a misplaced faith in metaphor.

The problem then, to adapt a phrase of Wittgenstein's, is "the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language" (*Philosophical Investigations*, 109). And, predictably, it is the masters of language, the poets, who have been the principal sources of the false figures. "Ovid affirmeth," writes Scot, that witches

can raise and suppress lightening and thunder, raine and haile, clouds and winds, tempests and earthquakes. Others do write, that they can pull downe the moone and the starres. Some write that with wishing they can send needles into the livers of their enimies. Some that they can trans-ferre corne in the blade from one place to another. Some, that they can cure diseases supernaturallie, flie in the aire, and dance with divels. . . . They can raise spirits (as others affirme) drie up springs, turne the course of running waters, inhibit the sunne, and staie both day and night, changing the one into the other. They can go in and out at awger holes, & saile in an egge shell, a cockle or muscle shell, through and under the

tempestuous seas. They can go invisible, and deprive men of their privities, and otherwise of the act and use of venerie. They can bring soules out of the graves. . . . But in this case a man may saie, that *Miranda canunt / sed non credenda Poetae*. (1.4.8)

The poet's wonders must not be believed. "All this stuffe," Scot writes, "is vaine and fabulous" (260). Human language, as opposed to the word of God, does not possess authentic creative power, only the ability to counterfeit that power; "for by the sound of the words nothing commeth, nothing goeth, otherwise than God in nature hath ordeined to be doone by ordinary speech" (124). Against bewitching metaphors the *Discoverie* marshals the skeptical, aphoristic wisdom—empirical, political, and aesthetic—of the everyday:

If all the divels in hell were dead, and all the witches in *England* burnt or hanged, I warrant you we should not faile to have raine, haile, and tempests. (3)

They can also bring to passe, that chearne as long as you list, your butter will not come; especially . . . if the maids have eaten up the cream. (6)

The pope maketh rich witches, saints; and burneth the poore witches. (179)

I for my part have read a number of their conjurations, but never could see anie divels of theirs, except it were in a plaie. (258)

"Except it were in a plaie." I do not know what plays Scot, who published the *Discoverie* in 1584, had in mind. (He had been a student at Oxford and may have seen or acted in plays there.) The great English Renaissance drama—including, of course, *Doctor Faustus* and *Macbeth*—lies ahead. What, if anything, does it mean for this drama to come after Scot? Scot's book had no official or semiofficial standing. We are not dealing with a situation comparable to exorcism in the 1590s, where the state and the church decided to stop a controversial charismatic practice, a practice consequently branded by institutional spokesmen as a kind of illicit theater. In that case, as I have argued elsewhere, Shakespeare could appropriate for the stage the intense social energies that were under attack as theatrical; he could at once confirm the theatricality of exorcism and recreate its suspect power, now dutifully marked out as fraudulent, for his own purposes. But this model of mutually profitable circulation does not apply to witchcraft. We are dealing instead with a contestation in which a straightforward appropriation or exchange is not possible. For while the Elizabethan ruling elite shared very little of the Continental enthusiasm for witchcraft prosecutions, they were in general unwilling to adopt Scot's wholly skeptical posi-

tion and had no ideological interest in handing over the representation of witches to the theater.

Even before James (whose *Daemonologie* includes an attack on Scot) brought his own complex interest in witchcraft to the throne, English intellectuals were struggling to work out ways of answering Scot—often by adopting certain aspects of his skepticism and at the same time containing them within a continued persecutorial structure. Hence George Gifford's spokesman, Daniel, in *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (1593), grants that witches can harm no one through supernatural intervention—they are only miserable and deluded old women—but argues that they should be “rooted out and destroyed” (H1v) because of their evil intentions and their threat to the faith. The threat is a serious one because if the witches' compact with the devil gives them no power beyond nature, it does give them access to extraordinarily acute knowledge of nature. The devil has, after all, been around for millennia; he has become a brilliant pathologist and can see long before any human observer when a child or a valuable animal is about to become ill through entirely natural causes. He then hurries to his follower the witch and incites her to claim credit for the incipient illness, whereupon a natural cause is read by everyone as a supernatural cause and a tribute to the devil's power. Similarly, King James (who had Scot's book burned) concedes that much of what passes for manifestation of the demonic is mere trickery, but then he reminds his reader that the devil is notoriously agile. Hence it stands to reason that Satan will teach his followers “many juglarie trickes at Cardes, dice, & such like, to deceiue mennes senses thereby” (*Daemonologie*, 22)—and hence too what is for Scot a sign of the fraudulence and emptiness of the discourse of witchcraft becomes for James a further proof of the demonic compact.

There is textual evidence, especially in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth*, that Shakespeare had read the *Discoverie*, but even if he had not, he could not have escaped an awareness of the contestation. And his own early plays suggest that he was well aware of the alternative positions. Thus in *The Comedy of Errors* Antipholus of Syracuse recalls that Ephesus is said to be “full of cozenage”:

As nimble jugglers that deceive the eye,
Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body,
Disguised cheaters, prating mountebanks,
And many suchlike liberties of sin.

(1.2.98–102)

Antipholus does not distinguish between the histrionic and the satanic: confidence tricks, feats of prestidigitation, and soul-killing witchcraft are jumbled together in a vision of dangerous, sinful urban liberties.²³ By the fourth act, mystified by the familiarity of perfect strangers, the poor fellow

is convinced that it is true what they say about Ephesus: "Lapland sorcerers inhabit here" (4.3.11). When the courtesan approaches him and asks for her gold chain, Antipholus quotes Jesus's words from Matthew, "Satan, avoid! I charge thee, tempt me not!" and makes his escape, "Avaunt, thou witch!—Come, Dromio, let us go" (4.3.48, 79). Three distinct models in the discourse of witchcraft—classical, Christian, and shamanistic—are blended together here. But the audience's pleasure is its knowledge that none of these models is appropriate, its understanding that it is witnessing a misrecognition arising from the play's zany coincidences and the psychological and social disorientation of the characters. In place of "soul-killing witches that deform the body" there is only the amorous fat kitchen wench from whom Dromio runs "as a witch." **Demonic possession is represented only to be scoffed at, and the exorcist—the conjuror or "doting wizard" Pinch—is a hopeless fraud.** There are no sorcerers or devils in Ephesus, no witches save those projected by male sexual anxiety, no magic save the natural magic of twinship and the linguistic magic of the shared proper name.

If *Comedy of Errors* suggests that Shakespeare is very close to the views of Scot and that he has contrived a brilliant comic device for staging the emptiness of the hypothesis of witchcraft, two other plays from the early 1590s, the first and second parts of *Henry VI*, convey exactly the opposite impression. Joan of Arc is not only likened by her enemies to an "ugly witch," she actually is a witch who by "charming spells and periapts" calls her "familiar spirits" to aid her. The play then can give a gratifying visual "proof" of the charges brought against her in a trial that Shakespeare does not need to represent, for the demonic spirits themselves appear unambiguously for all the spectators to witness. When these spirits refuse to speak, Joan offers to intensify her customary offerings:

Where I was wont to feed you with my blood,
I'll lop a member off and give it you
In earnest of a further benefit.

(5.3.14–16)

Hence the audience can see as theatrical representation what the witchmongers could only deduce or extract through torture as confession: **the compact, based on the exchange of fluids, upon which the entire edifice of imaginary and real malice was said to rest.** To the offer of blood Joan adds the offer of her body and finally of her soul, but the spirits refuse to assist her: **there would always come a point, the witchmongers observed, when the demons would abandon their human servants.** And this was the moment of justice: in the words of York, "Bring forth that sorceress condemned to burn" (5.6.1).

What can we make of the close temporal conjunction in Shakespeare's work of two radically opposed representations of witchcraft? We can take

it as a sign of deep ambivalence—a mind divided between sunlit, disen-
 charmed rationality and the nightbirds of ancient metaphysical fear—but
 there is no necessary logical contradiction between the two representations
 since the dramatist could have believed (as King James did) that in some
 instances accusations of witchcraft were delusional, in others perfectly ac-
 curate. Moreover, a search for consistency (or, for that matter, ambivalence)
 is quite probably misguided. There is a strong sense in both plays of an
 undisguised theatrical opportunism, an opportunism that would in effect
 pull against any decisive choice between the position of inquisitor and skept-
 ic. The appearance of fiends in *Comedy of Errors* would quite simply destroy
 the play: the comedy's decorum rests upon the strict absence of supernatu-
 ral agency. Conversely, the slightly brittle, disillusioned wit of the comedy
 would decisively deflate the strained attempt in *I Henry VI* to discover meta-
 physical causes underlying the otherwise inexplicable charismatic power of
 the base-born Joan.

But what does theatrical opportunism mean in these cases? It means
 that the dramatist follows out the inner imperatives of the genres in which
 he is working; it means that his choices are governed by the overriding will
 to achieve certain histrionic effects; it means that he takes what he wants
 from the world and gives no sign of concern for the fate, either exculpation
 or execution, of the miserable old women actually or potentially facing trial
 on charges of sorcery. According to Scot, witchcraft is an illicit crossing of
 the threshold of figuration, a confused tangle of anxieties improperly given
 a local habitation and a name. Shakespeare's concern—his business as a
 dramatist and the business of the joint-stock company in which he was a
 shareholder—is precisely to cross that threshold.

Scot had argued that any credible representation of a witch was an ille-
 gitimate attempt to give form to an inchoate emotion; to discredit witch-
 craft beliefs was to return the individual to his proper acceptance of God's
 judgments. But giving visible form to inchoate emotions is exactly the task
 of the dramatist. His whole project is the imaginative manipulation of the
 verbal and visual illusions that Scot tirelessly sought to expose as empty.
 What is at stake here is a divergence between the ethical and theatrical
 conditions of figurability.²² For Scot the passage from inchoate emotion to
 figuration—from fear or impatience or desire to an identifiable, luminously
 visible figure—is the source of evil; for Shakespeare it is the source of the
 dramatist's art.

Witchcraft provided Shakespeare with a rich source of imaginative en-
 ergy, a collective disturbance upon which he could draw to achieve powerful
 theatrical effects. But a dramatist could only achieve his effects, as both
 classical and Renaissance literary theorists argued, if he conjoined this en-
 ergy with what Aristotle called *enargeia*, the liveliness that comes when
 metaphors are set in action, when things are put vividly before the mind's
 eye, when language achieves visibility.²³ The most important classical ac-

count of *enargeia* is by the great first-century rhetorician Quintilian, for whom it is an essential technique in arguing cases before a court of law. How do you make your legal arguments persuasive? That is, how do you impress your account of what really happened, your version of the truth, upon your auditors and, for that matter, upon yourself? The answer is by drawing on the power of fantasies or visions, "images by which the representations of absent objects are so distinctly represented to the mind, that we seem to see them with our eyes, and to have them before us" (*Institutes* 6.2.29). The person who best conceives such images, who can "vividly represent to himself things, voices, actions, with the exactness of reality [*verum optime finget*]," will have the greatest power in moving the feelings. We all produce such images readily, Quintilian observes, whenever we idly indulge in chimerical dreams, disposing of wealth or power that is not our own; and shall we not, he asks, "turn this lawless power of our minds to our advantage?"

For Quintilian, then, the orator's task is to make something out of the imagination's capacity to fashion illusions, specifically, to bring forth the strong emotions that accompany the conviction of reality:

I make a complaint that a man has been murdered; shall I not bring before my eyes everything that is likely to have happened when the murder occurred? Shall not the assassin suddenly sally forth? Shall not the other tremble, cry out, supplicate, or flee? Shall I not behold the one striking, the other falling? Shall not the blood, and paleness, and last gasp of the expiring victim, present itself fully to my mental view? Hence will result that *enargeia* which is called by Cicero *illustration* and *evidentness*, which seems not so much to narrate as to exhibit; and our feelings will be moved not less strongly than if we were actually present at the affairs of which we are speaking.

It is this imaginative capacity to make what is absent present, to give invisible things the emotional force of embodied realities, that Reginald Scot fears and despises, for it has led in his view to a massive collective delusion and to the persecution of thousands of innocent victims. And Quintilian's account enables us to see why Scot is so deeply critical of poets: poets are particularly dangerous because they are the masters of *enargeia*. Scot seeks in effect to block the fusion of emotional disturbance and illusory embodiment in the discourse of witchcraft, for if inward anxieties are given no visible outlet, if they fail to achieve credible representation, if they are not enacted, witches will no longer be either believed or persecuted. We have no way of knowing if Shakespeare took Scot's position seriously, though *The Comedy of Errors* may suggest that on at least one occasion he did;²⁶ we do know from *Henry VI* and *Macbeth* that Shakespeare was willing to present witchcraft as a visible, credible practice.²⁷

If my account thus far is accurate, we have in Shakespeare a cool, ruth-

less, fabulously competent professional, one who knew supremely well how to turn the lawless power of the mind to theatrical advantage—nothing to celebrate if we insist that our greatest artists be ethical heroes, but impressive as testimony to the boundless energy and hallucinatory vividness of the imagination. But is this account adequate? I think it may work for *Henry VI*, but it seems inadequate for *Macbeth*. Inadequate first of all because the air of smug moral critique implicit in such a characterization is unearned, by my profession as a whole and certainly by me. Inadequate too because there is something that goes far beyond competent professionalism, something that pushes to the limits of what can be thought and said in the imaginative power of *Macbeth* and, specifically, in the horrible, inward intensity of its lawless fantasies:

I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this.

(1.7.56–59)²⁸

And inadequate because *Macbeth* incorporates a devastating critique of the cool, ruthless, fabulously competent professional, because it brilliantly scrutinizes the psychological and moral implications of hallucinatory vividness, and because it powerfully questions from within itself its own theatrical representation of witchcraft.

The demonic in Shakespeare's early history play makes history happen: it accounts for the uncanny success of the French peasant girl, for her power to fascinate and to inspire, and it accounts too for her failure. The witches in *Macbeth* by contrast account for nothing. They are given many of the conventional attributes of both Continental and English witch lore, the signs and wonders that Scot traces back to the poets: they are associated with tempests, and particularly with thunder and lightning; they are shown calling to their familiars and conjuring spirits; they recount killing livestock, raising winds, sailing in a sieve; their hideous broth links them to birth-strangled babes and blaspheming Jews; above all, they traffic in prognostication and prophecy.²⁹ And yet though the witches are given a vital theatrical *enargeia*, though their malevolent energy is apparently put in act—"I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do"—it is in fact extremely difficult to specify what, if anything they do or even what, if anything, they are.³⁰ "What are these," Banquo asks when he and Macbeth first encounter them,

So withered, and so wild in their attire,
That look not like th'inhabitants o'th' earth
And yet are on't?

(1.3.38–40)

Macbeth echoes the question, "Speak, if you can. What are you?" to which he receives in reply his own name: "All hail, Macbeth!" Macbeth is evidently too startled to respond, and Banquo resumes the interrogation:

I'th' name of truth,
Are ye fantastical or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show?

(1.3.50–52)

The question is slightly odd, since Banquo has already marveled at an outward show that would itself seem entirely fantastical: "You should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so." But "fantastical" here refers not to the witches' equivocal appearance but to a deeper doubt, a doubt not about their gender but about their existence. They had at first seemed to be the ultimate figures of the alien—Banquo initially remarked that they did not look like earthlings—but now their very "outwardness," their existence outside the mind and its fantasies, is called into question.³¹

What is happening here is that Shakespeare is staging the epistemological and ontological dilemmas that in the deeply contradictory ideological situation of his time haunted virtually all attempts to determine the status of witchcraft beliefs and practices.³² And he is at the same time and by the same means staging the insistent, unresolved questions that haunt the practice of the theater. For *Macbeth* manifests a deep, intuitive recognition that the theater and witchcraft are both constructed on the boundary between fantasy and reality, the border or membrane where the imagination and the corporeal world, figure and actuality, psychic disturbance and objective truth meet. The means normally used to secure that border are speech and sight, but it is exactly these that are uncertain; the witches, as Macbeth exclaims, are "imperfect speakers," and at the moment he insists that they account for themselves, they vanish.

The startled Banquo proposes a theory that would keep the apparition within the compass of nature: "The earth hath bubbles, as the water has, / And these are of them." The theory, whose seriousness is difficult to gauge, has the virtue of at once acknowledging the witches's material existence—they are "of the earth"—and accounting for the possibility of their natural disappearance. If witches are earth bubbles, they would consist of air around which the earth takes form; hence they could, as Macbeth observes, vanish "into the air." But Banquo's theory cannot dispel the sense of a loss of moorings, for the hags' disappearance intensifies the sense of the blurring of boundaries that the entire scene has generated: "what seemed corporal," Macbeth observes, "Melted as breath into the wind" (1.3.79–80).³³

Virtually everything that follows in the play transpires on the border

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between fantasy and reality, a sickening betwixt-and-between where a mental "image" has the uncanny power to produce bodily effects "against the use of nature," where Macbeth's "thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical" can so shake his being that "function / Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is / But what is not" (1.3.138-41), where one mind is present to the innermost fantasies of another, where manhood threatens to vanish and murdered men walk, and blood cannot be washed off.³⁴ If these effects could be securely attributed to the agency of the witches, we would at least have the security of a defined and focused fear. Alternatively, if the witches could be definitively dismissed as fantasy or fraud, we would at least have the clear-eyed certainty of grappling with human causes in an altogether secular world. But instead Shakespeare achieves the remarkable effect of a nebulous infection, a bleeding of the demonic into the secular and the secular into the demonic.

The most famous instance of this effect is Lady Macbeth's great invocation of the "spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts" to unsex her, fill her with cruelty, make thick her blood, and exchange her milk with gall. The speech appears to be a conjuration of demonic powers, an act of witchcraft in which the "murdering ministers" are directed to bring about a set of changes in her body. She calls these ministers "sightless substances": though invisible, they are—as she conceives them—not figures of speech or projections of her mind, but objective, substantial beings.³⁵ But the fact that the spirits she invokes are "sightless" already moves this passage away from the earth-bubble corporeality of the weird sisters and toward the metaphorical use of "spirits" in Lady's Macbeth's words, a few moments earlier, "Hie thee hither, / That I may pour my spirits in thine ear" (1.5.24-25). The "spirits" she speaks of here are manifestly figurative—they refer to the bold words, the undaunted mettle, and the sexual taunts with which she intends to incite Macbeth to murder Duncan, but, like all of her expressions of will and passion, they strain toward bodily realization, even as they convey a psychic and hence invisible inwardness. That is, there is something uncannily literal about Lady Macbeth's influence on her husband, as if she had contrived to inhabit his mind—as if, in other words, she had literally poured her spirits in his ear. Conversely, there is something uncannily figurative about the "sightless substances" she invokes, as if the spirit world, the realm of "Fate and metaphysical aid," were only a metaphor for her blind and murderous desires, as if the weird sisters were condensations of her own breath.³⁶

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We can glimpse the means by which Shakespeare achieves what I have called "bleeding"—the mutual contamination of the secular and the demonic—if we recall the long passage from Scot about the fraudulent wonders that Ovid and the other poets attribute to witches: raising thunder and lightning, causing unnatural darkness, going in and out at auger holes, and so forth. We happen to know that Shakespeare read this passage: his

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eye was caught by the phrase "auger hole." But he did not use it to characterize his witches; instead it surfaces after the murder of Duncan, when the justifiably terrified Donalbain whispers to Malcolm that they should flee:

What should be spoken here, where our fate,
Hid in an auger-hole, may rush and seize us?

(2.3.121–22)

The auger hole has ceased to be an actual passageway, uncannily small and hence virtually invisible, for witches to pass through and has become a figure for the fear that lurks everywhere in Macbeth's castle. And the weird sisters, of whose existence Malcolm and Donalbain are entirely unaware, have been translated into the abstraction to which their name is etymologically linked—fate. The phantasmagorical horror of witchcraft, ridiculed by Scot, is redistributed by Shakespeare across the field of the play, shaping the representation of the state, of marriage, and above all, of the psyche. When Lady Macbeth calls upon the "spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts" to unsex her, when she directs the "murdering ministers" to take her milk for gall, the terrifying intensity of her psychological malignity depends upon Shakespeare's deployment or—to borrow a term from Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589)—his "translacing" of the ragged, filthy materials of inquisitorial credulity.³⁷

Translacing is a mode of rhetorical redistribution in which the initial verbal elements remain partially visible even as they are woven into something new. Hence Lady Macbeth is not revealed to be a witch, yet the witches subsist as a tenebrous filament to which Lady Macbeth is obscurely but palpably linked. This redistribution does not, let me note, enable the playwright to transcend the ethical problem inherent in staging witches in early seventeenth-century England. If I were a woman on trial for witchcraft, I would call upon Reginald Scot, misogynistic, narrow-minded, suspicious of the imagination, to testify on my behalf, not upon Shakespeare. *Macbeth* leaves the weird sisters unpunished, but manages to implicate them in a monstrous threat to the fabric of civilized life. The genius of the play is bound up with this power of implication by means of which we can never be done with them, for they are most suggestively present when we cannot see them, when they are absorbed in the putatively ordinary relations of everyday life. That is what translacing means: if you are worried about losing your manhood, it is not enough to look to the bearded hags on the heath, look to your wife. "When you durst do it, then you were a man" (1.7.49). If you are worried about "interior temptation," fear your own dreams: "Merciful powers, / Restrain in me the cursèd thoughts that nature / Gives way to in repose" (2.1.7–9). If you are anxious about your future, scrutinize your best friends: "He was a gentleman on whom I built / An absolute trust" (1.4.13–14). And if you fear spiritual desolation, turn

your eyes on the contents not only of the hideous cauldron but also of your skull: "O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife" (3.2.37).

The whole point of the discourse of witchcraft was to achieve clarity, to make distinctions, to escape from the terror of the inexplicable, the unforeseen, the aimlessly malignant. Whatever the psychological satisfactions it gave the magistrates, torturing witches was intended to secure this clarity by extracting full confessions, gratifying confirmations of the theoretical truths. The fact that these confirmations were produced by torture did not compromise their usefulness; indeed, for King James voluntary confessions were suspect, since they suggested an unhinged mind neurotically bent on self-incrimination: "experience daylie proues how loath they are to confesse without torture, which witnesseth their guiltiness, where by the contrary, the Melancholiques neuer spare to bewray themselves. . . ." ³⁸ In *Macbeth* the audience is given something better than confession, for it can see visible proof of the demonic in action, but this visibility, this powerful *enargeia*, turns out to be maddeningly equivocal. The "wayward" witches appear and disappear, and the language of the play subverts the illusory certainties of sight. The ambiguities of demonic agency are never resolved, and its horror spreads like a mist through a murky landscape. ³⁹ "What is't you do?" Macbeth asks the weird sisters; "A deed without a name" (4.1.64). ⁴⁰

For Reginald Scot, to relocate witchcraft as theatrical illusion was to move it decisively into the zone of the imaginary and to end the equivocation: "I for my part have read a number of their conjurations, but never could see anie diuels of theirs, except it were in a plaie" (258). Scot does not rail against the theater; it is imposture he hates, fictions pretending to be realities. He confidently expects that anything self-consciously marked out as fiction, any play recognized as a play, will have no force. The playhouse, for Scot, is the house of unbelief. Show people how the juggling tricks are done, show them how their desire to know "the sequele of things to come, and to see the end of their feare and hope" is manipulated, show them how they are deceived by the "double or doubtfull" sense of language, and they will henceforth be free—free, that is, to submit themselves to the Almighty. *Macbeth* rehearses many of the same disillusioning revelations, including even a demonstration of the bad jokes by which, as Scot puts it, "plaine lieng is avoided with a figurative speech." Birnam Wood come to Dunsinane and the man "of no woman born" are close relations to the piece of earth from Russia and the marvelous substance in the Indian stone with which Scot sought to work his disenchantment. And when Macbeth understands the equivocations by which he has been deceived, he takes a step toward unbelief:

And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
That palter with us in a double sense,

That keep the word of promise to our ear
And break it to our hope.

(5.10.19–22)

Not believing the juggling fiends, of course, is different from not believing in their existence, but that skeptical doubt too, as we have seen, has been articulated in the course of the play. Moreover, Shakespeare's play does not attempt to conceal the theatricality of witchcraft;⁴¹ on the contrary, a self-conscious theatricality tinges all of the witches' appearances, becoming explicit in the scene, possibly part of Middleton's contribution to the play, in which Hecate complains that she was "never called to bear my part / Or show the glory of our art."⁴² But in *Macbeth* the acknowledgment of theatrical artifice is a sign not of polemical skepticism but of the tragedy's appropriative power, an effect not of ethical redemption but of irresistible histrionic life.

In the last analysis—if there ever is a last analysis—Shakespeare's theater, like most of the art we value, is on the side of a liberating, tolerant doubt, but on the way to that doubt there is the pleasure and the profit of mystification, collusion, imaginary enchantment. Shakespeare was part of a profession that made its money manipulating images and playing with the double and doubtful senses of words. If the life of the player comes to seem an empty illusion, it does so in the light not of Scot's faith but of Macbeth's despair:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

(5.5.23–27)

The closing moments of the play invite us to recoil from this black hole, just as they invite us to recoil from too confident and simple a celebration of the triumph of grace. For Shakespeare the presence of the theatrical in the demonic, as in every other realm of life, only intensifies the sense of an equivocal betwixt-and-between, for his theater is the space where the fantastic and the bodily, *energia* and *enargeia*, touch.⁴³ To conjure up such a theater places Shakespeare in the position neither of the witchmonger nor the skeptic. It places him in the position of the witch.

Notes

1. Quoted in Carlo Ginzburg, *Storia notturna: Una decifrazione del sabba* (Torino: Einaudi, 1989), 65.

2. Quoted in Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton:

Princeton University Press, 1991), 122. I have changed "phantasms" to a plural, in keeping with the Latin.

3. Reginone's project is not, like that of Eusebius in the fourth century, to persuade his readers that the ancient gods and goddesses were actually demons. Eusebius begins with the assumption that the apparitions of the pagan deities were real enough; that is, they did not simply occur in the minds of the credulous believers. Demons, he suggests, cunningly play the parts of pagan deities in order to shore up superstitious beliefs. See Eusebius, *Evangelicae praeparationis (The Preparation for the Gospel)*, ed. and trans. E. H. Gifford (Oxford: University Press, 1903): "The ministrants of the oracles we must in plain truth declare to be evil daemons, playing both parts to deceive mankind, and at one time agreeing with the more fabulous suppositions concerning themselves, to deceive the common people, and at another time confirming the statements of the philosophers' jugglery in order to instigate them also and puff them up: so that in every way it is proved that they speak no truth at all" (3.17.139).

Eusebius argues that the fact that spirits can be compelled to appear by magical charms is proof in itself that they are not good spirits (he cites Porphyry on the fact of the compulsion): "For if the deity is not subject to force or to compulsion, but is in nature superior to all things, being free and incapable of suffering, how can they be gods who are beguiled by juggling tricks managed by means of such dresses, and lines, and images?—beguiled, I say, by wreaths also and flowers of the earth, and withal by certain unintelligible and barbarous cries and voices, and subdued by ordinary men, and, as it were, enslaved by bonds so that they cannot even keep safe in their own control the power of independence and free will" (5.9.214). Presumably, then, the fact that Christian angels will not necessarily come when they are called is a sign of their reality.

4. Quoted in Flint, *Rise of Magic*, 123.

5. See Julio Caro Baroja, *The World of the Witches* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). Burchard argued that those who believed in witchcraft were participating in a revival of paganism and were crediting what were only satanic delusions.

6. Quoted in Flint, *Rise of Magic*, 123.

7. Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers (1928; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 155. A similar hard line toward authorities unwilling to prosecute witches is taken by Bodin. Here, as elsewhere, the issue of witchcraft is linked to an intensification of the claims of sovereignty. Such a link would seem to be present—though only in an oblique way—in *Macbeth*, where the "existence" of the witches is part of a strategy whereby Macbeth is not simply a ruthless political opportunist but a metaphysical nightmare, and Duncan, Malcolm, Banquo (and Fleance) and ultimately James VI are not simply admired rulers but agents of the divine will.

8. William Empson, *Milton's God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 253.

9. *Malleus Maleficarum*, 46. See Peter Stallybrass, "Macbeth and Witchcraft," in *Focus on Macbeth*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 205.

10. Janet Adelman, "'Born of Woman': Fantasies of Maternal Power in *Macbeth*," in *Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance* (English Institute Essays), ed. Marjorie Garber (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 103, 111. I should make it quite clear that Janet Adelman is not concerned to condemn the play as evil. Indeed, it is one of the strengths of psychoanalytic criticism that it can accept, even celebrate, the expression of dangerous fantasies.

11. The question of the play's evil would involve at least three distinct or distinguishable questions: 1. Was it morally responsible for Shakespeare to represent women as witches? 2. Did the representation have bad consequences in its own time? 3. Does the representation have bad consequences in our own time?

12. The sense that the witches are marginal is explicitly thematized in Hecate's complaint to the hags that she was "never called to bear my part / Or show the glory of our art." Though these words seem initially to refer only to the fact that the "saucy and overbold" hags had

trafficked with Macbeth without involving Hecate, they imply that the art of witchcraft has somehow been displaced on the stage by something else. Within the psychological and moral world of the play, the displacement seems to be focused on Macbeth's motivation. He is not a worshiper of the dark powers whom the witches serve; hence Hecate's complaint that he is a "wayward son." In the metatheatrical sense that I am pursuing in this paper, the "glory" of the witches' art is displaced by the glory of Shakespeare's.

13. Of course, what one culture or generation or ideological faction regards as repellent or criminal, another may regard as an exalted necessity, but this possibility of conflicting evaluation is the condition of all moral judgments and does not place art beyond good and evil. Nor can art be exempted from judgment on the principle that it is a kind of dream—and hence, as even Plato said of dreams, outside the canons of morality. For even if we all agree that art functions as a kind of culturally sanctioned dream work, art is *intended* dreaming and hence morally accountable.

We might, however, want to separate an aesthetic judgment of art works from a moral judgment: that is, it would be possible to find a work evil and at the same time to acknowledge its aesthetic power. Moreover, it is possible to imagine a response that would find the intention behind a particular work of art to be evil, while at the same time finding a moral value in that very work of art on the grounds that it allows a kind of imaginative freedom or that the revulsion it inspires awakens a moral response. (One could, conversely, find that a particular work was moral in intention but immoral in action.)

14. Cf. Thomas Greene, "Magic and Festivity at the Renaissance Court," *Renaissance Quarterly* 40 (1987): 641.

15. In disputing the claim the witches are melancholiacs, James VI's spokesman in the *Daemonologie*, Epistemon, claims that they are "rich and worldly-wise, some of them fatte or corpulent in their bodies, and most part of them altogether given over the pleasure of the flesh, continual haunting of companie, and all kind of merrines" (*Daemonologie*, 28–30, quoted in Stuart Clark, "King James's *Daemonologie*: Witchcraft and Kingship," in *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, ed. Sydney Anglo [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977], 171). This view, which is apparently linked to James's response to the principal North Berwick defendants, is wildly at variance with the pathetic weakness and impotence of witches amply documented elsewhere, and not only by those who were challenging the persecution. The most powerful theatrical acknowledgment of the weakness and vulnerability of witches is in Dekker's *Witch of Edmonton*, a play that nonetheless stages without protest the witch's execution.

16. It will not do to exaggerate the extent of this contestation; in England, unlike Germany, France, or Scotland, witchcraft prosecutions were relatively infrequent, and while there is a substantial discourse, there is no sign of a cultural obsession. But even before James came to the English throne and greatly intensified the official interest in witchcraft, its ramifications were broad and there is a constant recourse to witchcraft (as metaphor or image, for example) in a wide range of discourses.

17. The contract also licenses the violent persecution (rather than medical treatment or exorcism) of witches, for it is the sign of their "absolute liberty" (16) and hence their full responsibility for their actions.

18. "Again, although to enter the soul is possible only to God Who created it, yet devils can, with God's permission, enter our bodies; and they can then make impressions on the inner faculties corresponding to the bodily organs. And by those impressions the organs are affected in proportion as the inner perceptions are affected in the way which has been shown: that the devil can draw out some image retained in a faculty corresponding to one of the senses; as he draws from the memory, which is in the back part of the head, an image of a horse, and locally moves that phantasm to the middle part of the head, where are the cells of an imaginative power; and finally to the sense of reason, which is in the front of the head.

And he causes such a sudden change and confusion, that such objects are necessarily thought to be actual things seen with the eyes" (125).

19. What is going on here? Kramer and Sprenger may tell this tale less to address a particular hysterical symptom that they claim is widespread than to represent the sense that the penis is independent of one's control. Hence they remark that witches "sometimes collect male organs in great numbers, as many as twenty or thirty members together, and put them in a bird's nest, or shut them up in a box, where they move themselves like living members, and eat oats and corn, as has been seen by many and is a matter of common report" (121). In its grotesque way, the story registers an Augustinian anxiety that the stirrings and appetites of sexuality are not under the control of the rational will.

20. It is also the source of its originality in relation to the Continental sources on whom Scot greatly depends. For, as Michel de Certeau has observed, in the Continental debates over witchcraft, the issue is the relation between the supernatural and the natural: Wier and Bodin grant the same facts and then disagree bitterly about the cause of those facts. But there is another response to phenomena that apparently escapes the ordinary and observable norms of the natural, a response that consists in suspecting the presence of illusion. And, as de Certeau remarks, while this perspective seems less theoretical, it is in fact the more radical, for it challenges perception itself: visual testimony that was the principle of verification ("I would have doubted it, if I hadn't seen it for myself") is now called into question. (Michel de Certeau, *L'Absent de l'histoire* [Paris: Maison Mame, 1973], 30.) Michel Foucault, "Les déviations religieuses et le savoir médical," in *Hérésies et sociétés dans l'Europe pré-industrielle 11e-18e siècles*, ed. Jacques Le Goff (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1968): "L'essential, c'est que ni Molitor, à la fin de 15^e, ni Weyer ou Erastus au 16^e siècle ne donnent congé au démoniaque. Le débat avec Sprenger, Scirbonius, ou Bodin ne conteste pas l'existence du démon ni sa présence parmi les hommes; mais elle s'interroge sur ses modes de manifestation, sur la manière dont son action se transmet et se cache sous les apparences" (20). (What is essential is that neither Molitor at the end of the fifteenth century nor Weyer or Erastus in the sixteenth exclude the demoniac. The debate with Sprenger, Scribonius, or Bodin places in doubt neither the existence of the demon nor its presence among men, though it does call into question the modes by which it makes itself manifest and the means by which its action is transmitted and is hidden beneath appearances.) But Foucault concludes, rather puzzlingly, "Non pas conflit entre la nature et le surnaturel, mais débat difficile sur le mode de vérité de l'illusion."

21. Presumably Scot's indictment includes women as well as men. But the charges should not be hastily universalized since the legal apparatus of prosecution and punishment was entirely in male hands. Hence, though I (like Scot) am aware that many of the charges against women were brought by other women, I have followed him in speaking of what "men" believe.

22. Alternatively, it is our banalization of the marvelous aspects of the familiar world that has made these authentic wonders seem ordinary and has led to the invention of false miracles.

23. I follow the Folio reading, "liberties," and not Thomas Hanmer's eighteenth-century emendation, "libertines," adopted by the *Oxford Shakespeare*. In the term "liberties" we can perhaps hear an ironic allusion to the very zone in which the public theaters of Shakespeare's time were located, the Liberties of London. Cf. Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

24. In "The Index of the Absent Wound (Monograph on a Stain)" (*October* 29 [1984]), Georges Didi-Huberman speaks of "a sense of *figurability*, understood as a *means of staging*—a translation suggested by Lacan for what is generally called the consideration of representability, which Freud refers to as *Rücksicht auf Darstellbarkeit*. This is where the field I referred to as *figurative Aufhebung* has its fantasmatic extension, in thoughts expressed as images or, as Freud says, as pseudothoughts; in substituting for logic pure relationships of formal contiguity; in the play of displacements of plastic intensity, in their ability to focus and fascinate" (73).

25. In the *Poetics* Aristotle counseled the dramatist to "bring the play before his own eyes, for thus seeing everything in the clearest light as though he were actually present when the

events happened, he will find what is suitable" (chap. 17; in *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden*, ed. Allan H. Gilbert [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962], 94). Florio translates *energia* as "efficacie, or effectuall operation"; *enargeia* as "evidence, perspicuitie, evident representing of a thing" (*A Worlde of Wordes, Or a Most copious and exact Dictionarie in Italian and English*, collected by John Florio [London, 1598]).

26. In *The Comedy of Errors* the ethical and theatrical conditions of figurability converge, as they do whenever Shakespeare uses the discourse of witchcraft solely to designate the confusion and projection of a troubled consciousness.

27. Witchcraft for Shakespeare was a source of social energy upon which he could draw for varied theatrical purposes: at moments he uses it to suggest the confused metaphorical projections of disoriented individuals; at other times he uses it to suggest the dark supernatural forces that intervene in human affairs through the complicity of evil women.

28. We can perhaps get a sense of the heroism I have in mind if we recall Artaud's remark, in *The Theatre and Its Double*, that "theatre will never be itself again, that is to say will never be able to form truly illusive means, unless it provides the audience with truthful distillations of dreams where its taste for crime, its erotic obsessions, its savageness, its fantasies, its utopian sense of life and objects, even its cannibalism, do not gush out of an illusory make-believe, but on an inner level" (in *Collected Works*, vol. 4, trans. Victor Corti [London: Calder and Boyars, 1974], 70).

29. Their prognostications, to be sure, turn out to depend upon equivocations, the "double or doubtful words" that Scot saw as sources of credulity. But the bitter disillusionment that follows—"And be these juggling fiends no more believed / That palter with us in a double sense" (5.7.48-49)—is not at all what Scot had in mind, for it does not signal a recognition that witchcraft is itself fraud and delusion.

30. On the insistent thematizing of vision in *Macbeth*, see Huston Diehl, "Horrid Image, Sorry Sight, Fatal Vision: The Visual Rhetoric of *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Studies* 16 (1983): 191-203. "The play itself," Diehl argues, "is centrally concerned with the problematics of vision. It examines the act of seeing and interpreting an uncertain visible world" (191). Diehl suggests that the audience is led to realize what Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and Duncan all fail to grasp: "that sight is both objective and ethical" (191). But I have tried to show throughout this essay that, in the context of the witchcraft contestation, there is something ethically problematical in sight.

31. "What matters here is not hunting down an answer to the question 'What are the witches?' All the critical and theatrical efforts to answer that question demonstrate that the question cannot be answered. What those frantic answers also demonstrate—and what matters—is the fact of the question." Stephen Booth, "*King Lear*," "*Macbeth*," *Indefinition, and Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 102.

32. The questions were almost impossible to resolve, even for Scot, because virtually everyone who had access to print (and presumably most of the population as well) was committed to maintaining traditional Christian beliefs in the supernatural. Those beliefs were so closely bound up with fantasies of the demonic that it was extremely difficult to dismantle the latter without irreparably damaging the former. In a fuller account of the play we would have to explore not only the problematic character of these traditional Christian beliefs but the extent to which sovereignty too is bound up with the queasy and ambiguous status of the witches.

33. "Were such things here, as we do speak about," Banquo asks, "Or have we eaten on the insane root, / That takes the reason prisoner?" (1.3.83-85).

34. Paul Alpers has pointed out to me that the English repeatedly psychologized *enargeia*, by confusing it with *energia*.

35. From this Walter Curry concluded that Lady Macbeth must actually have been possessed: "without doubt these ministers of evil do actually take possession of her body even in accordance with her desire" (in *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1937], 87).

36. Lady Macbeth's two invocations of spirits are conjoined by a brief scene in which a nameless messenger brings her the startling news, "The King comes here tonight." When she expresses her incredulity that Macbeth himself has not brought word in person, the messenger answers,

One of my fellows had the speed of him,
Who, almost dead for breath, had scarcely more
Than would make up his message.

(1.5.34-36)

The lines have the odd effect of insisting on the literal meaning of a phrase like "breathless haste," and in doing so they provide a clue to the connection between the literal and figurative uses of the term *spirit*: both rest on the breath.

The relation between breath, spirit, and inspiration was well known in the early seventeenth century. Hobbes remarks,

On the signification of the word *Spirit* dependeth that of the word *INSPIRATION*; which must either be taken properly; and then it is nothing but the blowing into a man some thin and subtile aire, or wind in such manner as a man filleth a bladder with his breath; or if Spirits be not corporeall, but have their existence only in the fancy, it is nothing but the blowing in of a Phantasme; which is improper to say, and impossible; for Phantasmes are not, but only seem to be somewhat. (*Leviathan*, 440)

37. Puttenham introduces the terms in an account of the rhetorical figure of "*Traductio*, or the Translacer," "which is when ye turne and tranlace [*sic*] a word into many sundry shapes as the Tailor doth his garment, & after that sort do play with him in your dittie." *Arte of English Poesie* (Menston, Yorks: Scolar Press Facsimile, 1968), 170.

38. *Daemonologie*, 30.

39. For an alternative view, see Ninian Mellamphy, "Macbeth's Visionary Dagger: Hallucination or Revelation?" *English Studies in Canada* 4 (1978): 379-92. Mellamphy argues that the play's ambiguities are sorted out if one keeps in mind "the Renaissance distinction between distorting fantasy (the fantastic imagination) and good fantasy (the icastic imagination)" (385). But it is just this distinction that continually breaks down in *Macbeth*.

40. The witches, Dennis Biggins observes, "occupy a kind of twilight territory between human and supernatural evildoing" ("Sexuality, Witchcraft, and Violence in *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Studies* 8 (1968): 256.

41. Shakespeare in effect endorsed Scot's association of witchcraft with illusion-mongering, but of course Scot's fury is at those who do not admit that they are the purveyors of illusion, who allow people to believe that their powers are supernatural. Shakespeare, however, seems less persuaded than Scot that a frank acknowledgment of theatricality substantially reduces the power of the representation.

42. In an astonishing moment, Hecate and the witches actually sing a song from another play, Middleton's *The Witch*. The scene has been much lamented by scholars: "It is to be hoped that this song was altered for *Macbeth*, as some lines are relevant only to the plot of Middleton's play. But the 1673 edition of *Macbeth* prints them without alteration. No exit is marked for Hecate and the spurious witches; but the sooner they depart the better" (Kenneth Muir, *Arden Macbeth* [New York: Random House, 1962], note to 4.1.43). But the moment seems to me not a regrettable "non-Shakespearean interpolation" but rather a deliberate quotation, a marking of the demonic as the theatrical.

43. Touch but not fuse: their relation remains itself equivocal. "Equivocation is not so much a major theme in the play, as a number of critics have observed, but the very condition of the play," in Lucy Gent, "The Self-Cozening Eye," *Review of English Studies* 34 (1983): 419. Gent argues that "the work of art's equivocation is innocuous; that of the world of Macbeth is

mortal" (424). I am not sure that this consoling distinction can hold up; for Reginald Scot, the equivocation of the work of art is a key to the whole sickness.

For Shakespeare to identify the theatrical with witchcraft was to invent the fantasmatic as the site of the psychological—that is, to invent the staged discourse of interiority—and to do so out of the odds and ends of Continental witchcraft. (Adelman thinks that that Continental beliefs are "transferred away from the witches and recur as the psychological," but I would argue that these beliefs are the materials out of which the psychological is constructed.)