

**THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL**

Comedy and the Supernatural on the English Stage between 1589 and 1621: A Study of  
the Relevance for Early Modern Audiences of Comic Representations of Magic, Fairies  
and Witchcraft

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### Table of Abbreviated References to Critical Editions

The referencing of this thesis follows the guidance published by the Modern Humanities Research Association. A full citation is provided for the first reference to a work, which is followed by abbreviated references.

A table of abbreviated references follows for critical editions of early modern works to which frequent reference is made through the thesis. Where a single edition contains several works cited, those works are listed individually in the bibliography.

<u>Doctor Faustus</u>	Christopher Marlowe, <u>Doctor Faustus: A- and B-Texts</u> , ed. by David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, <i>The Revels Plays</i> (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993)
<u>Early Modern Witches</u>	<u>Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing</u> , ed. by Marion Gibson (London and New York: Routledge, 2000)
<u>English Faust Book</u>	<u>The English Faust Book: A Critical Edition Based on the Text of 1592</u> , ed. by John Henry Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
<u>Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays</u>	<u>Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays</u> , ed. by Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, <i>The Revels Plays</i> (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986)
<u>Witchcraft in England</u>	<u>Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618</u> , ed. by Barbara Rosen (1969; repr. Amhurst, Massachusetts, 1991)

## Introduction

What kinds of relevance to wider beliefs and practices did the comic representation of magic, fairies and witchcraft have for an early modern audience? This study will approach this main question through the consideration of two subsidiary questions. What is the cultural context for a series of comic, or partly comic, representations of the supernatural first performed between circa 1588 and 1621? What theatrical (and broader) strategies of performance informed the staging of the texts considered and what bearing would those strategies have had on the relevance of the subject-matter for their original audience?

The premise that form and context are interconnected and historically specific will be central to the approach taken in this study. As one influential modern account of the early modern English stage has proposed:

history cannot simply be set against literary texts as either stable antithesis or stable background, and the protective isolation of those texts gives way to a sense of their interaction with other texts and hence of the permeability of their boundaries.<sup>1</sup>

An appreciation of the 'permeability' of the boundaries between early modern texts informs this study. This principle is particularly important in the study of comic representation, where a modern reader faces particular challenges when interpreting the function of comedy for early modern audiences. An improved understanding of comic representation is gained through a close consideration of the relationship between form and context in a range of texts concerned with the supernatural, followed by a consideration of the ways in which those texts might be related. For example, the function of the supernatural as a vehicle for the expression of hidden desires in a wide range of early modern texts provides a significant context for the understanding of the comic representation of the supernatural on the early modern stage. Moreover, recognition of the 'permeability' of the boundaries between texts necessitates the reassessment of a simple notion of fictional and non-fictional texts about the supernatural in this period. Through the consideration of

such issues, particular kinds of insight will be provided into the wider relevance that comic representation of the supernatural on the early modern stage might have held for its audience.

In embracing this approach, this study must avoid a narrow understanding of the 'text'. The primary status of theatre as a medium for representation through performance needs to be appreciated. Although this study is specifically concerned with comic representation, the comic must be understood in the context of early modern theatre, more generally, as a performance medium. Chapter One will survey a series of approaches before arriving at a working model for the English theatre of the period which will be broad in its consideration of the functions of the comic and sympathetic regarding its status as performance. This study will also be inclusive throughout in its choice of texts. Comic material in plays generically signified as tragedy or tragicomedy will be considered where it helps to elucidate the argument of the thesis. The intention is to pursue relevant connections wherever possible, and to shadow the flexible, organic approach to genre demonstrated by much English drama of the period. Through such an approach, the meaning for audiences of comic representations will be shown to be ultimately underpinned by early modern notions regarding the nature of theatricality itself.

The diversity and stratification of views regarding the supernatural in early modern England, alongside the theatre the other significant cultural context for this study, will be considered in Chapter Two. The earliest impetus for this study came, in part, from a recognition that the particular historical interests of an older school of historians, in particular Frances Yates, continued to exercise a significant influence over published literary criticism of plays concerned with magic into the 1980s. This study aims in part to further the work of those who have sought to relate the drama to a range of more recent modern studies of early modern thought regarding the supernatural.

The organisation of the remainder of the study will be thematic. A detailed study in Chapter Three of two influential works from early in the period of study, Doctor Faustus and Friar Bacon, will be followed in Chapter Four by a study of patterns of representation in a series of plays concerned with magic that span the period of this study. Chapter Five will offer a reading of The Tempest in the context of the emerging themes of this study. Chapters Six and Seven will expand further the scope of the study by developing the provisional conclusions of the early chapters in a consideration of the comic representation of fairies and tragicomic representation of witchcraft on

the early modern English stage. Chapter Eight will explore the relationship between Ben Jonson's comic portrayal of the supernatural and other texts considered by this study.

Some questions related to the subject of this study cannot be fully developed within a work of this length. These include the relationship between comic stage representation and the representation of the supernatural in other genres in the theatre and literature of period, the comic representation of devils beyond their stage association with magicians and witchcraft, and the comic stage representation of magic and witchcraft after 1621. Where possible, attention is given to these issues, in particular where it helps to elucidate the central concerns of the study.

### **A note on the use of the terms 'supernatural' and 'popular'**

The use of two words within this study requires some explanation. The first is 'supernatural'. Strictly speaking, the use of this term is anachronistic, as will become clearer in Chapter Two. A number of beliefs circulated in the early modern period that are not consistent with a modern understanding of the laws of the physical universe, but the natural philosophy of the period normally held that God alone was able to operate outside the laws of nature. This left a wide range of occult forces, malicious or benign, to be explained as natural phenomena. However, as no more convenient modern term presents itself, the term 'supernatural' will be used to think collectively regarding the three broad strands of thought with which this study is concerned, namely thought concerned with magic, fairies and witchcraft.

The second term requiring some initial discussion is 'popular', in the context of thought regarding the supernatural. As this study will explore, the term is used by a range of modern historians and literary commentators to define ideas concerning the supernatural that could have resonated, either wholly or partially, with the views of a significant cross-section of theatre audiences. Following the broad pattern of other critics, this study retains the term 'popular' to reflect views regarding the supernatural that are distinct from those which were only accessible to an intellectual élite. However, it aims to bring to the reader's attention the significance for this study of the presence of aspects of 'popular' thought regarding the supernatural across a range of social and education levels in early modern England. This use of the term 'popular', of course, differs

significantly from that employed by Marxian theories of the social function of the early modern professional stage, as considered in Chapter One.

### **A note on titles and transcriptions**

The following editorial decisions have been made. The long 's' in manuscripts has been modernized. For early modern printed texts, titles have been amended to follow modern conventions for initial capital letters. A normalized modern spelling is employed where short titles are adopted for early modern works which are frequently cited. Other editorial decisions are noted in the text.

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, 'Shakespeare and the Exorcists', in Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 94-128 (p. 95). Greenblatt pursues similar ideas in his earlier article, 'Loudun and London', Critical Inquiry, 12 (1986), 326-46.



## Chapter One

### Early Modern English Comedy

#### I. The origins of early modern English comic drama

It is common knowledge that the artist is both something of a scientist and of a “bricoleur”. By his craftsmanship he constructs a material object which is also an object of knowledge.

(Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind)<sup>1</sup>

To begin to explore the relationship between the comic representation of the supernatural on the stage and the wider culture of beliefs and practices concerning the supernatural which circulated in the early modern period, it is clearly essential to consider more generally the place of theatrical performance, in particular performance in comic modes, within early modern culture. To apply Lévi-Strauss’s comment to the study of the drama of a past age, each surviving playtext is ‘an object of knowledge’ concerning early modern English culture: regardless of the transparency of its message, it concentrates and reflects wider currents of ideas within early modern culture. As a work of ‘craftsmanship’, moreover, it also belongs to a living tradition of symbolic structure determined in part by the conditions of theatrical performance and resting upon the foundation of existing traditions of performance. In preparation for the later detailed study of specific plays, this chapter will address a number of issues which this model for art raises for the study of early modern drama in general and the comic representation of the supernatural in particular. It will consider the origins and the specific qualities of the ‘craftsmanship’ of early modern playwrights. In particular, the nature of comedy on the early modern English professional stage, the medium for which the majority of the plays under examination by this study were written, will be considered within its wider historical context. Only by understanding the nature of the ‘craftsmanship’ can the contemporary relevance of any drama as ‘an object of knowledge’ be considered.

Western European theorists have associated humour with a range of functions or effects, in particular with the recognition of peculiar logic, with feelings of aggression or superiority or with the

cathartic release of suppressed impulses. Notions of surprise also feature frequently in conceptions of the humorous. As Mahadev L. Apte comments, no single theory can explain humour and individual theories typically borrow elements from each of the categories noted above.<sup>2</sup>

Early modern theories regarding comedy or laughter typically included the idea of ridicule.<sup>3</sup> One of the most celebrated English early modern accounts of the comic, Sidney's Defence of Poesy (c. 1580-5, first published 1595), identifies comedy as being properly concerned with 'delight', which he identifies with 'a fair woman' or 'good chances'. Laughter, by contrast, 'almost ever cometh of things most disproportioned to ourselves and nature'. Accordingly, 'though laughter may come with delight, yet cometh it not of delight' and by itself 'hath only a scornful tickling'.<sup>4</sup> Such classically-influenced theory could take different forms, however. For example, Madius, like Sidney and many other Continental theorists, placed importance upon the idea of humour as a method of ridiculing turpitude. At the same time, Madius also included a physiological dimension to his theory which, derived from ideas in Aristotle, had a particular impact on his understanding of the relationship between laughter and surprise, the latter being a quality closely associated in the period with the idea of admiratio or wonder.<sup>5</sup>

The extent to which such theory, even when expounded by an English writer like Sidney in the vernacular, aids our understanding of comedy in the early modern theatre is questionable, however. Sidney's theory is less a description of actual contemporary practice in the public theatre, and more of an attempt to correct the errors of current practice. He attacks both the 'mongrel tragi-comedy' which emerges when contemporary 'plays be neither right tragedies, nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns' and the way in which 'our comedians think there is no delight without laughter', a position Sidney considers erroneous for the reasons already quoted above.<sup>6</sup> In order to arrive at a working understanding of the diversities and complexities of English early modern stage comedy, it is necessary to turn first to more modern studies of the professional theatre of the early modern period in its cultural context.

In the case of the origins of early modern drama, and its comic forms in particular, modern critical interpretation falls into two broad categories. On the one hand, critics like Bernard Spivack and David Bevington emphasize the origins of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century comic

modes in a late medieval and early Tudor homiletic comic tradition which emphasizes the moral function of humour and comedy more generally. This homiletic or moral comedy of evil illustrates 'the degradation by caricature of a dangerous enemy [the forces of evil], and an anodyne, therefore, applied to fear and pain'.<sup>7</sup> In one notable passage, Bevington describes comedy which fails to conform to this homiletic method in pre-Shakespearean sixteenth-century drama as a marginalized feature which merely serves to diminish the artistic success of that drama.<sup>8</sup> In the case of Bernard Spivack's criticism, the emphasis upon the idea of the comedy of evil is clearly, at least in part, the result of his particular interest in the origins of Shakespearean villains in homiletic drama.

On the other hand, a series of influential critics have argued that an undue emphasis should not be placed on moral order as the predominant feature of late medieval and early modern drama, and of early modern culture more generally. A. P. Rossiter argued that the medieval, gothic, world-view encompassed 'two contradictory schemes of values, two diverse spirits; one standing for reverence, awe, nobility, pathos, sympathy; the other for mockery, blasphemy, baseness, meanness or spite, Schadenfreude, and derision'.<sup>9</sup> Robert Weimann combined this approach with Marxist notions of an idealized Folk. In particular, he argued that a number of vices and festive devils in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century drama were to be interpreted as popular celebratory figures, rather than as simple examples of turpitude.<sup>10</sup> Weimann's approach may be compared with Mikhail Bakhtin's highly influential Rabelais and His World. In the context of his argument that 'Rabelais' basic goal was to destroy the official picture of events', Bakhtin argues that Rabelais drew heavily upon the forms of 'popular-festive merriment' which were part of a pre-existing folk culture. Most famously he develops an idea of carnival in the early modern period which is, in the words of Michael Holquist, 'not only not an impediment to revolutionary change, it is revolution itself'. Considering Rabelais in a wider cultural context, Bakhtin argues, for example, that 'the mystery devil is not only an extra-official figure. He is also an ambivalent image, like the fool and the clown, representing the destroying and renewing force of the material bodily lower stratum'.<sup>11</sup> As Weimann argues in the context of the Shakespearean stage, Bakhtin suggests that the purposes of early modern art, performed art, cannot be seen simply as high-cultural and moral once its place within wider cultural traditions was taken into consideration.

Weimann's work has encountered considerable criticism. Brian Vickers has prominently illustrated Weimann's naïve understanding of social history and reliance upon outdated Frazerian anthropology.<sup>12</sup> In spite of their ostensible interest in the wider cultural situation of the drama, both Rossiter and Weimann could also be accused of creating a curiously simplistic grand narrative in which Shakespeare becomes a focal point of folk aspirations. Equivalent accusations could be made against Bakhtin, whose conception of Rabelais' revolutionary world is so strongly influenced by his own experiences of alienation within Stalinist Russia.<sup>13</sup> David Wiles's criticism of Bakhtin's concept of carnival as utopian and 'monologic' might equally be applied to Weimann's notions of Folk.<sup>14</sup>

Despite these issues, however, some of the points made by Weimann and Bakhtin, in particular, are insightful. Weimann's assertion that late-medieval and early-Tudor drama was influenced by conflicting cultural traditions tries to explain a genuine diversity in the extant plays the importance of which critics like Bevington and Spivack tend to minimize. His attempt to integrate the dramatic tradition with its wider culture, in particular with festive practices, reflects a genuine need to understand the drama of any historical period in its wider cultural context. In a similar fashion, Bakhtin's arguments regarding the diversity of influences and purposes which inform early modern culture, his notion of the interrelation of form, content and cultural context and his interest in symbolic ambiguity and instability provide a valuable resource for ongoing reconsideration of early modern culture.

The value of considering these kinds of questions as part of a study which is more directly focused on the drama itself is made clear by Richard Axton's European Drama of the Early Middle Ages. In it, Axton makes a significant and convincing attempt to address the issue of the relationship between drama and festivity in the medieval period in a more rigorous manner than Weimann. Axton suggests that secular festive culture influences the drama not just on a thematic level, as is the case with the use of folly as an example of the comedy of evil for instance, but also on a structural level in parts of the mystery cycles.<sup>15</sup> In a less romantic or polemical manner than Weimann, he envisages the structural core of that drama as a precarious balance, 'a mixture of pious exposition and vigorous, often pantomimic, conflict between actors and audience'.<sup>16</sup> Consequently,

he questions the predominance of homiletic intention in several episodes. Admittedly, the affinities which Axton draws between the secular tradition which disrupts the didactic intentions of such drama and folk drama need to be evaluated carefully in the context of ongoing criticism of the methodology of 'folk' studies, which will be considered further in Chapter Two. However, his sensitive treatment of the structure of late medieval and early Tudor drama is insightful, in particular his suggestion that the influence of non- or quasi-dramatic communal traditions needs to be considered. Despite the problems associated with his approach, Axton reaches insightful conclusions concerning the complex interaction of late medieval communal culture and drama which should inform an understanding of the traditions inherited by the later Elizabethan stage.

Issues of context and function, in particular with regards to comic drama, are also raised by modern critical debate regarding the relationship between the professional stage of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and the wider culture to which it belonged.

With particular reference to comedy, C. L. Barber's influential Shakespeare's Festive Comedy argues that its subject matter is distanced from the communal culture which influenced earlier comic drama because it reflects a modernising paradigm-shift within sixteenth-century thought. For Barber, Shakespeare, 'wrote at a moment when the educated part of society was modifying a ceremonial, ritualistic conception of human life to create a historical, psychological conception'.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, Barber's Shakespeare stands at a remove from his own culture. In the case of A Midsummer Night's Dream, for example, the playwright was able to express 'with full imaginative resonance the experience of the traditional summer holidays', yielding a result which Barber clearly conceives as distinct from, and artistically more impressive than, the original festivity.<sup>18</sup> In this context, the way in which Barber identifies Shakespeare's comic presentation of the supernatural with a modern ironic scepticism is understandable.<sup>19</sup>

Other critics, however, have chosen to stress the relationship between the later Elizabethan drama and both earlier dramatic traditions and argued that the wider culture of performance and festivity in which Axton located the earlier drama continued to influence Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Alan Dessen, for example, has suggested that the ambivalent comic mode of the

Vice, some of whose characteristics might be attributed to the influence of Axton's secular tradition on the late medieval drama, might have persisted even into the seventeenth century:

Thus, the entertainment function of the Vice-connection is to be found in the later moral drama and is remembered, but the diabolic associations [...] give that humour a distinct edge.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, David Wiles has suggested that the complex relationship between the Vice and natural or artificial fools persisted into the seventeenth century, again reflecting the complexity of the medieval heritage, as discussed by Axton:

The subtle distinction -or lack of it- between the artful Vice and the natural fool was the concern of moral interludes from Magnificence to William Wager's The Longer Thou Livest the More Fool Thou Art. It became, eventually, the obsession of the clown / fool Robert Armin.<sup>21</sup>

The possible influence of non-dramatic traditions, like folly, on the drama is of particular interest. It acts as a reminder that the drama of the early modern period need not be seen to have employed a single, naturalistic, dramatic mode, nor was its comedy, which drew widely on differing traditions, necessarily confined to a single homiletic function.<sup>22</sup>

In sharp contrast to Barber, Michael D. Bristol's Carnival and Theater argues for the existence of strong and direct links between festivity and Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre:

In this theater, literature as objet d'art or as ideological finished product is subordinated to more active, though more ephemeral forms of institution-making carried over into theater from the traditions of popular festive form.<sup>23</sup>

Bristol's approach raises a number of serious problems, however. In particular, its historical accuracy and methodology, in a similar way to those of Bakhtin, are both questionable. The weight of historical evidence points towards a rather more complex relationship between popular and elite

culture in the period than the popular festive subversion of authority that Bristol envisages. His work also obscures on a methodological level. His attack on 'literature as objet d'art or as ideological finished product' and his emphasis upon reading 'against the grain of traditional literary scholarship', may be felt to reject the question of authorship too lightly.<sup>24</sup>

Most recently, a more cautious position regarding the interaction of festivity and theatre in the period has been adopted by François Laroque. Laroque supports 'the idea that festivals, poor and rich alike, draw upon the same mythical and imaginary stock' and the notion that 'festivity is profoundly ambivalent'. His dynamic conception of early modern festivity resists its closed reading as either a simple manifestation of paternalistic authority or, the reverse, of class struggle. At the same time, however, Laroque's approach remains rooted in the notion, similar to that of Barber, that festive 'events are echoed in Shakespeare's dramatic work'. As such, he demarcates theatre as an activity wholly separate and distinct from festivity, or other contemporary cultural phenomena.<sup>25</sup>

## II. Comedy, festivity and liminality

There is considerable disagreement, therefore, among literary critics regarding the distinctive qualities of pre-Shakespearean comic drama, the distinctive qualities of the comedy which the professional companies performed in the new permanent theatres and the kind of relationship which existed between the two. The proliferation of opinions is clearly an encouragement to explore models for early modern comedy which embrace both tendencies of modern criticism: to view early modern comedy as predominantly moral in mode, or to associate it with a more controversial set of 'festive' values. The work of Victor Turner and other anthropologists concerning the relationship between ritual, festivity and theatre is of considerable use in this respect. Their appreciation of the wider cultural context of festivity, theatre and other kinds of cultural expression, such as literature, is insightful. The coherence of their interpretation of cultural, social and economic conditions exceeds that of Weimann, Bakhtin, Bristol or Barber and can be used to develop a more convincing model of the diverse functions of early modern stage comedy.

Victor Turner's theories concerning early modern ritual, festivity and drama are based upon the concept of liminality, which is the process whereby, in a specific time and place, the normative structures and values of a whole pre-industrial society are broken down and re-examined, typically as part of a ritual or in festivity:

It is the analysis of culture into factors and their free recombination in any and every possible pattern, however weird, that is most characteristic of liminality.<sup>26</sup>

In the liminal zone, structure, that is to say "the patterned arrangements of role-sets, status-sets, and status sequences" of a society, has to coexist with a second social mode, *communitas*, the 'bonds' of which 'are anti-structural in that they are undifferentiated, egalitarian, direct, non-rational (though not irrational)'.<sup>27</sup> Despite their egalitarian dimension, however, liminal activities are typically associated with a conservative rate of cultural evolution and Turner also stresses the inevitable return of the liminal symbol to convention and structure over time.<sup>28</sup>

Humour is an important aspect of liminal phenomena. It is not uncommon for the 'free recombination' of elements in the liminal zone to take a humorous form:

In many tribal rites, there is built into the liturgical structure a good deal of what we and they would think of as amusement, recreation, fun, and joking.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, liminal humour is not confined to the critical functions ascribed to humour in comedy by Bernard Spivack or Barber. Many of the other functions of liminality can also be expressed in humorous form, since humour itself has a wide range of relevant functions:

It gives pleasure, creates playful moods and an atmosphere of conviviality, induces feelings of social solidarity, permits venting of aggression, and relieves tension. It is also used for criticism and ridicule.<sup>30</sup>



In the liminal zone of festivity, therefore, we might expect to find some critical humour, but the predominantly conservative pleasures of social cohesion may also be presented humorously.

Moreover, liminality is often associated with the supernatural. In tribal societies, supernatural characters and powers are a feature of the 'multivocality' of the liminal zone. Through 'multivocality' many meanings can be combined in formerly illicit combinations. The creation of provocative connections between moral codes and bodily functions and the simultaneous display of humour and horror are both characteristic of 'multivocality'.<sup>31</sup> The impossible, or 'super-normal', nature of such connections lends itself to symbolic expression in a supernatural form. Grotesque disguising of the actor is a common method of presenting the supernatural within the liminal zone. Such performances of supernatural characters possess enormous potency. J. C. Crocker, indeed, has suggested that ritual disguising carries an intrinsic power of communication which persists even after the original context has been forgotten.<sup>32</sup> As will become apparent from this study, the identification of the supernatural with humour can be seen as part of a larger pattern of the identification of the supernatural as strange or wonderful.

The notion of liminal phenomena is clearly born out of the interest of an anthropologist like Turner in primitive societies. Through a conceptual development of theories of liminality which he terms 'liminoid', however, Turner seeks to extend the idea of liminality to describe Western culture since the Renaissance. Although they can be 'collective', liminoid phenomena are more individualistic and more socially decentralized than liminal phenomena:

Liminoid phenomena develop most characteristically outside the central economic and political processes, along their margins, on their interfaces, in their "tacit dimensions".<sup>33</sup>

Typical characteristics of liminoid phenomena include secularization, optional participation, as opposed to the compulsory nature of liminal ritual forms, the increasing professionalism of the arts, and a shift from the serious play of ritual to a modern concept of entertainment.<sup>34</sup> Several of the cultural forms of the late medieval and early modern periods, including the professional theatre, but also printed (as opposed to performed) literature such as prose romances, may be argued to have

liminoid qualities. Liminoid phenomena are central to the evolution of modern concepts of work and play, and the emergence of the idea of leisure as well as political subversion.<sup>35</sup> An important distinction between Turner's idea of the liminoid and Bakhtin or Bristol's concept of the festive or carnivalesque is that where the emphasis in the latter is on the subversive or revolutionary, the liminoid can embrace a range of purposes:

Of course, given diversity as a principle, many artists, in many genres, also buttress, reinforce, justify, or otherwise seek to legitimate the prevailing social and cultural mores and political orders. Those that do so, do so in ways that tend more closely than the critical productions to parallel tribal myths and rituals-they are "liminal" or "pseudo-" or "post-" "liminal", rather than "liminoid".<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, a significant feature of both the liminal and the liminoid is their association with play and plurality of meaning. With particular regard to liminoid phenomena produced by more developed cultures, for example, Brian Sutton-Smith describes "play," in terms of an "experimentation with variable repertoires," consistent with the manifold variation made possible by developed technology and an advanced stage of the division of labour'.<sup>37</sup>

The work of historians of the early modern period like Ronald Hutton and Natalie Zemon Davis supports the idea that there was a complex interaction between practices surviving from earlier ages and new forms of cultural activity of the sort suggested by Turner's idea of the liminoid. In The Rise and Fall of Merry England, Hutton's study of changing reactions in early modern England to collective culture suggests that communal traditions continued to be important, particularly in the more settled, agrarian, regions. In more urbanized and socially dynamic areas this communal culture was being eroded, at a gradual rate, by a more modern and individualistic mentality in the sixteenth century. He attributes this process to a general ideological shift in the period, which was further influenced by religious change and a new desire on the part of the ruling elite to control the activities of the rest of the population.<sup>38</sup> The idea of older and newer cultural traditions running contemporaneously is also suggested by Davis's famous study of the persistence of social grouping

by age in connection with communal activities in the early modern period.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Turner's idea of the 'modern' theatre as a complex liminoid phenomenon is supported by Hutton's suggestion that social development in early modern England is reflected in the rise of 'audience-based entertainments, such as public theatre and bear-baitings', under Elizabeth and the gradual demise of 'communal celebrations'.<sup>40</sup>

For anthropologists like Turner, the modern commercial theatre is distinct in its characteristics from related activities such as festivity, and enjoys a particularly complex relationship with the wider culture to which it belongs. In a study which complements Turner's concept of theatre as liminoid and not liminal in the same way as rituals in primitive societies, Mary and Max Gluckman distinguish between rituals, which are 'performed for the benefit of the community' and the 'direct effect on the audience' created by drama.<sup>41</sup> This is not to suggest that drama could not be closely associated with festivity. The survival of the mystery cycles into the second half of the sixteenth century demonstrates the perpetuation into the lifetime of Shakespeare of a form of drama with strong liminal connections. The mystery plays were both drama and also part of a celebration and re-affirmation of religious and social values as part of the ritual cycle of the year.<sup>42</sup> As already discussed, David Wiles's study of the stage fool demonstrates the complex relationship between theatrical folly and its origin as an informal mode of performance. At the same time, however, significant factors distinguish theatre from festivity. 'A hypertrophy' of 'jural' and also of other 'ritual processes', modern theatre exhibits more orderliness in its cultural 'self-reflexivity' than some other liminal phenomena.<sup>43</sup> To return to Lévi-Strauss's argument regarding art and myth, the modern theatre is an 'object of knowledge' which questions the structures of the culture to which it belongs. Theatre, like art, 'proceeds from a set (object + event) to the discovery of its structure'. Like Lévi-Strauss's 'myth', which 'starts from a structure by means of which it constructs a set (object + event)', festivity does not consciously objectify and critique its culture in the same way. In the context of the early modern theatre, to equate comedy with festivity would be to ignore the formal structures and the particular kinds of representation which are undertaken in comic drama, which are different to the dynamics of festivity or ritual. Not to recognize the interconnections between festivity, ritual and theatre, however, might lead to a diminished estimation of the range of

symbolic resources at the disposal of the playwrights, or to the misinterpretation of their use of such resources.

### III. Comic representation on the English early modern stage

The anthropological approaches to drama of Turner and other offers a useful model for the study of early modern theatre within which the conflicting approaches of literary criticism to later Tudor and Jacobean drama may be unpacked and reconsidered. In particular, they offer a method for examining the place of early modern comedy within its own culture which helps to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of various literary critical approaches. Much early modern English comedy was clearly moral in intent. However, anthropological interpretations of theatre, not to mention the critical analysis of Richard Axton, for one, suggest that drama in general, and comedy in particular, performed a wider variety of functions than acting solely as a vehicle for homily in the late medieval and early Tudor periods.

The nature of the connections between drama and festivity must be carefully explored in order that a simplistic interpretation of the social function of either can be avoided. Michael Bristol's emphasis on subversion, or the fashion among critics such as Stephen Mullaney for equating liminality with cultural subversion and geographical margins, over-emphasize the significance of theatre as a site for ideological subversion in the early modern period. The approach to early modern culture which characterizes such work clearly obscures the functional and structural distinctions between festivity and theatre suggested by anthropologists.<sup>44</sup> In this regard, Barber's identification of the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century professional theatre with a nascent modern subjectivity is clearly in sympathy with the cultural shift during the early modern period suggested by Turner and reinforced from a historical perspective by Hutton's survey of early modern English culture. It respects the significant distinctions drawn by Turner and other anthropologists between the inclusive social functions of festivity and the optional, proto-consumerist dimension to professional theatre. However, it is equally important to be aware of the weaknesses of more traditional interpretative strategies. The approach of Barber and, to a lesser extent, Laroque to the

comic can obscure an understanding of the status of theatre as a cultural institution in its own right, interacting in complex ways with other aspects of the culture which produced it. It can also reduce an appreciation of the significance for the theatre of that period, in particular the comic theatre, of its place within a dynamic tradition of performance.

When considering comic representation on the early modern professional stage, it is important to recognize the complexities of the theatre as both an artistic medium and a cultural institution. The professional theatre which arose in the new playhouses during the second half of the sixteenth century inherited a complex relationship with contemporary festive traditions from the dramatic traditions which preceded it.<sup>45</sup> In some plays which this study will consider, the fictional exploration in comedy of a festive movement through social disruption to social order is clearly a significant formal principle which transcends merely homiletic interpretations. Furthermore, the influence of elements from festive traditions of performance such as folly or morris dancing is also apparent as a complex presence in the comic structure of a series of plays.<sup>46</sup>

This late sixteenth-century theatre was a complex evolution of its predecessors. The construction of the permanent London playhouses did not initiate English professional theatre, but it ensured that the commodity which the theatre companies provided was readily and conveniently available for those who had the money and the free time to attend. It was not a community theatre of the sort epitomized by the mystery cycles. The idea of theatrical pleasure as a commodity purchased by the individual informs much of the drama, including a number of the spectacular comic portrayals of the supernatural and a series of works with controversial subject matter. In this context, the plays considered by this study, alongside a range of other works produced in other media, such as prose pamphlets, provided locations for 'playing' with contemporary beliefs and practices in a fictional space. However, in the theatre, controversy regarding performance itself could add a further dimension to the experience of the audience.<sup>47</sup>

While this was not a community theatre like the mystery cycles, it cannot be assumed that theatrical taste was defined by social class. Andrew Gurr has explored the extent to which the audiences for the London theatres showed differences which are 'more of social class than audience taste'. In the process he makes an important distinction between the thematic treatment of taste by

playwrights and the actual tastes of early modern audiences. As this study will show, a significant continuity of taste is particularly apparent in the comic representation of the supernatural. In particular, in several plays the audience is required to be, at least to some extent, complicit with the notion that the supernatural could credibly be represented in comic form on the stage. It will become clear that the audience for such plays might have included those within the social or intellectual élites of the period.<sup>48</sup>

In order to understand the theatrical context for comic representations of the supernatural in this period, it is beneficial to consider the theatre from a range of cultural perspectives. As 'an object of knowledge' concerning the supernatural, the comic portrayal of the supernatural in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century drama was the product both of its dramatic heritage and an ongoing engagement with many aspects of contemporary culture, not least the interests and aspirations of its audiences. The professional theatre was a product of a culture which demonstrates nascent individualism and consumerism, but it also shows an ability to appeal to homogeneities of taste and interest which embrace different social or educational groups. It cannot be seen simply as a social mechanism or objet d'art, but as a complex cultural institution in which, for the audience, form, meaning and cultural context are inextricably linked.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, (1962; trans. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Mahadev L. Apte, 'Humor', in Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centred Handbook, ed. by Richard Bauman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 69-70, distinguishes these three, often interrelated, approaches to the humorous. The theories of Bergson and Freud have been particularly influential upon theories of humour in the twentieth century. Henri Bergson, Laughter: An Essay in the Meaning of the Comic, trans. by Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (1911; repr. London: Macmillan, 1921) concentrates upon

the impact of the surprising, especially in the context of multiple interpretations or where the superiority of the viewer is suddenly revealed. Sigmund Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious (1905), trans. and ed. by James Strachey, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), argues that jokes yield pleasure by giving access to repressed ideas. See also Barbara Freedman, Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis and Shakespearean Comedy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> cf. Keith Thomas, 'The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England', TLS, 21 January 1977, pp. 77-81 (p. 78): 'ridicule was central to Renaissance comic theory'.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, The Defence of Poesy, in Sir Philip Sidney, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones, The Oxford Authors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 212-50 (ll. 1334-44).

<sup>5</sup> Marvin T. Herrick, Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950), pp. 41-52. Stephen Greenblatt, Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 80-2, charts the development of medieval and Renaissance philosophies of wonder.

<sup>6</sup> Sidney, ll. 1322, 1317-18, 1333.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to his Major Villains (New York: Columbia University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 121. See also Charlotte Spivack, The Comedy of Evil on Shakespeare's Stage (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1978).

<sup>8</sup> David Bevington, From "Mankind" to Marlowe: The Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 3: 'the inherent danger was unselective choice of episode, allowing the individual members a chaotic freedom in seeking to exploit an entertaining routine for its purely risible or melodramatic effect'.

<sup>9</sup> A. P. Rossiter, English Drama From Early Times to the Elizabethans: Its Background, Origins and Developments (London: Hutchinson, 1950), p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Weimann, Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function, passim, but especially pp. 69 and 114-6. Ibid,

pp. 155-7, mounts a concerted attack on Bernard Spivack's position.

<sup>11</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp. 439, 370, xviii, 266-7.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Vickers, Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 386-93. Although his critique of Weimann's approach is justified, Vickers's methodology has its own limitations. His call for critical moderation is valid (pp. 440-1), but his support for primarily ahistorical aesthetic criticism, suggested, for example, by the stress he places upon 'the potential uniqueness, at least, of every literary work' (p. 426), threatens to isolate the literary work from the cultural environment which produced it unless it is combined with the judicious use of historical information.

<sup>13</sup> Rossiter, p. 168: 'it remained for Shakespeare to maintain and transform the "tragedy-comedy" tradition by compelling the divergent tones to yield a new and greater unity'. First published in 1965, Rabelais was the fruition of ideas Bakhtin had developed as early as the 1930s which were not consistent with official Soviet conceptions of the folk (v. 'Prologue', pp. xiii-xxiii).

<sup>14</sup> David Wiles, 'The Carnavalesque in "A Midsummer Night's Dream"', in Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin, ed. by Ronald Knowles (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 61-82 (pp. 64, 79).

<sup>15</sup> Richard Axton, European Drama of the Early Middle Ages (London: Hutchinson, 1974), p. 181-2, analyses the Chester Herod. Cf. Billington, A Social History of the Fool (Sussex: Harvester; New York: St Martin's, 1984), pp. 18-20.

<sup>16</sup> Axton, p. 203.

<sup>17</sup> C. L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Custom (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11. Annabel Patterson, Shakespeare and the Popular Voice (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 60, describes this as 'the move which aestheticizes'.

<sup>19</sup> Barber, pp. 139-43. See also, François Laroque, Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991),



p. 185, who states that 'Shakespeare's references to popular beliefs and masquerades are often somewhat ironical or farcical'.

<sup>20</sup> Allan C. Dessen, Shakespeare and the Late Moral Plays (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> David Wiles, Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; repr. 1990), p. 4. See also, *ibid*, p.xii et passim. For a recent discussion of medieval and early modern attitudes to the fool, together with an examination of actual medieval festive fool games, see Billington, pp. 1-31.

<sup>22</sup> See Muriel Bradbrook, 'Marlowe's Doctor Faustus and the Eldritch Tradition', in Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honour of Hardin Craig, ed. by Richard Hosley ([n. p.]: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 83-90. Although Bradbrook, like Axton, makes difficult references to 'folk' culture, her arguments concerning the affinity of the drama with a wide range of other branches of contemporary culture are in sympathy with this study. Alongside Barber, other useful studies of early modern romantic comedy include John Weld, Meaning in Comedy: Studies in Elizabethan Romantic Comedy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975); Richard Levin, The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) and E. C. Pettet, Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition (London: Staples Press, 1949). Both Weld and Levin discuss the new romantic comedy in terms of a descent from the severe moral didacticism which characterized much of the preceding morality drama and its less abstract hybrid forms. Richard Levin, moreover, detects in clown sub-plots 'the inherent conservatism of folk culture and the effect of its attitudes and ritual in promoting conformity to the communal ideals and neutralizing anticonformist tendencies within the individual or groups' (pp. 146-7).

<sup>23</sup> Michael D. Bristol, Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Bristol, pp. 4, 6.

<sup>25</sup> François Laroque, Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage, trans. by Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 5, 303.

- <sup>26</sup> Victor Turner, Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 255.
- <sup>27</sup> Turner, Dramas, p.237 (quoting Robert Merton); *ibid*, pp. 46-7.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 255 et passim.
- <sup>29</sup> Victor Turner, 'Variations on a Theme of Liminality', in Secular Ritual, ed. by Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff (Van Gorcum: Assen / Amsterdam, 1977), pp. 36-52 (p. 40).
- <sup>30</sup> Mahadev L. Apte, 'Humor', in Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centred Handbook, ed. by Richard Bauman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 67-75 (p. 67). A common root for such activities is suggested by psychological conceptions of play and 'flow'. See Andrew W. Miracle, 'Play', in Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular Entertainments, pp. 60-6; Turner, 'Variations', pp. 48-52.
- <sup>31</sup> Turner, Dramas, pp. 28, 55. Stoeltje, 'Festival', in Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular Entertainments, pp. 61-71 (pp. 68-9). Cf. Bakhtin's interpretation of sixteenth-century grotesque figures, p. 394.
- <sup>32</sup> J. C. Crocker, 'Ceremonial Masks', in Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual, ed. by Victor Turner (Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), pp. 77-88 (pp. 78-80 et passim). On the supernatural, masked disguise and festivity, see also Turner, Dramas, p. 239; Stoeltje, p. 270 et passim; Roger D. Abrahams and Richard Bauman, 'Ranges of Festive Behaviour', in The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society, ed. by Barbara A. Babcock (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 193-208. For a folklorist's study of an English tradition of ritual disguising, see E. C. Cawte, Ritual Animal Disguise: A Historical and Geographical Study of Animal Disguise in the British Isles (Cambridge: Brewer; Totowa NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978).
- <sup>33</sup> Victor Turner, 'Variations', p. 44. See also *ibid*, p. 43: 'the "liminoid" represents, in a sense, the dismembering, the sparagmos of the liminal; for various things that "hang together" in liminal situations split off to pursue separate destinies as specialized arts and sports and so on, as liminoid genres'.

- <sup>34</sup> Turner 'Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology', in From Ritual to Theatre: the Human Seriousness of Play (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), pp. 20-60 (pp. 35-44).
- <sup>35</sup> Turner, 'Variations', p. 42.
- <sup>36</sup> Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid', p. 40.
- <sup>37</sup> Quoted by Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid', p. 52.
- <sup>38</sup> Ronald Hutton, The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 161-3. See also pp. 111-13 et passim.
- <sup>39</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, 'The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth-Century France', Past and Present, 50 (1971), 41-75. Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid', p. 28, defines the charivari as liminoid, but Davis's research into the evolution of charivaris and the Abbeys of Misrule suggests they also had conservative, post-liminal, characteristics.
- <sup>40</sup> Hutton, Merry England, p. 122.
- <sup>41</sup> Mary and Max Gluckman, 'On Drama, and Games and Athletic Contests', in Secular Ritual, ed. by Moore and Myerhoff, pp. 227-43 (p. 237).
- <sup>42</sup> Gluckman and Gluckman, p. 235. See also Turner, 'Liminal to Liminoid', pp. 38-9, where he mentions 'miracle' plays. The last recorded mystery cycles at Coventry, Chester and York were in 1579, 1575 and 1569 respectively. See English Mystery Plays, ed. by Peter Happé, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975; repr. 1985), pp. 23-4.
- <sup>43</sup> Victor Turner, 'Introduction', in From Ritual to Theatre, pp. 7-19 (p. 12). It is important to note that modern theatre, in this formulation, is seen as an enlargement ['hypertropy'] not only of legal or authoritarian ['jural'] processes, but also of other cultural formulations.
- <sup>44</sup> Steven Mullaney, The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). See also, Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. by Richard Howard (1st published in Great Britain by Tavistock Publications, 1967; repr. London: Routledge, 1992). Foucault's account of mental illness was undoubtedly highly influential on the emergence of this sort of criticism. The historical accuracy of his study is ably dismissed by Michael Macdonald in Mystical Bedlam: Madness,

Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. xi-xii.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew Gurr, Playgoing in Shakespeare's London, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 10, notes that the first of the London professional playhouses was the Red Lion, erected in 1567, rather than Burbage's Theatre of 1576).

<sup>46</sup> See Naomi Conn Liebler, Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 19. Liebler contrasts Michael Long's interpretation of comedy as a celebration of "the adaptability of culture and [...] the capacity of human structures to bend and not break under pressure from nature" with his interpretation of tragedy as a "journey from culture into trauma". Cf. Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 142: 'the materials of comedy [...] are [...] those of the Oedipal situation, with its tyrannical fathers, its rebellious younger generation, and its renewal of the social order by marriage and sexual fulfillment [...] Comedy is social in its ultimate perspective, whereas romance remains metaphysical'.

<sup>47</sup> See Jameson, p. 142, who considers 'the fantasy level of a text' within comedy or romance modes as 'something like the primal motor force which gives any cultural artifact its resonance'. Jameson makes an intelligent differentiation between the use of the language of psychoanalysis by critics like Northrop Frye to approach comedy or romance modes in terms of wish-fulfillment and psychoanalysis itself: 'yet such psychoanalytic readings, although perfectly appropriate, should not be understood as diagnoses of these modes, but rather as new motifs and pretexts for a more thorough-going differential of the two forms'. For Jameson 'the fantasy level of a text' is not a neutral source of pleasure, but rather 'must always find itself diverted to the service of other, ideological functions'. The relationship between the fantasy level of the stage and other early modern forms of fantasy will be considered in detail in later chapters.

<sup>48</sup> Gurr, Playgoing, pp. 51-118 (p. 79). On early modern interest in the realism or credibility of stage spectacle, see *ibid*, pp. 149-150 and the notion of 'theatrical literalism' developed by Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, The Queen's Men and their Plays (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 128-34. Homogeneities of thought regarding the supernatural across

social and educational groupings, which in turn also inform the drama, are considered below,

Chapter Two.

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## Chapter Two

### 'By his Art and Skill in Coniuration or Rather by the Information and Instigation of his Diabolical Spirits'<sup>1</sup>: The Place of the Supernatural in the Culture of Early Modern England

#### I. Introduction

She would often tell those, that had converse with her of lucky and unlucky days, which she would have them observe in their employments; she was likewise addicted much to Gossiping (as the vulgar call it) to tell strange unheard-of tales and stories of transactions, and things that have been, and might be done, by cunning and wise people; she was one that would undertake to cure almost any diseases, which she did for the most part by charms and spels, but sometimes used physical ingredients, to cover her abominable practices; she would undertake to procure things that were lost, and to restore stoln goods [...]<sup>2</sup>

The case of Anne Bodenham, published in 1653, illustrates the complex state of early modern English attitudes concerning the supernatural.<sup>3</sup> In the first case, there is contemporary disagreement regarding the nature of her magical activities. Executed for witchcraft, Bodenham identifies her own role with that of cunning folk who worked magic at the request of others, to judge by Bower's account. She is employed by members of the Goddard household to perform a number of tasks, including searching for a precious lost object, a silver spoon, and to provide charms to prevent harm. Moreover, her association with Dr John Lambe, together with her use of scrying-glass, incantatory circle and books, connects her with the recourse, alleged or otherwise, to magical practices of the gentry and aristocracy. Lambe, who was killed by a crowd while attending a play at the Fortune Theatre in 1628, had enjoyed the patronage of the Duke of Buckingham.<sup>4</sup> Although Bodenham might, at first glance, be considered to be a regional figure of low social status from Fisherton Anger, Wiltshire, who was tried and executed at Salisbury, her story belongs, therefore, to a much larger picture geographically and socially. The account of her activities and trial,

furthermore, demonstrates how the interpretation of supernatural phenomena could become perceived as relevant to wider religious questions, since she is described by Bower as ‘much addicted to Popery, and to Papistical fancies’.<sup>5</sup>

The Bodenham case suggests that, when studying early modern attitudes regarding the supernatural, a modern reader must not only address the cultural remoteness of the period but also the tensions between conflicting, or partially conflicting, attitudes. Anne Bodenham and those who employed her in all probability did not perceive their actions as diabolical or even criminal, at least at the outset. Similarly, the account of John Lambe’s life reveals an anomalous career. He enjoyed notable patronage, but succumbed to popular violence. Even when fatally injured by the crowd, Lambe was delivered into the safe-keeping of the Lord Mayor of London, apparently for his own protection.<sup>6</sup>

It will be seen in this chapter that belief in the supernatural in the early modern period was widespread, and attitudes towards it were varied. Supernatural phenomena were open to conflicting interpretation. In all probability, as suggested by both the cases of Anne Bodenham and John Lambe, public reaction to individual practitioners varied, either between groups of their supporters and their critics or as a result of fluctuations in public or private opinions. Practices considered to be produced by divinely sanctioned ‘Art and Skill in coniuration’, to elaborate upon the account of John Lambe, might also be interpreted as complicity with the Devil through ‘the information and instigation of his diabolical spirits’.<sup>7</sup> Magical practitioners, such as Anne Bodenham, who were consulted to provide a very practical kind of assistance (even by those of high social status), could find themselves convicted and executed for the same activities.

From a twentieth-century perspective, the acceptance, by at least a significant proportion of the population, of the impact on human lives of the supernatural in the early modern period is difficult to comprehend. Arguing that magical practitioners cannot be easily separated from the wider culture to which they belong in the period, Stuart Clark suggests:

We arrive then, at the 'average Christian' in his or her most all-embracing capacity –as the personal user of any practice designed to bring good fortune, and avoid or mitigate bad.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, the engagement with the supernatural in order to bring about these ends could take many forms. In terms of the mitigation or avoidance of bad fortune, the medieval Church, certainly at the level of popular perception, had a magical as well as a devotional role.<sup>9</sup> As will be considered further below, there is evidence to suggest that aspects of this association between magic and Christianity persisted in the popular mind after the Reformation, even though it was actively criticized by Reformed religious thinkers. For at least some, and probably many, during the early modern period, magic was a method by which worldly objectives could be realized, such as the recovery of lost property or prediction of future events. As Diane Purkiss suggests regarding one of Anne Bodenham's clients, 'magic seems to the master of the house a way to get on in the world; it gives the man with access to it the edge'.<sup>10</sup> The supernatural was also both a source of potential harm, for instance through the maleficium of witches, and an agency through which effective counter-measures could be taken to counteract such actions.

Undeniably a range of sceptical voices are to be heard in early modern Europe regarding the existence of particular supernatural phenomena or Christian dogma. Reginald Scot's 1584 Discoverie of Witchcraft, for example, associated belief in fairies with the credulity of an earlier generation. More significantly, like Johannes Weyer on the Continent, Reginald Scot wrote in refutation of the kinds of contemporary condemnation of witchcraft produced by demonologists both in England and abroad who did not share their species of scepticism.<sup>11</sup> Scot's attack upon the process of witch trials, for example his observation that 'an equivocall or doubtfull answer is taken for a confession against a witch' is underpinned by a broader theological stance.<sup>12</sup> Scot identifies superstitious belief in the supernatural with the pre-Reformation period:



Divers writers report, that in Germanie, since Luthers time, spirits and divels have not personallie appeared, as in times past they were woont to doo [...] but now that the work of GOD hath appeared, those sights, spirits, and mockeries of images are ceased.<sup>13</sup>

According to Scot, witchcraft accusations and the accused fell into a number of categories, but maleficium or supernatural practices were not genuinely efficacious. Behind Scot's arguments lies a belief that demonic agents did not in reality manifest themselves in corporal form. The notoriety of Scot's work during the period with which this study is concerned was considerable in England, but sceptical views of the sort he advocated attracted both adherents and critics. The Daemonologie of James I was partly a public refutation of Scot's work. However, views of Scot's sort were not rapidly adopted within early modern culture and should not be casually identified with modern scientific refutation of the same supernatural phenomena. The eventual decline in convictions for witchcraft in the seventeenth century was founded upon a narrower basis than the main groundwork of Scot's argument, resting instead upon the difficulty of proving individual cases of witchcraft.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, early modern modes of sceptical thinking regarding traditional Christian dogma, influenced by the thought of Giordano Bruno among others, rather than challenging notions of the supernatural, were considered consistent with a belief in the manipulation of the material world using occult powers. This kind of scepticism seems to have circulated in England, at least in the aristocratic circles associated with Raleigh, Marlowe and others, and has significant, but complex, connections with the development of modern scientific modes of thought.<sup>15</sup>

The path to a modern scientific scepticism regarding the supernatural through the early modern period, and indeed later periods, was far from straight. Indeed, the extent to which beliefs or superstitions regarding the credibility of supernatural phenomena circulated in the early modern period, even among the better informed, needs to be appreciated. Through the employment of magic or counter-magic, accusations of witchcraft and a range of other superstitious beliefs, the supernatural impinged daily upon both the social and the mental life of a significant proportion of the English population. The extent to which the idea of the supernatural remained firmly rooted in

English culture into the late seventeenth century, even among the literate, is attested to by the persistence of discussion regarding the supernatural in the context of natural philosophy, at a time when scepticism regarding the actual occurrence of witchcraft was perceived by contemporaries to be on the increase.<sup>16</sup> For example, in William Turner's 1697 discussion of marvels, A Compleat History of the Most Remarkable Providences, Both of Justice and Mercy Which Have Hapned in this Present Age, accounts of various supernatural activities are reproduced. In his letter to the reader, Turner couches his work in investigative terms. He hopes that he has 'open'd a little the Curtains that hid and separated the Secrets of Heaven from Common View'. In general, he defends the existence of supernatural phenomena, arguing for example that his survey of evidence 'Concerninge the Appearance of Bad Angels, or Demons' is 'enough to satisfie any People of an unbiased Judgement'.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, alongside such continued curiosity among the literate regarding the supernatural, informal action persisted against those believed to be witches.<sup>18</sup>

In the following sections, the range of early modern attitudes to the supernatural, together with the connections between them, will be surveyed. In the penultimate section, the relationship between these attitudes and two aspects of the wider culture of the period with supernatural connections will be considered, namely the performance of juggling tricks and disguising as devils in shows and drama.

## II. Magical practices in the early modern period

Belief in magic and recourse to its aid could be found in all social levels in England in the early modern period. Encompassing a considerable range of activities ranging from the control of supernatural agencies to herbalism and divination, magic, or the attempt by humans to discover and exploit occult knowledge regarding their environment, was often used in a highly practical manner. For example, it might be employed to seek material gain, such as lost property or hidden treasure, to discover the unknown or to bring about a change of character in a third party. Considering fifteenth-century examples, Richard Kieckhefer characterizes the motivation behind some such magic as 'a

quest for power over other people's minds, wills, and bodies, often manifesting itself as an expression of violent impulse'.<sup>19</sup> Frequently, magic was also used to counteract the perceived threat of witchcraft. The principle behind the range of magical practices employed to achieve these ends was that of the sympathetic universe. Through the theory of sympathies, the earthly, celestial and spiritual spheres became interconnected in a system of cause and effect. An appropriate change within one sphere could influence an appropriate part of another.<sup>20</sup>

Typically, magic was executed on behalf of others by designated practitioners. Among the common people recourse to the magical assistance of such cunning folk seems to have been widespread. In Elizabethan Essex, for example, it is conjectured that no one lived more than ten miles from a known cunning man.<sup>21</sup> Much of this magic belonged to an oral tradition. However, some surviving spell-books or treatises, although they might tend towards being more elaborate than the purely oral tradition, offer a probable insight into some of its essential characteristics. Such written sources, some in Latin and some in English, also suggest the sort of popular ideas to which literate and educated men, including playwrights like Robert Greene and Christopher Marlowe, might have had access.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the case of Anne Bodenham, for example, hints that ideas might circulate freely between magical practitioners operating at different social levels. Although a regional magical practitioner, Bodenham sought to identify with a magical practitioner with court connections and employed books at least as part of the paraphernalia of her art.

Certain basic techniques and beliefs were central to such magic in the early modern period. Amulets, images and other pieces of apparatus were common features. For example, a surviving 'Good Exp[er]iment for Love or Theft' requires,

An Image to be made of virgin waxe of [th]e length of your middle finger, & wiryete thy name in [th]e hinder p[ar]te of [th]e head thereof & [th]e name in [th]e former p[ar]te of [th]e heade.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, some surviving magical handbooks suggest that the practitioners using them expected to be able to summon and bind spirits without entering into the fatal pact associated with witchcraft.<sup>24</sup>

For example, one manuscript dating apparently from the sixteenth century is introduced by instructions regarding 'a godly way to haue a familer sperit which will tell you all wayes your desire without any h[e]rt[e] or ffeere'.<sup>25</sup>

Although they could be angelic or uncertain in origin, it is clear that the spirits summoned were often identified as infernal demons or devils. The 'Good Exp[er]iment for Love or Theft', for example, includes such an invocation:

I coniure thee Sathan & all thy power by [th]e vertue of our lord Jesus Christ & by [th]e vertue of all the aforesayd things rehearsed [tha]t [yo]u cause this woman N of whose heade these 3 heares belongeth to burne in my loue as this waxe melteth at [th]e heate of this fyre.<sup>26</sup>

Referring to fifteenth-century European magical manuscripts, Richard Kieckhefer notes 'the tendency in books of conjuration to juxtapose formulas for invoking angels, demons and spirits of neutral or indeterminate standing, and the use of prayers to God for power over demonic and other spirits'.<sup>27</sup>

In the early modern period, belief in the Devil and his minions was, in Keith Thomas's words, 'a literal reality'. Few would have subscribed to the theory of the non-corporeality of demonic forces proposed by Reginald Scot. Indeed, it was a common principle of demonological theorists that the Devil worked solely within the laws of the natural world. The population at large would have been, at least potentially, receptive to the idea that the Devil and his forces could appear in mundane forms, such as a dog or a black man. Reginald Scot's account of a population living in fear of 'an ouglie divell having hornes on his head, fier in his mouth, and a taile in his breech', which seems to link actual beliefs with traditions in drama and visual art, cannot be dismissed out of hand as mere sceptical exaggeration of the state of belief in this regard.<sup>28</sup>

Magic of the sort discussed above had circulated in written volumes during the Middle Ages and was frequently attributed, without legitimacy, to the biblical Solomon. Surviving texts possess a remarkable level of self-assurance regarding the safety and profitability of dealing with infernal

spirits even when blood sacrifices might be required. Although the practitioner had to observe the correct religious devotions, such as 'a period of chastity, fasting and prayer', popular magic enabled him or her to engage the practical help of such evil forces confident in the belief that they could be commanded in God's name.<sup>29</sup>

One element which strikes the modern reader is that the ends to which such practices were put were usually distinctly practical, and sometimes appear almost trivial. In Thomas's words, such magic could offer 'a short cut to riches, love, knowledge and power of all kinds'. As E. M. Butler referring to the Key of Solomon notes, there was a 'tragic dualism between the aspirations and achievements of [such] magic, between its religious convictions and its secular temptations'.<sup>30</sup> However, these paradoxes would seem not to have struck the committed early modern practitioner of magic, or his client, to the same extent. Contemporary condemnation of magic was not an overriding concern for those who sought to gain power, wealth or influence by it. It may be assumed that oral magical practices focussed upon similar objectives, as well as addressing issues of health and offering protection from maleficium. Belief in magic in the early modern period seems to have been able to encompass, even within individual manuscripts, a number of paradoxical positions. It was religious in spirit, even though the principle that devils, as well as elemental daemons and angelic spirits, might be summoned in God's name to achieve worldly ends did not conform to the principles of more theologically orthodox thinkers, who typically condemned human traffic with the supernatural and are considered in greater detail in the next section. Such beliefs were probably not impervious to the warnings issued by such thinkers about such practices, but within their own tradition concerns regarding the danger associated with such activities were of a different, less severe, kind. Thomas comments that such 'practices did not usually involve any formal breach with Christianity, and were, as often as not, followed by men and women who would have indignantly repudiated any aspersions upon their religious faith'.<sup>31</sup>

In the influential work of Frances Yates and others, of course, this kind of magical activity is sharply differentiated from the interests of the prominent hermetic-cabalistic-neoplatonic philosophers of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including Marcello Ficino, Pico

della Mirandola, Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, Giordano Bruno and, in England, John Dee. Yates herself comments 'Agrippa's necromancy and conjuring are not mediaeval in spirit [...] they come invested with the noble robes of Renaissance magic'.<sup>32</sup> Some recent studies of the drama have clearly been significantly informed by this approach and led to a tendency to emphasize the influence of Yates's conception of Renaissance magic on the drama to the exclusion of other possible contemporary contexts.<sup>33</sup> However, more recent historical studies lead to a review of this approach to these prominent early modern figures and suggests that they should be seen within a more complex historical context. In Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science, for example, Hilary Gatti explicitly seeks to revise the broad position adopted by Yates by arguing for the importance of both Pythagorean and Copernican thought in Bruno's work, as well as a 'systematic process of doubt' which she describes as 'pre-Cartesian'.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it is increasingly apparent that Yates's Renaissance magicians can be shown to have important connections with the heterodox culture of magical beliefs and practices in England in the Early modern period mapped by Thomas and others. Alongside the angelic magic and notions of spiritual ascent central to the higher philosophical aspects of the hermetic tradition, Pico della Mirandola and Agrippa, for example, seem to have hinted that man could safely bind evil spirits in certain circumstances.<sup>35</sup> In the case of John Dee, extant records of his activities reveal connections not only with Yates's hermetic tradition, but also with other aspects of contemporary supernatural culture. Deborah Harkness's detailed study of Dee's conversations with angels argues compellingly that they were expressly intended to differ from ceremonial magic. At the same time, her study assembles an important series of analogies between the conduct of the conversations and a considerable range of contemporary magical activities lying outside the purview of a grand hermetic tradition. These include crystallo-mancy (using a crystal ball), ritual preparation, attempts by Dee's contemporaries to invoke angels, and even Dee's apparent involvement late in life in attempts to employ the conversations to find buried treasure.<sup>36</sup> This sense of Dee's experiments drawing on a complex contemporary context is further reinforced by a review of Dee's own accounts of his most famous scryer, Edward Kelly. Possibly unaware of Dee's particular spiritual interests, Kelly's first offer of occult assistance is rejected by

Dee 'for his coming was to entrap me if I had any dealing with wicked spirits'. Later in Prague, Dee records, albeit not without suspicion, that 'little creatures of a cubit high' appeared to Kelly outside an 'Action'. One of them, named Ben, provided him both a powder and predictions regarding future events.<sup>37</sup> Although Dee should be considered a learned and original mind, it is nevertheless appropriate to see his activities as interacting with a range of contemporary activities, as well as building upon the thought of predecessors within a grand hermetic tradition.

A straightforward divide simply did not exist between the hermetic tradition, pursuing Renaissance spiritual enlightenment through monkish communion with angelic spirits, on the one hand, and the continuation of a late-medieval tradition of ghoulish devil-summoning and superstitious practices on the other. Indeed, there is evidence not only of interaction between the élite intellectual circles inhabited by men like Dee and more popular approaches to the supernatural, but also that published works with debts to the hermetic tradition were circulated outside élite intellectual circles. Sharpe notes 'a rare (or at least rarely documented)' account of Ann Watts, a fortune-teller from the London area, who was found to be in possession of several books relating to magic or astrology, including two works by Cornelius Agrippa. Although this incident took place in 1687, it might be conjectured that similar works might have been in the possession of at least a few cunning folk in the period of this study.<sup>38</sup>

It is also important to recognize that the widespread use of various forms of magic to achieve explicitly worldly ends was not confined to the lower strata of early modern English society. Certainly, during the period with which this study is concerned there is evidence to suggest all levels of society had recourse to such assistance. As already mentioned, Dr Lambe, for example, enjoyed the patronage of the Duke of Buckingham. Evidence presented at the trial of Anne Turner for assisting with the poisoning of Sir Thomas Overbury included magical apparatus allegedly used by her former confidant Simon Forman, a famous Elizabethan doctor and astrologer. This included a doll in wax, allegedly used by Forman during magical rituals, an erotic sculpture and a parchment containing the names of the Trinity written profanely. Forman was alleged to have used magic to further the romantic interests of clients of high social status. Forman's own autobiography reveals

his interest in practical magic: in 1588 it records that he 'began to practise necromancy and to calle aungells and spirits'.<sup>39</sup>

When considering the influence of wider contemporary beliefs regarding magic on the drama of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, therefore, it is not possible to make a simple divide between the beliefs of those at higher and lower social levels, or between *élite* and non-*élite* magical traditions. There were clearly some ideas to which the educated had more ready access, but aspects of these ideas seem to have filtered through to the less educated. Although the evidence suggests that forms of scepticism regarding supernatural phenomena generally spread more rapidly at higher social levels during the seventeenth century, there is also evidence to suggest the persistence of belief in magic among the educational and social *élite* during the period with which this study is concerned. Indeed, in addition to a 'top down' filtering of ideas, there is evidence in the careers of Dee and others for the 'bottom up' movement of ideas regarding magic from lower to higher social levels. Certainly, the emphasis placed upon the hermetic tradition by some modern critics of the drama seems unrepresentative of the period that they are studying and fails to reflect the historical investigations into this field conducted over the last thirty years by Thomas, Macfarlane and others.<sup>40</sup>

Similar conclusions regarding the circulation of ideas might also be reached regarding a range of other areas of supernatural interest in the early modern period. Alchemy, for example, was consistent with the concept of a sympathetic universe common to *élite* intellectual discourses and more widespread contemporary systems of thought. Keith Thomas notes that alchemy, the quest for gold or other benefits through the transmutation of metals, was 'as consistent with popular theories that metals were living organisms' as it was with more erudite philosophical approaches. Thomas also observes that a range of widespread practices, such as astrology, geomancy and palmistry, 'had a recognized intellectual basis'.<sup>41</sup> In particular, the tendency towards syncretic thinking among those who determined to use magical assistance in this period, even among social and intellectual *élites*, should not be underestimated.



### III. Belief in witchcraft and possession in early modern England

Like belief in the power of magic, the evidence suggests that belief in witchcraft was widespread among the population of early modern England. Indeed, Keith Thomas has argued that the move to eliminate 'protective ecclesiastical magic' from Reformed religion might have fuelled popular anxieties and so have led to the period of witchcraft prosecutions in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>42</sup>

In early modern England, three major approaches can be distinguished within beliefs regarding witchcraft. First, there is the work of demonological theorists, both within England and across Western Europe, to define witchcraft. Their work not only sought to explain witchcraft theologically, but also expanded the notion of witchcraft to include a reinterpretation of other supernatural practices as witchcraft. Secondly, there is the widespread culture of witchcraft beliefs and accusations that operated at a local level, typically among rural communities, as a response to local pressures. Thirdly, in England there was the legal prosecution of witchcraft. However, the distinctions between the strands should not be over-emphasized, since common ideas informed them and cross-fertilisation of ideas clearly took place.

Although far from homogeneous in their opinions, the writers of demonological treatises against witchcraft provide the most straightforward strand of thought regarding that subject in the early modern period. Although the details of their theories vary, they interpreted all interaction with the supernatural not officially endorsed by their Church as apostasy from true Christian faith and an act of alliance with the Devil. Prominent among the earlier Continental examples of such thought was the Malleus Maleficarum (1486) of Kremer and Sprenger, which includes many of the classic demonological interests with regard to witchcraft, including the witches' pact and infanticide.<sup>43</sup> Underlying this orthodox demonological tradition, which after the Reformation spanned the confessional divide, was the principle of contrariety. As the eminent Protestant English writer William Perkins described it, the Devil and those within his influence proceeded 'by way of counterfeit and imitation [...] of the order of god's owne proceeding with his Church'.<sup>44</sup>

Many educated demonological thinkers went further, moreover, and argued that all magical practices should be considered covert forms of witchcraft, irrespective of the beliefs of the practitioner in that regard. The Protestant Essex clergyman George Gifford, for example, reserved particular criticism for cunning folk, and consequently for those who consulted with them:

He [Satan] worketh by his other sorte of Witches, whome the people call cunning men and wise women to confirme all his matters, and by them tendeth many remedies, that so he may be sought unto and honoured as God. These things taking root in the hearts of the people, and so making them afraide of Witches, and raising up suspitions and rumours of sundry innocent persons, many giltles are uppon mens othes condemned to death, and much innocent bloud is shed.<sup>45</sup>

Like Gifford, many writers in the period, both Protestant and Catholic, place a particular emphasis upon the need to reform the thinking of ordinary people regarding the supernatural as a key element of the battle against the forces of evil. Not only did they frequently seek to reinterpret practices which their readers might have perceived to be benign as forms of witchcraft, they also sought more generally to reinterpret witchcraft as a spiritual issue, rather than a physical force.<sup>46</sup> Widespread recourse to magic by the general population may have been perceived by them as at least as great a threat as witchcraft. William Perkins, for example, places considerable emphasis upon the idea that magic constitutes a form of 'secret or close' pact with the Devil, as compared to the 'expressed and open' pact of the witch.<sup>47</sup> Across Europe, the denunciation of such magical practices formed part of a wider attempt by educated religious thinkers to acculturate the wider population by saving them from their own superstition. However, it is apparent such thought did not succeed in reforming the activities of much of the population of England or the rest of Europe during the period that concerns this study. At the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries, a significant proportion of the population probably did not consider as heretical, at least in certain circumstances,

either the recourse to magical aid or many other kinds of superstitious assistance in their everyday lives.<sup>48</sup>

A second strand of early modern English thought regarding witchcraft which requires consideration alongside demonological writing and legal action is the witchcraft beliefs of the wider populace. To understand the relationship between these strands of thought is a considerable task of some complexity. The work of Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane has notably explored the function of witchcraft accusations within English early modern society. Thomas and Macfarlane argued that significant differences of belief or emphasis existed between the conception of witchcraft which informed most English accusations and trials and that which informed demonological treatises, especially those written by influential Continental authorities such as Kremer and Sprenger. Thomas and Macfarlane stress the centrality of maleficium to accusations of witchcraft in early modern England and argue that such accusations are just one manifestation of more general social tensions within early modern society.<sup>49</sup> Both also observe that many of the elements associated with the Continental demonological tradition are frequently missing from the corresponding English records. Although a variety of actions was punishable under the witchcraft laws of 1563 and 1604, including the 'Invocacon of evill and wicked Spirites' and provoking 'any p[er]son to unlawful love' by witchcraft, Macfarlane notes that the vast majority of cases tried at the Essex Assizes between 1560 and 1680 (462 cases out of a total of 503) related directly to the injury or killing of persons or property by witchcraft.<sup>50</sup> Both Thomas and Macfarlane note the relative infrequency with which reference is made in English accounts of actual early modern accusations of witchcraft to a pact between the witch and the Devil, or the witches' sabbat, the alleged meeting of witches which demonstrated that they formed a coherent secret society that inverted the key practices and principles of the Christian Church. Thomas, in particular, stresses the contrast between the importance of these elements within many of the demonological treatises regarding witchcraft written by Continental, or Continentally-influenced, intellectuals and their usual absence from actual contemporary English witchcraft accusations. What influence they do exhibit on wider contemporary beliefs he generally considers to be the result of the downward filtration of élite cultural ideas.<sup>51</sup>

The model put forward by Thomas and Macfarlane, which suggests that maleficium was the primary issue in the majority of local witchcraft accusations and trials in early modern England, is highly convincing. However, a number of more recent critics have argued that the interaction between élite and popular attitudes concerning witchcraft and the nature of popular beliefs merits some re-evaluation. In Instruments of Darkness, James Sharpe comments:

The gulf between learned theory and popular practice was, in fact, filled with a shifting and developing body of ideas of considerable richness.<sup>52</sup>

Sharpe accepts the general pattern of English witchcraft accusations established by Thomas and Macfarlane, in particular the central importance of maleficium to witchcraft attitudes at a local level.

At the same time, he attempts to build upon their work to create a broader picture of the sort of beliefs concerning witchcraft which may have been widely-held in early modern England. Although this necessitates working with 'isolated scraps of evidence', Sharpe concludes that 'any idea of a straightforward model of witchcraft beliefs being imposed on the populace from above is vastly over-simplified':

As can be seen with familiars, the demonic pact and the sabbat, what might have originated as an élite concept could be incorporated into popular thinking about witches, but was frequently changed in the process.<sup>53</sup>

The fragmentary nature of the evidence to which Sharpe refers suggests that the views which he assembles regarding these aspects of witchcraft might be unusual for the period. Certainly, Thomas and Macfarlane seem to demonstrate that these aspects of belief concerning witchcraft were rarely central to actual accusations of witchcraft and their investigation. However, Sharpe's assertion that popular witchcraft beliefs were diverse, even if most trials revolved around the question of maleficium, cannot be simply dismissed. Indeed, it would seem in some ways to be

supported by the sheer diversity of early modern attitudes concerning witchcraft and the supernatural assembled by Thomas in Religion and the Decline of Magic, as opposed to the specific theory concerning the causes of English witchcraft accusations in the same book. Although actual accusations of witchcraft and the judicial system concentrated upon crimes committed against persons and property, there is clear evidence that early modern beliefs concerning witchcraft were far more extensive than a narrow belief that witches committed covert acts of damage, personal injury or murder.

A particularly good example of Sharpe's argument is his account of the 1633 Lancashire trials. One of those accused of witchcraft, Margaret Johnson,

told of meeting the devil, or entering into a pact with him, of having a familiar and of having sexual intercourse with it. She also told of being at a meeting with thirty or forty other witches [...] Johnson had also, probably as a result of memories of the 1612 trials, picked up the notion that Good Friday was 'one constant day for a yearly gen[er]all meetinge of witches'.<sup>54</sup>

In many cases, it is possible to argue that some or all such details were simply added by the investigators or later by an editor. However, this does not exclude the possibility that the information presented by the accused and potentially shaped by intermediaries was consistent with some wider understanding of the operations of witches, whether or not the specific events referred to had ever taken place. The question of whether such ideas had filtered down from the theories of elite Continental demonologists or, at least in part, have their origins in popular traditions is impossible to resolve since popular traditions leave little incontestable evidence. However, it is probable that much of what such witnesses said and intermediaries shaped meant something to them within the terms of their own attitudes towards witchcraft.<sup>55</sup>

In The Witch in History, Diane Purkiss also reviews the question of the range of popular beliefs concerning witchcraft. Through an examination of early modern narratives she considers, in particular, the early modern conception of the witch as Other, and the possibility of individuals self-

fashioning themselves as witches, as opposed to being fashioned as such by others. Purkiss recognizes that some witch narratives do not conform to the model of Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane, in which the accusation of witchcraft is directed at a neighbour against whom the accuser has perpetrated an unneighbourly act. She expands upon this locating of witchcraft accusation in social anxiety to suggest that the witch represented for some early modern women 'a powerful fantasy which enabled women to negotiate the fears and anxieties of housekeeping and motherhood'. She also argues that some accounts of witchcraft demonstrate the attempt of the accused to fashion an identity for themselves through their confession. This self-fashioning might encompass the incorporation of a whole range of ideas, many of them not officially sanctioned, regarding the nature of the supernatural, such as familiars, the family inheritance of a witch's powers, sabbats or other witches' meetings and even supernatural flying. With figures such as Anne Bodenham, for example, the record of her behaviour suggests that she did not perceive herself as being a witch, although it is not improbable that others in the early modern period identified themselves more or less closely with witchcraft. In a similar revisionist vein, Marion Gibson has noted three bases for accusations in early modern witch narratives. Two of these are the 'denial narrative' and the 'witch's revenge narrative', both of which are broadly consistent with the Thomas-Macfarlane model. The third, however, is 'explicitly "motiveless malignity" on the part of the witch', which does not correspond to the theories of Thomas and Macfarlane regarding the origins of accusations in social tensions. Any study of early modern beliefs regarding witchcraft, including those beliefs regarding maleficium which led to accusations, needs to appreciate the part apparently played not only by complex and dynamic social forces, but also by early modern notions of identity and self-fashioning. However, the operation and range of such forces can only ever be ascertained dimly through the medium of the extant records.<sup>56</sup>

Early modern attitudes concerning witchcraft are further complicated by a third strand of thought, also intimately related to both popular and more scholarly demonological opinions, the approach of the English legal system. Legally, the boundary between witchcraft and other practices was blurred. Provision was made under the 1563 and 1604 statutes to outlaw at least one

supernatural practice without explicitly malignant intentions: the use of witchcraft to search for treasure or lost property. It is also significant to note that, in the 1604 Act, dead bodies cannot be removed from their graves 'to be employed or used in any manner of Witchecraft, Sorcerie, Charme or Inchantment'. Although it seems as if such practices were very infrequently tried when compared to the number of trials of maleficium itself, the legal system, however, bracketed together a range of possible supernatural practices. It was also by no means certain that cases of suspected maleficium taken to court would be proved, as might be expected of a crime which by its nature had to be committed at a distance from its alleged effects and in some degree of secrecy. Many indictments for witchcraft at assizes do not appear to have led to eventual executions. The conviction of witches was also strongly dependent upon the perception of individuals: the 'sufficient proofs' for witchcraft included 'two witnesses who claimed to have seen the accused either make a pact with Satan or entertain her familiars'.<sup>57</sup> Even if we choose to see the legal treatment of witchcraft as at least partially separated from popular attitudes concerning witchcraft in the period, it is possible to view the ratio of executions to indictments as one symptom of a wider phenomenon in the period. Witchcraft could not be easily disassociated from other supernatural beliefs or activities.

It is against this complex background that the dramatic portrayal of witchcraft must be considered. Unlike other branches of supernatural practice considered by this study, towards which an audience might have held more ambivalent opinions, English witchcraft was closely associated with damage or destruction to person and property. It challenged the good order of both human society and, for the more theologically minded, God's spiritual universe. It is important to appreciate, however, that an early modern theatre audience would have considered witchcraft a subject of greater complexity than this might suggest. The range of beliefs that constituted the popular conception of witchcraft, some elements of which were probably drawn from elite considerations of the subject and some probably originating in popular culture, was far from unified, and seems to have encompassed more than a belief in maleficium.

Similar issues of complexity are raised by possession. Possession, and the related phenomenon of obsession, the tormenting of a subject by external malicious spirits, were often

closely identified with witchcraft in the period.<sup>58</sup> Theories regarding the theological justification for possession and obsession, and regarding actions that might be taken against them, were a significant element of early modern demonological debate. Indeed, more clearly than in the case of witchcraft, the interpretation and treatment of possession was a matter of direct religious controversy. This is most readily illustrated by the famous examples of Samuel Harsnett's attacks on both the Catholic exorcisms in England of the 1580s and the later celebrated 'dispossessions' conducted by the Puritan minister John Darrel and his associates. Exorcism could be employed by the Catholics as a demonstration that their church was the true church in the face of Protestantism, while Darrel identified in his 'Dispossession of Demoniakes' the operation of 'the Word of God'.<sup>59</sup> Harsnett sought to defend the Anglican Church from the charismatic, and in the case of Catholicism seditious, threat of these activities by upholding a sceptical approach, maintaining that the power to cast out demonic spirits in the early church had now ceased.<sup>60</sup> This arena for theological controversy was further complicated by a prevalent interest in the relationship between possession and natural diseases, as defined by early modern medical theory. A melancholic disposition, for example, could be considered to create a predisposition towards possession. There was also an expectation that doctors would consider carefully whether a case of suspected possession might have purely natural causes. Following the sceptical accounts of witchcraft disseminated by Weyer and Scot, natural explanations, such as melancholy and hysteria were used by Harsnett to undermine further the credibility of those who, he claimed, pretended to cast out spirits.<sup>61</sup>

Embedded within these prominent controversies, however, is evidence of a significant set of beliefs regarding internal and external demonic threats to mankind which circulated within the population. Among the most interesting of these is the idea that possession was caused by witchcraft, as famously demonstrated by the case of the Throckmorton children published in The Most Strange and Admirable Discoverie.<sup>62</sup> Various remedies might be sought when possession was suspected. Thomas and Bossy both suggest that even those who were not practising Catholics might recourse to a Catholic priest to combat witchcraft, while Darrel's account of his dispossessions in Lancashire records 'Nicholas Starchie gentleman' turning at an early stage to the assistance of one



Edmund Hartley, 'a conuier' to cure members of his household. In 1590, no less a figure than John Dee attempted to alleviate the possession of a nurse in his household by anointing her breast with oil, which Walker notes was 'not a usual procedure even for a Catholic'. By contrast to the notion of malicious possessing spirits, Walker also notes fragmentary evidence of beliefs in possession by benign supernatural agencies.<sup>63</sup>

Beliefs about witchcraft, possession, and other forms of malicious supernatural activity, therefore, may usefully be seen as an expression of, and explanation for, widespread problems or anxieties effecting either individuals or communities in England in the early modern period. However, the dynamics through which those beliefs were fashioned were clearly complex and are still far from fully understood. Walker has argued that a complex relationship must have existed between fraud and illness in many cases of possession. There is also the question of self-fashioning. If Purkiss is right, self-fashioning as a witch would have presented a route to empowerment, especially among women, but this in turn might have taken a number of forms. For example, as Marion Gibson suggests concerning the case of Elizabeth Frauncis, her 'confession of sins in her examination for witchcraft may simply have been a great relief to her'.<sup>64</sup> Given the fluidity of early modern thought regarding the supernatural and the complexity of evidence like the extant witchcraft pamphlets, it is difficult to judge the extent to which those accused of witchcraft or those who claimed to be afflicted by maleficium deliberately fashioned roles for themselves. However, witchcraft was clearly a richly symbolic belief system that could act as the basis for a variety of compensatory fantasies concerned with the human condition. As such it has certain affinities with other strands of thought regarding the supernatural in the period.

To complicate the picture still further, practices and beliefs concerning witchcraft held by individuals or local communities must have interacted in a variety of ways with broader debates concerning witchcraft and possession. When considering early modern accounts of witchcraft, it is particularly important to bear in mind that, at all social levels, its forms and practices were frequently contested and open to different interpretations. Interpretation could vary between individuals or social groups and could change over time. For example, there are many examples of communities

apparently turning upon cunning folk and classifying their activities, in other contexts perhaps seen as services to the community, as acts of witchcraft.<sup>65</sup> At a more élite intellectual level, ministers of religion and writers like Gifford and Perkins vigorously sought to reinterpret other practices as forms of covert witchcraft. Within the law, proving the incidence of the inherently covert crime of witchcraft was directly a matter of investigative interpretation, an issue which is made particularly apparent by the interventions of King James I in the examination of witchcraft accusations.<sup>66</sup>

Our understanding of published early modern accounts of malicious supernatural activity must be informed by an appreciation of all these factors. The works of pamphleteers and others frequently offer an unresolved or ambiguous account to their audience. This can be illustrated by the apparent differences between Anne Bodenham's opinions and those of both the court which tried her and, presumably, the author of A Briefe Description, discussed above. As Marion Gibson has explored in her study of pamphlet accounts of witchcraft, it is apparent that published accounts of witchcraft beliefs and practices may contain multiple, potentially inconsistent, voices. Pamphlets may be the product of a series of authors, such as a suspected witch, an examiner, an editor and a publisher, who may themselves have a variety of opinions and motives, including an intention to entertain as well as educate.<sup>67</sup> This process may lead to more or less apparent tensions within individual texts and it is important to try to ensure that, as far as possible, the different voices within a text, and the particular interpretation of witchcraft which each reflects, are recognized.

#### **IV. Fairy beliefs in early modern England**

Supernatural beliefs in early modern England extended beyond magic and witchcraft. Astrology, for example, exercised a considerable influence over many lives. Some phenomena now no longer considered as supernatural, such as poison, could be considered to have supernatural overtones in the period. While some activities were widely considered to be supernatural, the status of others created debate.<sup>68</sup>

Among these beliefs, an understanding of early modern English beliefs regarding fairies will be particularly relevant to a study of the comic representation of the supernatural on the stage. However, the interpretation of the wider cultural background to the stage representation of fairies presents particular difficulties.

Twentieth-century critics of early modern drama tend to argue that little actual belief in fairies existed in England during the early modern period. C. L. Barber, for example, interprets Puck's humour in A Midsummer Night's Dream simply as an implicit method of expressing scepticism concerning the existence of fairies. Referring specifically to Puck's early account of his pranks, he notes,

the plain implication of these lines [...] is that Puck does not really exist- that he is a figment of naïve imagination, projected to motivate the little accidents of household life.<sup>69</sup>

Minor White Latham and Katherine Briggs similarly regard the literary and dramatic appearances of fairies as a sign of a decline in belief.<sup>70</sup> Briggs, in particular, recreates Shakespeare in her own image. Her suggestion that, at most, Shakespeare maintained a nostalgic 'kind of pleasurable half-belief' in fairies is suggestive of the detachment of the folklorist from source materials which are perceived to be fragmentary remains of a lost, more primitive set of beliefs.<sup>71</sup>

Diane Purkiss has recently produced a reappraisal of the history of fairy beliefs and their artistic portrayal from Antiquity until the twentieth century. While acknowledging the frequent association of fairies with dead ancestors, Troublesome Things notes the wider cultural function of fairy beliefs:

A fairy is someone who appears at and governs one of the big crises of mortal life: birth, childhood and its transitions, adolescence, sexual awakening, pregnancy and childbirth, old age, death. She presides over the borders of our lives [...] (Although male fairies can do these things, in mortal realms these tasks are women's work.)<sup>72</sup>

At the same time, Purkiss follows the tendency of earlier critics to stress the distance between Shakespeare's stage fairies, in particular, and any wider culture of early modern English fairy beliefs:

Like a jobbing tailor using up the ends of fabric rolls, Shakespeare pieced together his sweetly tiny fairies from a number of sources, but none was directly folkloric; indeed it is questionable whether Shakespeare knew anything about fairies from oral sources at all, as opposed to from the writings of the burgeoning folklore industry, especially those of Reginald Scot.<sup>73</sup>

However, it is apparent both from Purkiss's own survey and other sources that fairy beliefs would have presented a more controversial and stimulating branch of contemporary culture for early modern playwrights than the mere folkloric curiosity which Purkiss suggests. There is evidence for the survival of belief in fairies in the early modern period and, significantly, for the integration of notions of fairy into other areas of supernatural belief and practice. King James's *Daemonologie*, for example, indirectly affirms the validity of fairy belief by integrating those beliefs into a larger set of schemes perpetrated by the Devil against mankind. The *Daemonologie* classifies encounters with 'the Phairie' as an illusion created by the Devil.<sup>74</sup> Alternatively, fairies are sometimes identified with the spirits theoretically placed at human command by the magical practices. John Walsh, for example, stated in 1566 that he received assistance from the fairies to know 'when any man is bewitched'.<sup>75</sup> References to spirits called Oberion and Oberyorn in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, summoned either by apparent believers or confidence tricksters suggest that belief in fairies overlapped with more general supernatural beliefs.<sup>76</sup> Other accounts which unambiguously related the exploits of confidence tricksters who successfully fool the gullible by feigning the existence of fairies would also seem to attest to the continuation of belief, even if they ridicule it.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, this point seems to be well illustrated by the early seventeenth-century Rye case of Susan Swapper, Anne Bennett and Anne Taylor explored by Annabel Gregory. The events in Rye, which

led to attempted prosecutions brought under the 1604 witchcraft statutes, indicate a host of overlapping ideas regarding the supernatural circulating among the parties involved, including beliefs in fairy treasure, spirits and angels. Gregory also notes, in particular, how certain spirits were alleged to have,

played puckish practical jokes on inhabitants, such as bouncing a couple up and down in bed. When in the guise of fairies, these spirits seem in fact more suited to a remote, unreformed village than to godly Rye.<sup>78</sup>

A particularly interesting connection between fairies and wider supernatural beliefs with particular relevance to this study is suggested by The Most Strange and Admirable Discoverie of the Three Witches of Warboys (1593). This recounts the trial of those accused in the notorious Throckmorton case. At the gallows, the convicted witch Alice Samuels made the following confession:

Being demaunded, whether she had bewitched master Throckmortons children: she confessed, that she had done it. Being asked with which of her Spirits: she said, that it was Pluck.<sup>79</sup>

Winfried Schleiner has noted the similarity between the name of the spirit 'Pluck' and the 'Puck' and 'Pouke' familiar from contemporary poetry and drama, including A Midsummer Night's Dream.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, Pluck's association with another spirit called 'Catch', may suggest a more mundane etymology in the mind of the reporter than the Old English púca and Welsh pwca suggested for Puck.<sup>81</sup> Although this work need not be Shakespeare's source for the name, an exchange of material between fairy beliefs and other forms of supernatural beliefs in this context would be consistent with the more general picture in the period. An intriguing question regarding this aspect of Alice Samuels's confession is whether the reference to Pluck represents an insertion by the editor-author or an attempt to shape her confession to her own ends, perhaps incorporating a

fairy or spirit name which she had encountered in another source, or an insertion into the narrative by another. Either way, the implications, if any, of the spirit's name, cannot be recovered with certainty.

Examples of persisting belief in fairies can also be found well into the seventeenth century. William Lilly, the astrologer, recounts that one of his clients attended an experiment to invoke the 'Queen of the Fairies' which resulted in her 'appearing in a most illustrious Glory'.<sup>82</sup> A spell for invoking a fairy, which presumably has origins in earlier popular forms of magic, is included among the papers of Ashmole.<sup>83</sup> In his Compleat History of the Most Remarkable Providences, William Turner records, at length and apparently with some seriousness, an account written in 1696, but relating to events which took place seventeen or eighteen years earlier, of the claims of a certain Anne Jefferies that she consorted with fairies.<sup>84</sup> Although describing Scottish practice, Robert Kirk's The Secret Commonwealth of Elves and Fairies, is also noteworthy. Writing at the close of the seventeenth century, Kirk attempts to defend the existence of fairies ('as there are parallel stories in all Countreys, and Ages [...] so it is no more of necessitie to us fully to know their Beings and manner of Lyfe') and also, in an interesting parallel to empirical science, the operation of the second sight associated with them ('so doth the loadstone attract Steel necessarily, But we know not the dependence of these effects from their natural causes').<sup>85</sup>

One feature of some early modern accounts of fairies which sometimes distinguishes them from other supernatural agents and might be inherited from more primitive beliefs is their association with neutral or benign as well as malicious behaviour. This is apparent in the account of Anne Jefferies. Turner reproduces as his source a letter from a Moses Pitt to the Bishop of Gloucester which observes that 'the Ministers endeavoured to perswade her [Jefferies] they were evil Spirits that resorted to her, and that it was the Delusion of the Devil (but how could that be, when she did not Hurt, but Good to all that came to her for Cure of their distempers?)'. Rather than being her familiars, the fairies who assist Anne seem to maintain an autonomous existence. It is also apparent from other contemporary accounts assembled by Keith Thomas from both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that fairies were perceived by some to represent a source of powerful

assistance. The more benign side to the fairies of folk stories is, therefore, perhaps not entirely a later addition to the fairy tradition directly associable with a decline in genuine belief, but rather one of the manifestations of a notion of fairy autonomy that informs many fairy narratives.<sup>86</sup>

Overall, therefore, there is some significant evidence to suggest that fairies continued to have a place within early modern systems of thought concerning the supernatural. They were apparently assimilated into demonological systems of thought, where they could be identified with demonic illusion. They also seem to have been assimilated into more popular systems of magical belief, where they were identified with other supernatural agents. Pierre Le Loyer's suggestion that, in the early modern period, beliefs with more obviously primitive origins, such as fairies, might have been concentrated on the 'Celtic fringes' of the British Isles in many ways seems sensible.<sup>87</sup> There is, however, evidence to suggest that belief in fairies survived within both demonological thought and magical beliefs in England even after the sixteenth century.<sup>88</sup> It is clearly important to recognize that fairy beliefs were not homogenous, but rather diverse and sometimes conflicting. Equally, they became associated not just with other branches of early modern thought, but also with other ideological issues. The Rye case, for example, presents accounts of fairies within a complex web of depositions, conflicting religious beliefs and local social and political tensions. The Secret Commonwealth has been associated with concern among the London clergy that growing scepticism regarding the supernatural threatened belief in God itself.<sup>89</sup> Equally, however, it is important that the range of views presented should not be ignored when the comic portrayal of fairies is considered.

By contrast, several early modern English accounts suggest that fairy beliefs, or at least some aspects of such beliefs, were in decline during the sixteenth century or even earlier. Most famously, there is Reginald Scot's sceptical attack upon fairy belief in his Discoverie (1584), in which he dismisses fairies as merely a story told in childhood by 'our mothers maides'.<sup>90</sup> Locating belief in their existence in the recent past, or with an older generation, in this manner is a feature of several early modern references to fairies. By placing the relevant episode in his own childhood, Richard Willis's famous account of fairies employs this technique, for example.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, Laroque has noted that the idea of a recent decline in fairy belief is common to the works of writers from

Chaucer to Margaret Murray.<sup>92</sup> There seems to be a complex process in place, whereby inherited tropes intended to distance the author from fairy narratives become joined to a wider move towards scepticism in the early modern period. This process does seem to be broadly indicative of an erosion of belief, since it suggests a desire not to stand by the truth of the story as it is told. A partial decline of belief in fairies would parallel transitions between belief and more empirical forms of knowledge in other aspects of early modern culture.<sup>93</sup> At the same time, it is apparent that fairy beliefs were not surrendered in a quick or straightforward manner. A diverse range of beliefs probably did persist, predominantly by assimilation into more virile areas of belief in a period when fairy beliefs were probably more generally being eroded. When reviewing the extant evidence, it is obviously important to bear in mind Carlo Ginzburg's criticism of the 'historiography strongly influenced by anthropological functionalism', by which he characterizes the work of Keith Thomas and others.<sup>94</sup> Ginzburg argues for 'a symbolic richness that does not seem reducible to the psychological need for reassurance, to regional tensions, or to the general notions about causality current in England at this time'. As much as other aspects of early modern supernatural thought considered by this chapter, fairy beliefs of the sort attributed to Anne Jefferies may be considered to demonstrate this 'symbolic richness'. As Ginzburg suggests, early modern culture as a whole should be assessed with a respect for the inconsistencies and improbabilities of belief systems so remote from our own. This is particularly imperative when considering fairy beliefs, for which the psychological or social motivation is typically even more obscure than for witchcraft or forms of magic with more direct input from human agency.<sup>95</sup>

Historical enquiry into fairy beliefs in the period therefore suggests that Shakespeare and other playwrights could draw upon a broad and complex field of ideas. Despite the erosion of belief in fairies in the period, the extent to which the plays of Greene and Shakespeare in particular might reflect some continuing contemporary belief in fairies should not be neglected. The similarity between Oberon's 'love juice' and the sort of magical devices prepared to procure love in the early modern period, for example, should not be ignored.<sup>96</sup> More generally, the historical background does not support the assertion that fairies were so thoroughly discredited in this period that any



dramatic treatment of them must be interpreted as implicitly sceptical regarding the existence of such supernatural phenomena or merely allegorical. The historical evidence suggests that David Young's assessment of A Midsummer Night's Dream is correct when he argues that,

the term "folklore" [...] suggests barriers that did not exist for the average Elizabethan. If he could doubt the existence of such mysteries, he could as easily see them as part of the fabric of life.<sup>97</sup>

Indeed, Young's comment would seem to be more generally applicable to a range of supernatural beliefs in early modern English culture. As Purkiss notes in her study of witchcraft, the boundaries could be fluid in the period not only between different interpretative possibilities regarding the supernatural, but also between narratives which could be believed and narratives which could not be believed, at least with the same confidence. She argues that 'other strands of story or belief' become woven into 'narratives of witchcraft'. For example, the account put forward by Edmund Robinson during the 1633 Lancashire witchcraft accusations shows how a narrative of witchcraft could become intertwined with a variety of elements, including motifs drawn from folktales. Robinson became quite famous before the case was transferred to London, at which point he retracted his story. Such narratives were clearly potentially convincing to an early modern audience, even in a court of law, and Purkiss describes Robinson's account as 'an object lesson in how to construct a plausible narrative using cultural materials'.<sup>98</sup> Robinson noted in his retraction that his tale had 'no truth at all, but only as he has heard tales and reports made by women, so he framed the tale out of his own invention'.<sup>99</sup> In terms of their function as a place of fantasy, either as a source of personal fulfilment or explanation for discomfort, supernatural beliefs could draw widely upon other appropriate materials from early modern culture. In addition to considering the diversity of beliefs about fairies present in the wider culture, therefore, this study will reconsider the impact of the representative modes employed by the playwrights on the meaning they would have held for a contemporary audience. It will be argued that the comic portrayal of fairies in the period reflected a

more diverse culture of fairy beliefs in England in the early modern period than Purkiss's argument regarding the emerging early modern 'folklore industry', epitomized by Scot, suggests. Throughout this study, an attempt will be made to understand the complexity of an early modern context which included both the proto-folklorist views of Scot and also other strands of thought, including popular genres of performance and narrative to which the title 'folk' is often applied by critics.

#### V. Spectacular entertainments: juggling and festive devils

Early modern English beliefs regarding the supernatural were, therefore, various and the relationships between the strands were frequently complex. Moreover, the relationships between those beliefs and the wider culture could also be complex, as suggested by Purkiss's analysis of Edmund Robinson's account of witchcraft. The final section of this chapter will consider the associations between early modern beliefs and two aspects of the wider culture of the period with particular relevance to the dramatic representation of the supernatural, namely the performance of apparently impossible feats by jugglers and the appearances of devils in entertainments and drama.

The association of spectacular entertainment with the supernatural appears in medieval culture. Regarding the spectacular boats and castles prepared to entertain the French king Charles IV in 1378, for example, Thomas M. Greene has suggested that such spectacles 'were felt to be touched by the supernatural' in the late medieval period. He is quick to distinguish between such 'spectacular "magic"' and 'teleological' magic which has 'a definite goal', since the former is 'not serious because it is not useful'. At the same time, however, Greene's suggestion that both should be seen as branches of the same culture of belief in the supernatural is convincing. This is not to suggest that the audiences for spectacular court shows credulously attributed them all to supernatural power. It must be remembered, however, that such spectacles belong to an age which frequently sought to attribute both the unusual and even political authority to genuine supernatural forces.<sup>100</sup> As Greene suggests, Chaucer's portrayal of a magician who both creates magical spectacle and controls 'teleological' magic in 'The Franklin's Tale' may reflect something more than artistic

licence. Indeed, the dual meanings of the terms 'tregetour', which is typically glossed as 'illusionist' or 'sleight-of-hand artist', and to 'pleye', which suggests both to 'play' and 'perform' or to 'work (tricks)', both of which appear in this tale, again suggest affinities between spectacular performances and 'teleological' magic.<sup>101</sup>

By the late sixteenth century, the defences of juggling in Scot's Discoverie and the later works of his successors 'S. R.' [Samuel Rid] and Hocus Pocus Junior set out to demonstrate that juggling, the performance of apparently magical tricks for entertainment, contains no supernatural involvement.<sup>102</sup> For example, Hocus Pocus Junior describes such entertainments as 'legerdemaine',

an operation, whereby one may seeme to work wonderfull, impossible, and incredible things by agilitie, nimblenesse, and slightnesse of hand.<sup>103</sup>

All three writers wish to explain juggling from a rationalist perspective in order to defend its propriety as a form of entertainment. Scot notes that,

if these things be doone for mirth and recreation, and not to the hurt of our neighbour, nor to the abusing or prophaning of Gods name, in mine opinion they are neither impious nor altogether unlawfull: though herein or hereby a naturall thing be made to seeme supernaturall. (p. 174)

Hocus Pocus Junior declares the use of juggling to be 'lawfull when it is used at Festivals, and merry meetings to procure mirth: especially if it be done without desire of estimation above what we are'.<sup>104</sup>

At the same time, however, these rationalist defenders of juggling all suggest that belief in juggling as real magic existed in their period. Referring to trickery in general, Scot states that 'manie writers' have been deceived by 'illusion', 'confederacie and legierdemaine, etc.' into 'sometimes imputing unto words that which resteth in the nature of the thing; and sometimes to the nature of the thing, that which proceedeth of fraud and deception of sight'.<sup>105</sup> The idea of 'imputing

unto words' is an apparent allusion to the emphasis placed on the power of words in both élite and popular forms of magic. Hocus Pocus Junior, moreover, writes ostensibly to defend himself from the accusation that he employs 'unlawfull' powers:

A little practice made me expert, and having playd some such like feates before some of my friends and merry companions, they would needs perswade me that it was impossible for any to doe such things without some unlawfull assistance, and furthermore began to presse me upon it.<sup>106</sup>

Samuel Rid even more explicitly suggests that spectacles like juggling could be attributed to the aid of spirits:

And no doubt many when they heare of any rare exploit performed which cannot enter into their capacity, and is beyond their reach, straight they attribute it to be done by the Deuill, and that they worke by some familiar spirit, when indeede it is nothing els but mere illusion, cosoning, and legerdemaine.<sup>107</sup>

Such accounts must be treated with some suspicion since they offer no information concerning the prevalence, or otherwise, of such views. It might be in the interests of rationalist polemicists, particularly those like Scot with a clear Protestant religious agenda, to emphasize the extent of his contemporaries' ignorance. Scot's *Discoverie* clearly views the acts of itinerant street jugglers as a very obvious example of the natural being given supernatural explanation.<sup>108</sup> However, the possibility that an association between spectacular entertainment and genuine supernatural activity might have existed in early modern Europe is significant to our understanding of the comic portrayal of the supernatural in English drama, since that drama clearly makes similar associations. More generally, it would seem to reinforce the idea that beliefs in the supernatural interacted with other elements of early modern culture.

The persistence into the early modern period of late medieval traditions of festive performance involving demonic disguises is also of considerable importance to an understanding of the later dramatic portrayal of the supernatural and worth examining in some detail. As early as the fourteenth century, there is some evidence for the existence of festive games involving a half-human, half-animal figure perhaps not dissimilar to later festive devils. Sandra Billington associates a fourteenth-century grotesque carving in the church at Beverley of a 'half human, half animal' figure wearing the 'two-eared cap of a fool' with les Fulles, a Christmas game that the church authorities continued to allow even while they were in the process of attacking the custom of regis stultorum.<sup>109</sup> Although there is insufficient information about les Fulles to confirm a direct connection between this monstrous disguise with the festive devils of later periods, this festive performance of an anthropomorphic monster suggests the sort of links between folly and devils found later in medieval and early modern shows and collected English folk drama.

Sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century records of the Lord Mayor's Shows in London and the Midsummer Fairs in Chester make specific reference to devils.<sup>110</sup> The 'dulle [devil] with squybes bornyng' of the 1554 London Show is described by Henry Machyn as appearing alongside 'ij vodys' ['two wild men']. Men disguised as devils played an active role in the pageant of 1575. According to the Haberdasher William Smith, 'to make waye in the streetes there are certain men apparelled lyke devells and wylde men with skybbs and certayne beadells'.<sup>111</sup> According to Withington, this policing function still allowed them to be considered as part of the entertainment. He suggests that these devils and wild men both performed crowd-clearance and provided entertainment, like the extravagantly dressed Dick fools of the Norwich processions. According to Withington, however, the wild men and, it may be assumed, the devils as well, created a 'combination of terror and amusement' more complex than that which accompanied the Dick fool.<sup>112</sup>

Devils also appeared in the Show which accompanied the Midsummer Fair at Chester in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As a part of this celebration the guilds rode with characters that also appeared in the mystery cycle plays, while morris dancers, hobbyhorses and several large model animals are also recorded.<sup>113</sup> A number of devils appeared in the Show in the sixteenth century.

Among the elements suppressed by the mayor, Henry Hardware, apparently in 1599, was 'the devill in his fethers', which he replaced with 'a man in armor'. From another manuscript we learn that the next mayor restored to the pageant,

men in women's apparell with divells attendinge them called cuppes & cannes with a divell in his shape ridinge there with [which?] preachers of God's worde and worthye divines there spake against as unlawfull and not meete with divers other thinges which are now reformed.<sup>114</sup>

The 'devill in his fethers' was apparently the responsibility of the Butchers, while the 'divells' of the 'cuppes & cannes' were presented by the Cooks and Innkeepers.<sup>115</sup> 'Cuppes & cannes' is generally agreed to refer to the final section of the Cooks' and Innkeepers' play of 'The Harrowing of Hell', which was also performed as part of the Show. Once the patriarchs have departed from Hell, a Tapstress confesses that she deceived her customers and holds up her infernal punishment as an example to others of her profession, before being welcomed to hell by Satan and two other devils.<sup>116</sup>

These examples illustrate the way in which devils were associated with a variety of more, or less, spontaneous festive activities in broadly secular contexts. For instance, the appearance of devils with the wild men locates them away from any immediate association with their religious function. The connection of devils with cross-dressing men places them in an even more general context of festive inversion, as does the similarity of festive function that they share with the Dick fool. Although sanctioned by the authorities, the accounts of the London devils offer no direct connection between them and any orthodox religious interpretation.

Richard Axton's account in European Drama of the Early Middle Ages of the connections between the Chester Show and mystery cycle, moreover, strongly suggests that these festive devils cannot be seen simply as the degeneration of the devils of mystery and morality drama. Following contemporary opinion, Axton argues that the Show may predate the mystery play, with the result that elements held in common by the Show and the cycle may in some cases reflect borrowing by the cycle from the Show, not vice versa. Indeed, the editor of the Chester records would seem to

support this when he observes that 'cuppes & cannes', which also involves the smashing of crockery by the devil with a cane, may have evolved from a non-Christian folk custom. Describing it as 'a farcical and satirical epilogue', Axton concludes that the tapstress is 'apparently common property, the key figure in a satirical set piece used by both the religious plays and the Watch'.<sup>117</sup>

Axton's study has wide-reaching implications. He argues that similarities between episodes in medieval drama and shows do not indicate that the festive versions were simply a degenerate form of the dramatic tradition. Rather, the secular traditions may well have predated and exerted a destabilizing influence on the religious drama, since moral criticism forms only one element of their festive humour. This assertion finds some support from the evidence concerning the appearance of devils at other secular festivals. In the English Mummers' plays, for example, figures with supernatural and demonic connotations still appear, such as Devil Doubt and Beelzebub. In the collected versions of these plays, however, their disguise seems to have involved, at most, blacking up and they have lost any direct supernatural significance that they might have possessed. However, the form and seasonal nature of such performances do hint at some parallels with the devils of the London and Chester Shows. The evidence they represent for a secular tradition of performing demonic characters would seem to strengthen the case for a connection between the Chester devils and the many instances in European folk drama of animal or demonic disguises.<sup>118</sup>

Establishing this connection, however, raises both historical and theoretical problems. All the examples of such English folk drama were collected later than the early modern period. It is probable that social and economic change altered these performances considerably between their lost medieval forms and the eighteenth century, and we cannot be sure of the nature of this alteration. It is impossible to say with certainty that there was an English folk drama in the medieval or early modern periods to which the Chester show may be more confidently related. Indeed, Billington has suggested that folk drama, in the form of the English Mummers' plays, was either insignificant or non-existent in that period.<sup>119</sup> As previously noted, the methodology of modern folk studies in this field is itself problematic. The connection made by E. K. Chambers between mystery devils and classical, saturnalian, revelry, for example, seems to perpetuate a Frazerian idea of primitivism and

lost ritual. However, Axton's observations and conclusions regarding the influence of other contemporary festive performance traditions upon religious drama in the late medieval and early modern periods are clearly relevant whether or not these external traditions are defined as a form of folk drama. Without pursuing this argument in greater theoretical detail, it is sufficient for the purposes of this study to observe that secular traditions of festive folly and monstrous performances existed within what their adherents would have considered a Christian framework. The evidence regarding the particular characteristics of these traditions and their place within their culture may be considered without the necessity to become absorbed into problematic arguments regarding their ancestry.<sup>120</sup>

Notably for this study, the uneasy tension between moral exposition and festive amusement which Axton detects in the 'cuppes & cannes' episode is echoed in the portrayal of devil or vice figures in a number of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century morality plays.<sup>121</sup> Most of the morality drama does not stray beyond the bounds of the homiletic and theologically orthodox comedy of evil discussed in Chapter One. However, a number of portrayals of devils, or devil-like characters, may be considered to reflect the more complex tradition of demonic disguise which Axton's study suggests existed.

The most famous example is the portrayal of the devil Titivillus in the anonymous morality Mankind. Titivillus was traditionally associated with such orthodox demonic activities as 'the recording of whispers, lies, false oaths, and idle talk'. However, a number of modern critics have felt that the charismatic humour of Titivillus comes to dominate the play, overriding the function of his comedy as an exposition of evil. Robert Weimann and G. A. Lester have connected the charismatic entertainment of Titivillus with elements of the English Mummer's play.<sup>122</sup> Less problematically, Christine Richardson and Jackie Johnston detect a mood of unconditional merriment in the play that has strong similarities to the communal pleasures of liminal phenomena:

While we find order restored at the end of the play, the prime theatrical response may well be that of delight in the carnival energy, a response which celebrates the play world creation.<sup>123</sup>



Similarly, the late morality Like Will to Like, which was published in 1568 and possibly revived as late as 1600, provides a good example of the way in which stage devils could retain a more secular festive association with entertainment and humour, suggestive of the evidence from Chester, within a dramatic tradition with predominantly didactic aims.<sup>124</sup>

While it announces the homiletic intention of the play, the Prologue, in a rather ambivalent manner, offers two different explanations of its comic method:

Heer in as it were in a glasse se you may:

The aduancement of vertue of vice the decay [...]

And because diuers men of diuers mindes be,

Some doo matters of mirth and pastime require:

Other some are delighted with matters of grauitie,

To please all men is our authours cheef desire.

Therefore mirth with measure to sadnes is annexed:

Desiring that none heer at our matter wilbe perplexed [...]

And sith mirth for sadnes is a sauce moste sweet,

Take mirth then with measure that best sauceth it.<sup>125</sup>

The juxtaposition of offers of personal improvement and entertainment in this manner seems to suggest that the play's festive and didactic impulses are not fully reconciled. The final culinary metaphor, in particular, suggests an uneasy collaboration between the homily and the 'mirth' of the play, rather than the moral humour of the comedy of evil.

To some extent, this ambiguity seems to be born out by the play itself. In Like Will to Like, devil Lucifer, like Titivillus, is a dynamic devil of considerable comic appeal. The initial

conversation between the Devil and Nichol Newfangle (ll. 110-258) and the Devil's dance with the Collier (ll.211-27) are particularly lively comic moments as, for example, is the late scene in which the Devil carries off Nichol on his back. On one level, this late scene can be interpreted as the culmination of a sequence of homiletic imagery centred upon the ideas of the gibbet (the 'two legged mare') and Balaam's ass:

NICHOL                    Now for a pair of spurres I would giue a good grote:  
                                   To try whether this lade doo amble or trot.  
                                   Farwel my masters til I come again,  
                                   For now I must make a iourney into spain.  
                                   [He rideth away on the Deuils back.]<sup>126</sup>

At the same time, however, the portrayal of Lucifer throughout the play seems to realize the ambiguities in the play's comedy suggested by the Prologue, where the function of 'mirth' as a method for keeping the audience's attention is stressed, rather than its homiletic function.

Robert C. Jones has argued that the advertisements for the moralities 'lured their audiences with promises of the mirth and game to be provided by the vices'. In the play itself, the Vice or devil entices the audience into enjoying his entertainment, until a darkening in the tone of the play forces the audience to renounce its growing complicity with the forces of evil, however charismatic the entertainment.<sup>127</sup> This suggests that the antics of Lucifer and Titivillus perhaps reflect the incidence in the morality drama of a more eclectic humour which might be associated with the wider tradition of festive devils and over which the homiletic impulse in the play could perhaps exercise at best only provisional control.

Therefore, the evidence suggests that there was a long-standing tradition of performing devils both within drama and festive shows during the late medieval and early modern periods. There is insufficient evidence to suggest the extent to which this tradition existed inside or outside of an 'official' culture, if indeed the concept of an 'official' culture has any meaning in this context.

However, the association of devils with festivity and humour sometimes seems to be engaged only provisionally in fulfilling a homiletic function in late medieval and earlier Tudor drama. Devil performances also seem to have occurred in entertainment which had, in all probability, an even more secular context, such as the Chester Shows. The evidence suggests that performances of devils occurred in a range of cultural contexts and that these performances were probably informed by cultural associations which exceeded the closed and simple homiletic function ascribed to the comedy of evil by some commentators. Such devil performances are reminiscent of the supernatural and monstrous disguises associated by anthropologists with liminal-type activities in many cultures, considered in Chapter One. As such, the activities within which the devils appeared could serve various social functions and carry a range of meanings within different cultural contexts.

There is no reason to suppose that an early modern audience would have considered these devils, at least under normal circumstances, to be anything other than elaborate disguises. However, in a period when the physical existence of the devil was still widely accepted, such images had particular power. The typical costume of a devil in the drama was undoubtedly easily identified with the actual form of real devils. The shift from the stage or show devil as moral metaphor or festive symbol towards the stage devil as a realistic representation of the devil, seems to have presented little problem, as may be suggested by the famous account of “the visible apparition of the devil on the stage at the Belsavage playhouse” during an Elizabethan performance of Doctor Faustus.<sup>128</sup>

The later dramatic portrayal of devils in plays concerned with magic, possession or witchcraft needs to be understood as more than just an inherited mode of performance. Like the spectacular shows of jugglers, such performances could be associated with everyday beliefs regarding the efficacy of the supernatural and its impact on human lives. It cannot be automatically assumed from the background evidence that the performance of tricks or the assumption of monstrous costumes on the professional stage of the last decades of the sixteenth century or the first decades of the seventeenth century automatically demystified the subject-matter for its audience. Rather, in the same way that Diane Purkiss suggests that Edmund Robinson’s narrative employs a range of cultural materials, including folktale motifs, to realize an account of witchcraft with some

credibility, so the association of both potentially supernatural tricks and festive devils with entertainment was available to be developed by the playwrights of the period.

## **VI. Conclusion: the supernatural in the culture of early modern England**

The purpose of this chapter has been two-fold. First, the range of beliefs regarding the supernatural which circulated in early modern England has been surveyed and discussed. Secondly, the relationship between those beliefs and other facets of the culture of the period with particular relevance to the dramatic representation of the supernatural in late medieval and earlier Tudor drama has been considered in the context of juggling and also the tradition of stage devils.

While some earlier studies of the dramatic portrayal of the supernatural have been comprehensive in their coverage of 'historical background' in this area, it is apparent that many have not. In particular, the interest of several critics in the hermetic tradition expounded by Yates probably places an undue emphasis on theories with which the vast majority of the audience would have been only vaguely familiar. Moreover, the tendency of such criticism is to isolate that aspect from other kinds of early modern belief and practice concerning the supernatural and thereby create a firm distinction between strands of thought which would not have been apparent to most contemporaries. While this study adopts the principle that different trends in early modern thought need to be distinguished from each other in order for the contemporary context of the comic representation of the supernatural to be explored, the complexity of much of the contemporary evidence for beliefs and practices also needs to be recognized. In particular, the work of Purkiss and Gibson has indicated that key contemporary contextual documents, such as witchcraft pamphlets, can be influenced by a complex set of conflicting cultural forces.

Where older studies have attempted to be comprehensive, they invariably fail to reflect the diversity and fluidity of patterns of belief in early modern England.<sup>129</sup> This study aims to supplement the work of previous critics by considering the comic portrayal of the supernatural in the context of the more complex early modern cultural background which historians, over the previous

three decades, have endeavoured to map. This will necessitate an appreciation of the complex interrelationship between various beliefs and practices within the period considered above, for example, between demonological theories and other widespread beliefs regarding witchcraft; or between recourse to magic and more marginal areas of supernatural belief such as fairies. It will also require a consideration of the 'function' of the supernatural within early modern culture as an explanation of misfortune or a resort for those seeking various kinds of fantastic explanations or solutions for the events of their everyday lives. It will be equally essential to guard against the reductive tendencies of overly functionalist approaches. The supernatural was not merely a source of practical aid or threat, but also belonged to a larger symbolic framework (or possibly one or more of a series of symbolic frameworks) with moral and cosmological significance.<sup>130</sup>

In the case of witches, magicians and fairies, the presentation to the audience of the exceptional and wonderful, but also the contemporarily relevant, was central to the comic portrayal of the supernatural on the early modern stage. Although playwrights and their printed sources may have concentrated upon the sensational aspects of the subject, this did not necessarily divorce their representation from engaging with widely held contemporary beliefs. In the following chapters the ways in which a series of comic representations of the supernatural reflect the contested nature of the wider culture itself will be explored. One prominent critic has recently argued, in the case of witchcraft plays, that the approach to the subject-matter ultimately supported the rise of sceptical thought regarding the supernatural.<sup>131</sup> However, this study will argue, with reference to the comic representation of a range of supernatural phenomena, that the promotion of scepticism should be seen as only one facet of the drama of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Playwrights could draw on the interaction between earlier theatrical traditions and also upon the new potential of the theatre, as discussed in Chapter One, to produce a rich tapestry of comic representation which could engage with a wide range of early modern English thought regarding the supernatural.

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Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> A Briefe Description of the Notorious Life of John Lambe, Otherwise called Doctor Lambe Together With His Ignominious Death (Amsterdam, 1629), p. 6.
- <sup>2</sup> Edmund Bower, Doctor Lamb Revived, or Witchcraft Condemned in Anne Bodenham a Servant of his, who was Arraigned and Executed the Lent assezes Last at Salisbury [...] (London, 1653), p. 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Anne Bodenham's case is discussed in detail by Diane Purkiss, The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 147-53.
- <sup>4</sup> A Briefe Description, pp. 20-1; Purkiss, Witch, p. 147; Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1971; Penguin, 1991), p. 412.
- <sup>5</sup> Bower, p. 1.
- <sup>6</sup> A Briefe Description, pp. 20-1.
- <sup>7</sup> A Briefe Description, p. 6.
- <sup>8</sup> Stuart Clark, Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), p. 472.
- <sup>9</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 27-57. Thomas's conception of this 'popular' belief is problematic in so far as it might be taken to imply that such views were inevitably confined to the least educated and parts of their society with the lowest social status. As this chapter will demonstrate, similar views could be held by those of higher social status with greater access to education.
- <sup>10</sup> Purkiss, Witch, p. 149.
- <sup>11</sup> Johann Weyer, De praestigiis daemonum, et incantationibus, ac veneficiis (1583).

- <sup>12</sup> Reginald Scot, The Discoverie of Witchcraft, ed. by the Rev. Montague Summers (John Rodker, 1930; repr. New York: Dover, 1972), p. 14.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 87.
- <sup>14</sup> King James, Daemonologie, ed. by G. B. Harrison, Elizabethan and Jacobean Quartos (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966); Thomas, Religion, pp. 684-5; Stuart Clark, Thinking with Demons, pp. 211-12, 205.
- <sup>15</sup> On the relationship between Bruno and modern scientific thought, see Hilary Gatti, Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).
- <sup>16</sup> Clark, Thinking with Demons, pp. 294–310; Thomas, Religion, p. 693.
- <sup>17</sup> William Turner, A Compleat History of the Most Remarkable Providences, Both of Justice and Mercy Which Have Hapned in this Present Age (London, 1697), sig. b<sup>r</sup>, p. 16.
- <sup>18</sup> See, for example, the 1751 case of Thomas Colley, in James Sharpe, Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550-1750 (1996; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), pp. 1-5.
- <sup>19</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), p. 187. Claire Fanger, 'Medieval Ritual Magic: What It Is and Why We Need to Know More About It', in Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions in Medieval Ritual Magic, ed. by Claire Fanger (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), pp. vii-xviii (p. xvi), notes that medieval ritual magic was often 'about real life'.
- <sup>20</sup> See Thomas, Religion, p. 265: 'the cosmos was an organic unity in which every part bore a sympathetic relationship to the rest [...] Three main types of magical activity thus lay open: natural magic, concerned to exploit the occult properties of the elemental world; celestial magic, involving the influence of the stars; and ceremonial magic, an appeal for aid to spiritual beings.'
- <sup>21</sup> Thomas, Religion, p. 294. Alan Macfarlane, Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 115-30. On the survival of such magic see Peter Rushton, 'A note on the survival of popular Christian magic',

Folklore, 91 (1980), 115-18. Thomas, Religion, pp. 252-300, presents numerous examples of popular magic in the early modern period.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 272-3. Norman Cohn, Europe's Inner Demons: The Demonization of Christians in Medieval Christendom (London: Chatto and Heinemann, 1975; revised and repr. 1993), pp. 102-17.

<sup>23</sup> Bodleian MS eMus. 243, p. 44<sup>r</sup>. The manuscript was apparently written in 1622.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 256, 268-9, 274-6, 280.

<sup>25</sup> Bodleian MS Ballard 66, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Bodleian MS eMus. 243, p. 47<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> Kieckhefer, p. 8. See also Cohn, pp. 106 and Fanger, pp. vii-viii. E. M. Butler, Ritual Magic (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949), pp. 58-9. On the history of beliefs regarding the Devil, including his perceived reality in the early modern period, see Cohn, pp. 16-34; Thomas, Religion, pp. 559-69.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 562, 565-7. Clark, Thinking with Demons, pp. 161-77; Scot, p. 86.

<sup>29</sup> Cohn, pp. 104-5, 107-8, 111.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas, Religion, p. 274; Butler, p. 62. Cf. Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, De Occulta Philosophia (1533), trans. by J. F. as Three Books of Occult Philosophy (1651), sig. A2<sup>r</sup>: 'A Magician doth not amongst learned men signifie a sorcerer, or one that is superstitious, or devilish; but a wise man, a priest, a prophet.'

<sup>31</sup> Thomas, Religion, p. 616.

<sup>32</sup> Frances A. Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition (1964; repr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 142. Other significant works include The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) and Theatre of the World (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969); see also Peter French, John Dee: The World of the Elizabethan Magus (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972). The model proposed by this



historical school of thought will subsequently be referred to, following Yates, as ‘the hermetic tradition’.

<sup>33</sup> See Barbara Howard Traister, Heavenly Necromancers: The Magician in English Renaissance Drama (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984), pp. 1-2. Traister’s study concentrates upon the ‘elitist and philosophical’ early modern view of the magician, ‘best studied in the writings of the Italian neoplatonists’. Traister, p. 20, confines her study of other magical practices: ‘though for the purposes of my study popular magic is pretty much dismissed in this footnote [...] The practices and beliefs of popular magic served to further confuse the terminology and interpretations of magic available to both dramatists and their audiences in Tudor-Stuart England’. John S. Mebane, Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition in Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) also focuses upon the influence of the hermetic tradition on the drama.

<sup>34</sup> Gatti, Giordano Bruno, pp. 4, 17, 23-5, and 207-8. Gatti correctly identifies Yates’s thought is not consistent in this central aspect of her theory.

<sup>35</sup> Agrippa, Occult Philosophy, p. 448: ‘but evil spirits are overcome by us through the assistance of the good’. See also D. P. Walker, Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella, Studies of the Warburg Institute 22 (London: Warburg Institute, 1958), p.90. However, Walker suggests that Agrippa, in his retraction of magic entitled De Vanitate et Vanitate omnium Scientiarum et Artium, may have been trying to differentiate his theurgic magic from ‘magic involving bad demons’. De Vanitate was published in an English translation by ‘Ja[mes] San[dford], Gent.’ in 1569 as Of the Vanitie and Uncertaintie of Artes and Sciences’.

<sup>36</sup> Harkness, Deborah E., John Dee’s Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy, and the End of Nature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 118-27, 215. Fanger, pp. viii-ix, also distinguishes between a ‘devotional’ (from the perspective of the operators) angelic magic and ceremonial magic in the medieval period, while noting the ‘permeable boundaries’ between them.

<sup>37</sup> The Diaries of John Dee, ed. by Edward Fenton (Oxfordshire: Day Books, 1998),

pp. 27, 217-18. For the most recent biography of Dee, see Benjamin Woolley, The Queen's Conjuror: the Science and Magic of Dr Dee (London: HarperCollins, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Sharpe, Instruments, p. 281.

<sup>39</sup> Anne Somerset, Unnatural Murder: Poison at the Court of James I (1997; repr. London: Phoenix, 1998), p. 325. The Autobiography and Personal Diary of Dr Simon Forman, The Celerated Astrologer, From A. D. 1552, to A.D. 1602, from the Unpublished Manuscripts in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, ed. by James Orchard Halliwell (London: [n. pub.], 1849), p. 19. Forman may be using the term 'necromancy' loosely here. 'Necromancy' technically referred to the use of the dead in rituals to raise spirits. See Thomas, Religion, p. 274. Judith Cook, Dr Simon Forman: A Most Notorious Physician (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001) provides a recent popular account of Forman which makes some assumptions concerning the context for Forman's activities not shared by this study. See also A. L. Rowse, Simon Forman Sex and Society in Shakespeare's Age (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974).

<sup>40</sup> Thomas, Religion, p. 272, Macfarlane, p. 57, notes an increase in Essex after 1647 of the number of cases of witchcraft about which the Grand Jury, formed of minor gentry, rejected as Ignoramus and so failed to lead to an indictment.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas, Religion, p. 271. See also Clark, Thinking with Demons, pp. 254-5, for a consideration of the complex relationship between popular and elite intellectual enquiries in the work of Francis Bacon.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas, Religion, p. 594.

<sup>43</sup> Jacobus Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer, Malleus Maleficarum: The Hammer of Witchcraft (1486), trans. by the Rev. Montague Summers, ed. by Pennethorne Hughes (London: Folio Society, 1968), pp. 54-6.

<sup>44</sup> William Perkins, A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft (Cambridge: 1608), sig. 3<sup>r</sup>. On inversion or contrariety as principles of demonology, see Stuart Clark, 'Inversion, Misrule and the

Meaning of Witchcraft', Past and Present, 87 (1980), pp. 98-127, and also Clark, Thinking with Demons, pp. 4-93.

<sup>45</sup> George Gifford, A Dialogue concerning Witches and Witchcraftes: In Which is Laide Open How Craftely the Divell Deceiueth Not Onely the Witches but Many Other and so Leadeth them Awne into Many Great Errours (London, 1593), sig. A3<sup>r</sup>. Clark, Thinking with Demons, pp. 479-85, discusses the demonization of various types of magical practice by Catholic and Protestant writers who considered them superstitious.

<sup>46</sup> Clark, Thinking with Demons, pp. 457-65.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 301-32. Perkins, p. 47. See also Leland L. Estes, 'Good Witches, Wise Men, Astrologers, and Scientists: William Perkins and the Limits of the European Witch-Hunts', in Hermeticism and the Renaissance, ed. by Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus (Washington: Folger, 1988), pp. 154-65; Stuart Clark, 'The rational witchfinder: conscience, demonological naturalism and popular superstitions', in Science, Culture and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe, ed. by Stephen Pumfrey and others (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 222-48. Although he denied the existence of the demonic pact and so of witchcraft, even a writer like Johan Weyer, whose De Praestigiis Daemonum (1563) was a major influence on Scot, believed in the existence of the 'magus infamis' ('black magician'). See West, The Invisible World: A Study of Pneumatology in Elizabethan Drama (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1939; repr. Octagon Books, 1969), p. 36; Walker, pp. 152-3.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 763-5, 616.

<sup>49</sup> For example, see Macfarlane, p. 95: 'it would seem that it was particular pressures within the village, rather than an external event, such as the arrival of a witch-hunter, a general economic recession, or political uncertainty, which led to accusations.' Clark, Thinking with Demons, p. 440, comments: 'in early modern Europe [...] most ordinary people regarded witchcraft as a cause of affliction'.

<sup>50</sup> Macfarlane, pp. 14-15, 25. Quotations are from the 1563 Act.

<sup>51</sup> For example, see Thomas, Religion, p. 525: ‘even on the Continent, the idea of witchcraft as devil-worship, rather than maleficium, was slow to triumph [...] In England, where most demonological treatises were locked up in Latin or some other alien language, witchcraft for most men was still an activity - doing harms to others by supernatural means - not a belief or a heresy’.

<sup>52</sup> Sharpe, Instruments, p. 71. See also Carlo Ginzburg, Ecstasies: Decyphering the Witches’ Sabbath trans. by Raymond Rosenthal (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1990), pp. 6-13.

<sup>53</sup> Sharpe, Instruments, pp. 78-9.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, p. 78.

<sup>55</sup> See *ibid*, p. 78: ‘What is clear is that popular views about witches were able to develop and become more elaborate while having only very uncertain contact with the concepts of the learned’. Sharpe, *ibid*, p. 77, suggests more emphatically that beliefs regarding the sabbat were in circulation which were not influenced by the works of learned demonologists.

<sup>56</sup> Purkiss, Witch, pp. 91-112 (quotation from p. 93). Marion Gibson, Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 81-3. Cf. Macfarlane, pp. 197-8 and pp. 145-70. When considering the revisionist views of Purkiss and Gibson, it is worth noting that Thomas’s own conclusions regarding early modern witchcraft beliefs extend beyond the model for accusations of witchcraft stimulated by ‘unneighbourly action’. See Thomas, Religion, pp. 610-28 (p. 624): ‘those modern historians who dismiss the whole notion of witchcraft as groundless are therefore as mistaken as the contemporary demonologists who saw themselves surrounded by a sect of ritual devil-worshippers’.

<sup>57</sup> Macfarlane, pp. 15, 61 (Table 4), and 18.

<sup>58</sup> For general studies of possession and obsession in early modern England see Thomas, Religion, pp. 569-88; D. P. Walker, Unclean Spirits: Possession and Exorcism in France and England in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries (London: Scholar Press, 1981); Clark, Thinking with Demons, pp. 389-434; F. W. Brownlow, Shakespeare, Harsnett, and the Devils of Denham

(Newark, London and Toronto: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 1993).

<sup>59</sup> John Darrel, A True Narration of the Strange and Grevous Vexation by the Devil, of 7. Persons in Lanca-Shire, and William Somers of Nottingham [...] ([n.p.], 1600). Walker, Unclean Spirits, pp. 4-10, et passim.

<sup>60</sup> S. [amuel] H. [arsnett], A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures, to With-draw the Harts of his Majesties Subjects from their Allegiance [...] (London, 1603) and A Discovery of the Fravdvlent Practises of Iohn Darrel Bachelor of Artes, in his Proceedings concerning the Pretended Possession and Dispossession of William Somers at Nottingham: of Thomas Darling, the Boy of Burton at Caldwell (London, 1599). Walker, Unclean Spirits, p. 62, notes that between 1598 and 1601 no fewer than 13 items were published by both sides regarding the Somers case.

<sup>61</sup> Harsnett, Declaration, p. 25-6, 131; Walker, *ibid*, pp. 10-17.

<sup>62</sup> The Most Strange and Admirable Discoverie of the Three Witches of Warboys [...] (London, 1593). Walker, Unclean Spirits, pp. 8-10 and 49-52.

<sup>63</sup> Darrel, sig. A1<sup>r</sup>; Walker, Unclean Spirits, pp. 58, 16-17.

<sup>64</sup> Walker, Unclean Spirits, p. 15. Gibson, Reading Witchcraft, p. 26. Elizabeth Frauncis' confession is perhaps not typical, but apparently embraces elements of sexual guilt and fantasies of murder and infanticide. See The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches (1566), in Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing ed. by Marion Gibson (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 10-24.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 314-17 and 677. Thomas notes he has encountered 'over forty cases' of cunning folk accused of witchcraft.

<sup>66</sup> James's intervention in cases of witchcraft and possession is discussed in greater detail below, in the context of Middleton's The Witch (Chapter Seven, Section II) and Jonson's Devil is an Ass (Chapter Eight, Section III).

<sup>67</sup> See Gibson, Reading Witchcraft, pp.13-49, 118-56, et passim.

<sup>68</sup> On astrology, see Thomas, Religion, pp. 335-458. On poison and magic, see *ibid*, p. 226.

<sup>69</sup> Barber, p. 143. The passage to which Barber refers is A Midsummer Night's Dream, ed. by Harold F. Brooks, The Arden Shakespeare (Methuen, 1979; repr. London: Routledge, 1988), II.i.47-52.

<sup>70</sup> Minor White Latham, The Elizabethan Fairies: The Fairies of Folklore and the Fairies of Shakespeare (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), p. 177. See also Katherine Briggs, The Anatomy of Puck: An Examination of Fairy Beliefs among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and Successors (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), p. 44: 'Shakespeare, following a hint from Lyly, had gathered the things that most pleased him out of the wealth of fairy material to his hand, and had combined and transmuted them into our greatest fairy poem'.

<sup>71</sup> Briggs, Anatomy, p. 6. Thomas, Religion, p. 724, questions the 'hard and fast divisions' of fairy types in her work. See also Katherine Briggs, The Vanishing People: A Study in Traditional Fairy Beliefs, (London: Batsford, 1978). When it encompasses a reductive model by sentimentally abstracting a pure and primitive cultural essence from the extant evidence, the approach of the folklorist can fail to communicate the complex historical specificity of a culture and suggest ahistorical similarities between particular traditions which may not aid understanding of either in their historical context. See Peter Happé, 'A Guide to Criticism of Medieval English Theatre', in The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Theatre, ed. by Richard Beadle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 312-43 (p. 340); Richard Bauman, 'Folklore', in Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments, pp. 29-40 (pp. 29-32).

<sup>72</sup> Diane Purkiss, Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 2000), pp. 4, 7.

<sup>73</sup> Purkiss, Troublesome Things, p. 158.

<sup>74</sup> King James, Daemonologie (1597), pp. 73-4.

<sup>75</sup> The Examination of John Walsh (1566), in Early Modern Witches, pp. 25-32 (p. 28).

<sup>76</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 727-8; Briggs, Anatomy, pp. 115-16. The procedure 'To Call Oberion' is to be found in Bodleian MS Douce 116, p. 174.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, The Bridling, Sadling and Ryding, of a Rich Churle in Hampshire, By the Subtle Practise of One Judith Philips (1595), in Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618, ed. by Barbara Rosen (1969; repr. Amhurst, Massachusetts, 1991), pp. 213-18. This case, together with that of John and Alice West, is discussed by Gamini Salgado in The Elizabethan Underworld (London: Dent; Totowa NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), pp. 94-6, 93. See also the deception perpetrated against of Thomas Rogers, in C. J. Sisson, 'A Topical Reference in "The Alchemist"', in Joseph Quincey Adams: Memorial Studies, by James G. McManaway and others (Washington D.C.: Folger Institute Library, 1948), pp. 739-41.

<sup>78</sup> Annabel Gregory, 'Witchcraft, Politics and "Good Neighbourhood" in Early Seventeenth-Century Rye, Past and Present, 133 (1991), 31-66 (p. 46).

<sup>79</sup> The Most Strange and Admirable Discoverie, sig. O3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>80</sup> Winfried Schleiner, 'Imaginative Sources for Shakespeare's Puck', Shakespeare Quarterly, 36 (1985), 65-8.

<sup>81</sup> Most Strange and Admirable Discoverie, sig. H1<sup>v</sup>. OED, 2nd edn, also lists as sources or analogues for 'puck' the Old Norse púki, and the Irish púca.

<sup>82</sup> William Lilly, Mr William Lilly's History of his Life and Times from the Year 1602 to 1681, ed. by Elias Ashmole (London, 1715), pp. 102-3, quoted in Purkiss, Troublesome Things, p. 188.

<sup>83</sup> Briggs, Anatomy, p. 113. Briggs supposes Ashmole's interest was more than antiquarian.

<sup>84</sup> Turner, ii, pp. 116-19.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Kirk, The Secret Common-Wealth & A Short Treatise of Charms and Spels, ed. by Stewart Sanderson, Folklore Society Mistletoe Series (Cambridge and Totowa NJ: D. S. Brewer and Rowman and Littlefield, 1976), pp. 89, 100. Sanderson, p. 21, argues that The Secret Commonwealth was written in 1690 or 1691, on Kirk's return from London to Aberfoyle.

<sup>86</sup> Turner, ii, p. 119; Thomas, Religion, pp. 727-9. Briggs, Anatomy, p. 46.

<sup>87</sup> Purkiss, Troublesome Things, pp. 85-115, considers accounts of fairies from early modern Scottish witch-trials.

<sup>88</sup> Laroque, p. 22. Laroque's source is Pierre Le Loyer, A Treatise of Specters or Straunge Sights, Visions and Aparitions Appearing Sensibly unto Men, trans. by Zachary Jones (London, 1605), p. 201.

<sup>89</sup> Purkiss, Troublesome Things, p. 186.

<sup>90</sup> Scot, p. 86

<sup>91</sup> Katherine Briggs, 'The Folds of Folklore', Shakespeare Survey, 17 (1964), 167-79 (pp. 167-9).

<sup>92</sup> Laroque, p. 21.

<sup>93</sup> See Bridget Gellert Lyons, Voices of Melancholy: Studies in Literary Treatments of Melancholy in Renaissance England (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. xiii. Lyons suggests that established attitudes concerning melancholy came under pressure from more modern schools of thought concerning psychology and physiology 'at the very time that English writers of the Renaissance were creating masterpieces based upon it'.

<sup>94</sup> Ginzburg, p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 5. The perception of time in early modern agrarian societies is another good example of a subject which presents the modern mind with a particularly tough interpretative and descriptive challenge. See Laroque, pp. 29-31.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas, Religion, p. 278. On the Overbury case, see also Rowse, Simon Forman, pp. 257-61.

<sup>97</sup> David P. Young, Something of Great Constancy: The Art of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 26.

<sup>98</sup> Purkiss, Witch, pp. 159, 234. Ibid, p. 244, suggests that the fact that the witches remained in Lancaster Castle after their pardon by Charles I, as a sign of a persisting belief in their guilt even after acquittal.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted by Sharpe, Instruments, p. 164.



<sup>100</sup> Thomas M. Greene, 'Magic and Festivity at the Renaissance Court', Renaissance Quarterly, 40 (1987), 636-58 (pp. 638-41 et passim).

<sup>101</sup> 'The Franklin's Tale', in The Riverside Chaucer, ed. by Larry D. Benson and others, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 178-89 (V.1141). For definitions, see The Riverside Chaucer, pp. 1277, 1300. See also Chaucer's description of the classical and post-classical magicians in The House of Fame, in The Riverside Chaucer, pp. 347-73 (ll. 1259-60): 'Ther saugh I pleye jugelours, Magiciens and tregetours'. The party of magicians is singled out for description, along with the party of 'mynstralles And gestiours' (ll. 1197-8).

<sup>102</sup> Scot, pp. 163-203; S.[amuel] R.[id], The Art of Iuggling or Legerdemaine [...] (London, 1612); Hocus Pocus Junior, The Anatomie of Legerdemain [...] (London, 1634). See Barbara A. Mowat, 'Prospero, Agrippa, and Hocus Pocus', ELR, 11 (1981), 281-303.

<sup>103</sup> Hocus Pocus Junior, sig. A4<sup>v</sup>. Scot's list, p. 174, includes the use of 'arythmetically devises', 'naturall magike', and 'confederacie'. As a thinker with a generally sceptical response to the supernatural, Scot's use of the term 'naturall magike' should not be misunderstood, however. He makes several references to it in what seems to be an attempt to appropriate its use from the very different ones given to it by occult philosophers and magicians. The cabalists Ficino and Bruno, for example, made only a fine distinction between natural and some kinds of angelic magic. See Wayne Shumaker, Natural Magic and Modern Science: Four Treatises 1590-1657 (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1989) pp. 20-1, 55-6. Like occultists' use of the term, Chaucer's reference to 'magik naturel' in the House of Fame (l. 1266) would seem to carry none of Scot's rationalist distinctions.

<sup>104</sup> Hocus Pocus Junior, sig. A4<sup>v</sup>. Cf. Rid, title-page.

<sup>105</sup> Scot, p. 174. Cf. Rid, sig. B2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>106</sup> Hocus Pocus Junior, sig. A3<sup>r</sup>. Original is in italics.

<sup>107</sup> Rid, sig. B2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>108</sup> Scot, p. 182. See the OED, 2nd edn, entry for ' juggler ' (definition 2), which cites sixteenth-century uses in the senses of both 'one who works marvels by the aid of magic' and 'a performer of legerdemaine'. Mowat, by contrast takes the scepticism of these treatises to reflect early modern culture more generally and therefore suggests that theatre audiences would receive allusions to juggling sceptically.

<sup>109</sup> Billington, p. 3. Cf. Cawte, pp. 13-23, who records that hobbyhorses, another monstrous festive disguise, were permitted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so they could be used to raise money for church funds.

<sup>110</sup> Robert Withington, English Pageantry, 2 vols (Harvard University Press, 1926; repr. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1963).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, II, 15, 22.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, I, 72-4.

<sup>113</sup> Records of Early English Drama: Chester, ed. by Lawrence M. Clopper (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), pp. lii-liii. Ibid, p. liii, suggests the Show began in 1499. Cawte, p. 29, suggests 1498.

<sup>114</sup> Withington, I, 44-5. Records: Chester, p. 526, suggests that Hardware may have intermittently suppressed the Shows from 1560 to 1600. It also argues that, although devils may only have been performed sporadically in the later sixteenth century, the Butchers' devils were certainly revived in 1616.

<sup>115</sup> Records: Chester, p. liii.

<sup>116</sup> The Chester Plays, Early English Text Society Extra Series LXII (London: Oxford University Press, 1892, repr. 1926), XVII.261-320. In connection with the proverbial phrase 'pull devil, pull baker', The Dictionary of Proverbs, ed. by Linda and Roger Flavell (London, Kyle Cathie, 1993), pp. 69-70, recounts a nineteenth-century account of a 'magic lantern show' supposedly derived from 'a traditional puppet show of the sixteenth-century' in which the miller is eventually punished for making short-weight loaves by being carried off to hell in his own basket by the devil.

<sup>117</sup> Axton, pp. 183, 184. Axton refers to the Midsummer Show as the 'Watch'. Records: Chester, p. liii.

<sup>118</sup> Axton, p. 35 et passim; Alex Helm, The English Mummers' Play, The Folklore Society Mistletoe Series (Cambridge: Brewer; Totowa NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981), pp. 38-9, 48; Cawte, pp. 113-15; Billington, p. 110. R. M. Lumiansky, 'Comedy and Theme in the Chester "Harrowing of Hell"', Tulane Studies in English, 10 (1960), 5-12, provides a more orthodox Christian interpretation of that play.

<sup>119</sup> Helm, pp. 7-10; Billington, pp. 103. Peter Happé, 'Guide', p. 340.

<sup>120</sup> E. K. Chambers, The Mediaeval Stage, 2 vols ([n. pl.]: Oxford University Press, 1903), II, 91, 148; Happé, 'Guide' pp. 340; Hutton, Merry England, pp. 71-2. However, see also Hutton's discussion of the Mummers' play, *ibid*, p. 8: despite his rigorous sceptical adherence to documentary proof, Hutton comments that the Beelzebub of the later Mummers' plays 'can hardly be anything other than a pagan god-figure'. An exposition of the issues raised by the ahistorical tendencies of 'folk studies' is also provided in the context of Mummers' plays by Ronald Hutton in Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain (1996, repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 70-80. With regard to the application of 'folk studies' to the interpretation of drama, Vickers, pp. 386-7, discusses the influence of discredited Frazerian theories, including those concerning the fool and Mummers' Plays, with specific reference to the work of Robert Weimann.

<sup>121</sup> Glynn Wickham, Early English Stages 1300 to 1660, 2 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), I, 78, 122-3, notes general similarities between the characters appearing in pageants and both morality and 'Miracle' plays and notes the parallel development of these secular and religious traditions.

<sup>122</sup> Three Late Medieval Morality Plays, ed. by G. A. Lester, The New Mermaids (London: A. & C. Black; New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), pp. xxii-xxiii; Weimann, p. 116.

<sup>123</sup> Christine Richardson and Jackie Johnston, Medieval Drama, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p. 138.

<sup>124</sup> Ulpian Fulwell, Like Will to Like, in Two Moral Interludes, ed. by Peter Happé, Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 51-120 (p. 51). All reference will be to this edition. On the possible 1600 revival, see Chambers, Elizabethan, III, 317.

<sup>125</sup> Like Will to Like, ll. 42-3, 50-5, 60-1.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, ll. 1297-1301. The imagery sequence is ll. 704, 1207, 1268 and 1286-7. OED, 2nd edn, entry for 'mare' (definition 2a) cites the use at l.704 as its earliest example. On the convention of the ride on the devil's back, see L. W. Cushman, The Devil and the Vice in the English Dramatic Literature Before Shakespeare (Halle A.S / Max Niemeyer, 1900), p. 69 (quoting Harsnett's A Declaration (1603) and p. 120. Although he stresses that the devil is not usually genuinely merry in morality drama, Cushman, p. 53, sees Titivillus, in Mankind, and the Devil Lucifer, in Like Will to Like, as exceptions. See also Robert Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, ed. by J. A. Lavin, The New Mermaids (London: Ernest Benn, 1969), p. 91 (note to xv.62).

<sup>127</sup> Robert C. Jones, 'Dangerous Sport: The Audience's Engagement with the Vice in the Moral Interludes', Renaissance Drama, VI (1973), 45-64 (p. 45).

<sup>128</sup> Greenblatt, 'Shakespeare and the Exorcists', pp. 110-11. On William Prynne's account of the incident in the Belsavage playhouse, see Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus: A- and B-Texts, ed. by David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, The Revels Plays (Manchester and New York: Manchester, 1993), p. 2.

<sup>129</sup> The most famous comprehensive study is Robert Hunter West's The Invisible World. See p. 3 et passim. As noted above, prominent recent studies of the drama which focus on the hermetic tradition include those of Barbara Traister and John Mebane.

<sup>130</sup> Ginzburg, p. 6, discusses the incidence in witchcraft confessions of 'a symbolic richness that does not seem reducible to the psychological need for reassurance, to regional tensions, or to the general notions about causality current in England at the time'.

<sup>131</sup> Purkiss, Witch, p. 283: 'it is mostly early modern literary writers who clump together figures of otherness to make one big Other of disorder. In doing so they weaken rather than strengthen the

specificity of the images and stories they deal with, which might have very highly developed meanings in other contexts; you could even say that the stage contributes to acculturation, and it certainly contributes to the growth of the kind of scepticism that eventually ensures the end of the successful prosecution of the witch, though not the end of stories of beliefs'.

### Chapter Three

#### 'What Art Can Work, the Frolic Friar Knows': Comic Representation in "Doctor Faustus" and "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay"<sup>1</sup>

##### **I. Introduction: magic on the early modern English stage**

A modern study of the magician in English early modern drama by Barbara Traister identifies a stereotype for the stage magician drawn from two major influences. The first is the intellectual hermetic tradition, with its strong neoplatonic influences, and the other 'popular and literary, perhaps most clearly expressed in the medieval romances'.<sup>2</sup> Traister stresses the 'relaxed, unconcerned attitude toward magic' of the medieval romances, in which 'there was none of the association between magic and learning mandatory in theories of philosophic magic'. These 'romance magicians are generally amoral' and 'quite different from the character suggested by the writings of the neoplatonic philosophers'.<sup>3</sup> The influence of neoplatonic philosophy, in particular, on literary magic becomes apparent in the works of Renaissance writers like Spenser in the greater learning of the magicians and 'the almost formulaic association of the magician with spirits or demons'. Traister's conception of romance magic is functional: 'what magicians in narrative romance do is facilitate plot action and provide spectacular effects'. They present a convenient method for manipulating the plot, rather than constituting significant subject-matter, with contemporary relevance, in their own right.<sup>4</sup>

Traister's study is representative of two significant critical approaches to the literary or dramatic portrayal of magic in the early modern period. First, it reflects a tendency, already noted, among some critics to focus upon the hermetic tradition, proposed by Yates and others as the primary historical context for the literary treatment of magic. Such an approach reflects neither the diversity, nor the interrelationships which recent historical inquiry is uncovering between schools of magical thought and practice in early modern England, as discussed in Chapter Two. Secondly, Traister's model perpetuates a typical critical axiomatic divide between fictional sides to the portrayal of the supernatural, which are typically considered popular, derivative or evolved from romance, and non-fictional sides, relevant to a wider contemporary culture of beliefs and practices

which principally comprises elite forms of magic enquiry. Traister's own interpretation of the plays themselves goes beyond the principles established by her own study. Her reading of the plays however still fails to consider the drama in its full historical context of analogous works, early modern beliefs and early modern practices or, in several plays, engage specifically with issues relating to the use of comic modes.<sup>5</sup>

The relationship between the comic representation of magic and wider contemporary culture in Doctor Faustus and Friar Bacon will be considered in this chapter. An attempt will be made to redress the issues raised by the work of Traister and others by considering the drama in the context of a wider range of contemporary beliefs and practices and by adopting a more inclusive approach to the question of the contemporary relevance of the drama. In particular, it will consider ways in which fictional portrayals of magic can be seen to belong to a wider culture of belief and practice in the period and, therefore, indicate how the hypothetical divide between 'realistic' and 'literary' magic inferred by many critics of the drama might be questioned. The consideration of the representation of magic in these plays will allow some working conclusions to be identified which can be carried over into the analysis of other comic representations of magic and the supernatural in subsequent chapters.

## II. **Faustus and Bacon in early modern English prose and drama**

As a tragedy, Marlowe's Doctor Faustus (?1588-92) might be considered a surprising inclusion in a study of the comic representation of magicians and of the supernatural.<sup>6</sup> However, Doctor Faustus is a useful starting point for this study for several reasons. The significance of the comic episodes within the play is considerable. When examined in a wider cultural context, the comic episodes in Acts Three and Four, in particular, can cast new light upon the kind of impact that this difficult play might have had upon its original audience. The comic portrayal of magic in Doctor Faustus, moreover, became a significant influence on several later comic representations. Doctor Faustus and Greene's Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay belong to a group of late sixteenth-century works concerned with the two magicians. This group also includes the anonymous John of Bordeaux, the English Faust and Wagner books and, probably, a lost contemporary version or

versions of the Bacon prose romance, which survives in two later variants.<sup>7</sup> The order of composition of these works is uncertain. However, some version of the Faustus and Bacon prose narratives almost certainly preceded their respective plays, and the English Faust Book is usually regarded as a source for Doctor Faustus. The later version of the Bacon narratives seem to imitate material found in the English Faust Book, which supports to some extent the notion that the English Faust Book was composed first. Similarly, although their order of composition cannot be firmly established, many of the episodes in Friar Bacon would seem to derive thematically from the English Faust Book, which suggests that the lost prose source for Friar Bacon was attempting consciously to emulate the English Faust Book and probably the success of Doctor Faustus itself.<sup>8</sup> Conscious emulation of, or 'borrowing' from, the English Faust Book or from Doctor Faustus itself extended beyond this group of works, moreover, as this study will discuss in succeeding chapters. More generally, the comic portrayal of the supernatural in Doctor Faustus also demonstrates a range of characteristics which, it will be argued, are common to a series of plays and other works in the period. These characteristics do not suggest 'borrowing' between plays and playwrights so much as they offer evidence of more fundamental cultural connections between wider beliefs and comic theatrical representation. Such characteristics emerge from the temporally and geographically localized conditions under which cultural artefacts are produced and have meanings for their original audience which it should be the purpose of historical criticism to attempt to recover.

Consideration of the English Faust Book and also the English Wagner Book can lead us to an improved understanding of Doctor Faustus. The English Faust Book is typically accepted as a source, in a traditional literary-critical sense, for Doctor Faustus. However, both books also establish, more generally, an interesting context for our understanding of the kind of comic representation of the supernatural demonstrated by the play.

The English Faust Book (?1588-9) provides many of the episodes for Doctor Faustus. Its framing structure is clearly homiletic. The start and close of the work show Faustus's career to be an example of moral corruption and his magical practices are viewed in terms which are thoroughly consistent with the critical opinions of early modern demonologists:



But Faustus being of a naughty mind and otherwise addicted, applied not his studies, but took himself to other exercises [...]

And thus ended the whole history of Doctor Faustus his conjuration and other acts that he did in his life; out of the which example every Christian may learn, but chiefly the stiff-necked and high-minded may thereby learn to fear God [...]<sup>9</sup>

Faustus signs a transparently binding pact with the forces of the Devil and is eventually torn to pieces by them.<sup>10</sup> However, the author's awareness of the charisma of Faustus's powers and his interest in them as a source of entertainment is also apparent in several episodes. In one later passage, for example, Faustus entertains the Duke and Duchess of Anholt by having his spirit fetch fruit from the other side of the world and by creating a temporary castle full of exotic animals, food and drink.<sup>11</sup> Even more remarkable is the episode in which Faustus flies with his friends to the cellar of the Bishop of Salzburg, 'either of them upon an holly wand' and proceeds to drop a butler into a high tree.<sup>12</sup>

The English Wagner Book (1594), a sequel to the English Faust Book, declares that its intention is to reveal the truth concerning the careers of Faustus and Wagner, his servant.<sup>13</sup> It goes on, however, to offer a generically and morally ambivalent representation of the manipulation of supernatural power which is less clearly confined within a homiletic structure and more generally biased towards the spectacular and entertaining. The Wagner of this work makes no formal pact with Mephistophiles, Akercock or the spirit of the dead Faustus, and is not finally punished, even though Mephistophiles explains to him that the orthodox concept of eternal damnation is true.<sup>14</sup> To confuse the issue further, some of the early episodes in the English Wagner Book seem to suggest that trickery and gullibility at least contribute to the reputation of magicians like Faustus or Wagner, while yet others emphasize the truth of certain magical incidents.<sup>15</sup> If the early tone of this text is an attempt to treat the subject-matter with irony, it is neither consistently nor convincingly carried through. As the narrative progresses, the early exploration of differing interpretations of the Faustian story becomes less prominent and the four main characters embark upon a series of adventures that show a generic shift away from quasi-historical narrative towards a more

conventional genre of episodic romantic adventure. Most notably, they insult the 'Turk' himself, to the amusement of the Christian court.<sup>16</sup> It is clear that the ability of Wagner and his companions to entertain, sometimes assisted by supernatural powers, becomes the author's main interest. The question of damnation becomes largely forgotten as the companions embark on a series of adventures centred on the assembled Christian forces. In these later episodes, the author's criticism of Wagner and his spirits is relatively mild. In the following extract, censure seems to be confined to an attack on the indecorum of the merriment which they create, regarding them simply as part of the *dramatis personae* of a bawdy tale of knavery:

[Wagner and his spirits] were neuer content to play any merry pranckes for honest sport, but they must be so satirically full of gall, that they commonly proued infamous, sparing neither their good name on whom they committed them nor any kind of villainy, so it might procure mirth.

(p. 112, ll. 18-23)

There are clearly conflicting influences at work in both books. To differing effect, each work reveals a tension between homiletic intentions and a desire to represent the supernatural, even in the hands of Faustus or Wagner, in a less condemnatory light. John Henry Jones has described this effect in the English Faust Book as 'comprehending popular aspirations and their attendant anxieties'. The homiletic framework ultimately determines the reception of the whole, with the attractiveness of Faustus's adventures only making the 'tragedy the more poignant'.<sup>17</sup> This tragedy, therefore, has a clear moral dimension. Following the principles of the comedy of evil, the amusement generated by Faustus's antics would only serve to reveal his alliance with evil. The presentation of magic in the English Wagner Book, however, seems so remote in content and tone from a consistently tragic message as to make an unproblematic orthodox reading difficult to substantiate. Frank Baron's assessment of the German Faust Book, might well be applied to the English Wagner Book: 'the persistent effort to reject and condemn diabolical magic does not effectively cover up the potential attractiveness of the opposite tendency'.<sup>18</sup> In both the English Faust Book and the English Wagner Book there is a significant tension between the attractiveness of

their supernatural subject-matter and a tendency to attempt to suppress that attractiveness either through the use of irony or homiletic structure.

Aside from the differing degree of artistic success that they may be argued to demonstrate, it is clear that the tension between homiletic message and charismatic material is negotiated differently in each book.<sup>19</sup> However, the extent to which the tensions in the representation of the supernatural might reflect not only demonological condemnation of magic, but also other beliefs and practices, merits discussion in the case of both texts. A primary intention of both is to entertain the reader, although it is apparent, at least from the homiletic framework of the English Faust Book and the quasi-historical approach of both works, that they were not intended to be viewed as entirely frivolous and without contemporary relevance. Indeed, the emphasis on the practical use of magic in each, either as entertainment or in order to attain worldly objectives, would seem to parallel some of the less condemnatory attitudes concerning magic discussed in Chapter Two. Consequently, both the English Faust Book and the English Wagner book raise a number of interesting issues with considerable relevance for an understanding of Doctor Faustus, because in both books magic is treated, to differing extents, as a charismatic source of entertainment and humour.<sup>20</sup>

The notion that the charismatic and often comic episodes in these books had a contemporary relevance for their readers that extended beyond a closed homiletic message finds support from other texts concerning the supernatural in the period. Several early modern texts ostensibly concerned with the denunciation of witchcraft include humorous, even bawdy, supernatural episodes which do not conform to a simple homiletic structure. For example, The Most Cruell and Bloody Murther Committed by an Innkeepers Wife (1606), includes an account of how a drunk man who abused a suspected witch,

drawing his Gentleman Usher against a pale side, finds me a top of his nose a red lump as big as a cherry, & in his belly felt such a rumbling, as if the Tower of Babel had falne about his eares.<sup>21</sup>

Such passages must act as an encouragement to rethink the boundaries between received notions of fictional and non-fictional representations of the supernatural in the early modern period. As Marion

Gibson has argued, the boundaries between classes of witchcraft pamphlet can be indistinct. Her comment regarding the contrast between the trivial style and ostensibly serious subject-matter of some early modern pamphlets might also be applied to aspects of the English Faust and Wagner Books:

In them, we can see evidence of an openness, superficiality and curiosity in the popular and reasonably learned mind on the subject which we cannot find in more propagandist accounts, whether narrative or documentary.<sup>22</sup>

This study will demonstrate that a similar 'openness, superficiality and curiosity' sometimes found comic expression in the drama of the period. In spite of a tendency towards the superficial and towards the entertainment of the audience, the representation of the supernatural in such plays could continue to engage with wider contemporary opinions and practices in a variety of ways. Doctor Faustus drew heavily upon the structure and narrative of the English Faust Book, but the tension within it between homiletic framework and the charismatic nature of many of Faustus's 'superficial' comic antics is intensified in the play. Parallels between the humour of the English Faust and Wagner Books, pamphlets like The Most Cruell and Bloody Murther and Doctor Faustus, moreover, reveal deeper cultural associations between the supernatural and comedy which recur in English drama in the early modern period. Each constitutes a distinct, but related, refashioning of contemporary beliefs and practices through an artistic medium which is consistent with Victor Turner's concept of liminoid phenomena.

### III. The comedy of Doctor Faustus

The heightened tragic emphasis upon Faustus's fatal aspirations in Doctor Faustus expands upon the technique of the English Faust Book and builds considerably upon the tradition of the morality drama, to which the play owes a number of formal debts. The initial scenes in Doctor Faustus establish a complex, tragic, contrast between the appeal to the audience of the aspirations of the magician and the results of his conjuring. Harnessing the power of Marlowe's mighty line,

Faustus expresses, in verse which recalls the ambition and imagination of Tamburlaine, the desires which lead him to practise magic. Faustus, 'glutted with conceit', enjoys not least the prospect that the control of spirits will offer him earthly power:

I'll have them fly to India for gold,  
 Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,  
 And search all corners of the new-found world  
 For pleasant fruits and princely delicates.<sup>23</sup>

The context of Faustus's imaginative flights is undeniably tragic. His claim that there is 'virtue in my heavenly words', is apparently proved wrong as the events which culminate in the demonic pact develop along orthodox theological and demonological lines:

FAUSTUS            Did not he [Lucifer] charge thee to appear to me?  
 MEPH.             No, I came now hither of mine own accord.  
 FAUSTUS            Did not my conjuring speeches raise thee? Speak.  
 MEPH.             That was the cause, but yet per accidens.  
                          For when we hear one rack the name of God  
                          Abjure the Scripture and his Saviour Christ,  
                          We fly in hope to get his glorious soul.<sup>24</sup>

However, Doctor Faustus also makes significant use of comic modes. The moral dimension to Faustus's tragedy is overtly reinforced by the homiletic patterning of the comedy in the play's subplot. This, at least to some extent, perpetuates the tensions of the main plot through the appeal to the audience of the antics of Wagner and his associates and also the structural relationship between the comic episodes and the main plot.<sup>25</sup> More clearly than corresponding servant scenes in the English Faust Book, the subplot involving Wagner offers a parodic moral commentary upon the main plot which conforms to the notion of the comedy of evil.<sup>26</sup> In I.iv, for example, Wagner summons two devils to terrify Robin into entering his service:

WAGNER           The villain is bare and out of service, and so hungry that I know he would give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though it were blood raw.

ROBIN            How? My soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though 'twere blood raw? Not so, good friend. B'yr Lady, I need have it well roasted, and good sauce to it, if I pay so dear.

(I.iv.8-13 (A); cf. I.iv.8-12 (B))

Wagner's desire to recruit Robin into his own service clearly parallels Faustus's demonic pact (I.iii.90-9, II.i.59-75 (A); I.iii.87-96, II.i.59-75 (B)). Robin's reply strongly suggests that demonic service should only be undertaken for a very high price, implying that Faustus has settled for less.

In III.ii (III.iii (B)), the price of dealing with supernatural powers is also explored in a homiletic comic mode. Robin and an accomplice called Rafe in the A-text and Dick in the B-text, attempt to evade paying a Vintner for a goblet with banter, sleight-of-hand, and finally by summoning Mephistopheles. The Vintner flees in terror and Robin and his companion are transformed by the angry devil into an ape and a dog respectively. This scene has obvious parallels with the snatching of dishes by Faustus and Mephistopheles from the Papal table in the preceding scene of both texts.

There is also a gruesome humour in the subplot with clear moral implications. For example, this effect is apparent when Wagner informs the two Scholars that 'God in heaven knows' where Faustus is when he is dining, and presumably discussing magic, with Cornelius and Valdes (I.ii.6). This also reinforces the moral message of the main plot in a moral comic mode.

The overt parallels between the subplot and the main plot encourage the subplot to be understood in moral comic terms. Undoubtedly, the scenes which show Wagner and Robin conjuring, in particular their transformation by Mephistopheles into an ape and a dog, are entertaining for the audience. However, the way in which that scene, for example, functions as a grotesque parody of Faustus's own entrapment by the forces of evil indicates to the audience that it must reject such amusement (III.ii (A); III.iii (B)).

Several of the comic adventures of Faustus in Acts Three and Four conform less overtly to this kind homiletic patterning, however. In Act Three, Mephistopheles and Faustus expose the ceremonial emphasis of Roman Catholicism to ridicule at the Papal court in Rome. This culminates in both texts in the failure of the Friars to exorcize their invisible tormentors. As the Friars curse them in English and Latin, Faustus and Mephistopheles bring the scene to a spectacular conclusion:

[Faustus and Mephistopheles] beat the Friars, and fling fireworks among them, and so exeunt.

(III.i.100 (sd) (A); cf. III.ii.106 (sd) (B))

In the B-text, an extra scene is interpolated, in which Faustus and Mephistopheles, disguised as cardinals, rescue both the apostate pope, Bruno, and his papal crown from Rome.<sup>27</sup>

Anti-Catholic sentiment has already appeared in the play when Faustus requests that Mephistopheles appear to him in the shape of a friar (I.iii.26-7 (A); *ibid* (B)). The depravity of Faustus's actions is reinforced by the association of his demonic companion with Roman Catholicism in a period when the Church of Rome, and especially the Pope, were commonly associated by Protestants with the Anti-Christ.<sup>28</sup> In Act Three, however, Faustus and Mephistopheles are not identified with the hated Pope and Catholic Church, but rather with the anti-Catholic sentiment of the Protestant audience. This alliance with popular sentiment is cleverly combined with spectacular practical jokes which amuse the audience as well as the perpetrators:

FAUSTUS            Well, I am content to compass then some sport,  
                          And by their folly make us merriment.

(III.i.54-5 (A))

                          Then in this show let me an actor be,  
                          That this proud Pope may Faustus' cunning see.

(III.i.75-6 (B))

In Act Four, Faustus, with the aid of Mephistopheles, becomes a performer of supernatural feats at the court of the Emperor Carolus and in the house of the Duke of Vanholt. As the A-text makes explicit, his supernatural powers are at least accepted by some other characters within the play:

EMPEROR            Master Doctor Faustus, I have heard strange report of thy knowledge in the black art [...] This therefore is my request: that thou let me see some proof of thy skill [...] And here I swear to thee, by the honour of mine imperial crown, that whatever thou dost, thou shalt be no ways prejudiced or endamaged.<sup>29</sup>

Having summoned up, in spirit form, Alexander, his paramour and, in the B-text only, Darius, Faustus goes on to punish a Knight who questions his magical powers by placing horns on his head. In the same way that Bacon humiliated Burthen, Faustus turns this episode into an entertainment for the Emperor and also the theatre audience:

My gracious lord, not so much for the injury he offered me here in your presence as to delight you with some mirth hath Faustus worthily requited this injurious knight.

(IV.i.90-4 (A); cf. 157-9 (B))

The B-text contains a sequel to this event, in which the Knight, this time named Benvolio, seeks revenge. The resulting scene provides even more scope for supernatural spectacle. It requires Faustus to wear a false head so that he can appear to be decapitated but then rise up, an exit on devils' backs for the conspirators, trees which move by magic and a small army of devils.

The scenes in which Faustus meets the Duke and Duchess of Vanholt show him treated with the same courtesy and enthusiasm which he was at the imperial court:



DUKE                    Come, madam, let us in,  
                               Where you must well reward this learned man  
                               For the great kindness he hath showed to you.

(IV.ii.32-4 (A))

In the B-text, this episode is concluded by a further section in which Faustus presents the clowns whom he has previously encountered to Vanholt, in order to provide 'merriment' (IV.vi.55 (B)). Any sympathy the audience might feel for the Horse-Courser is mitigated by his failure to follow Faustus's instructions as a result of what amounts to greedy suspicion.<sup>30</sup> The same is true in the episode concerning the Carter in the B-text. He is a simple countryman who is deceived by Faustus into setting too low a price for the amount of hay he believes Faustus can eat.<sup>31</sup> Keith Thomas has suggested that, in the early modern period, humour which exploited the weaknesses of others need not have been regarded as reflecting badly on its instigator. Humour that exploits the defects of others, such as 'idiocy' or even physical deformity, which might in the twentieth century be interpreted as unnecessarily cruel, was very common before the romantic period. Faustus's actions towards the Horse-Courser must be considered in this historical context.<sup>32</sup>

Acts Three and Four of both versions of the play retain some of the homiletic comic patterning which is clearly in evidence elsewhere in the play. Faustus's antics at the Papal court in Act Three are followed by the scene in which Robin and Rafe (Robin and Dick in the B-text) raise Mephistopheles (III.ii (A); III.iii (B)), an obvious parodic commentary on Faustus's dealings with devils in the main plot. Moreover, in Act Four, while the Horse-Courser is off the stage, Faustus suddenly turns to contemplation of his future death and his predisposition to despair which denies him the chance to repent.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the play has already associated the provision of entertainment and earthly pleasure directly with infernal powers through the dance of the devils who crown and dress Faustus in 'rich apparel', the 'Devil dressed like a woman' and the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins. As Lucifer declares to Faustus, 'in hell is all manner of delight'.<sup>34</sup> To some extent, therefore, the audience is being conditioned to interpret Faustus's comic adventures in Acts Three and Four as part of a larger homiletic structure. Faustus's entertainments and dealings with the clowns become a reflection of his personal decline, his weaknesses and the limitations of his

magic. The enthusiasm of his noble patrons for his tricks can be interpreted as an ironic warning concerning the actual audience's own response to Faustus's trickery. The dismemberment of Faustus by the Horsecourser in both texts and Faustus's beheading by Benvolio in the B-text, for example, can be seen to prefigure Faustus's own physical destruction, as recounted in the English Faust Book and the B-text. The repeated expressions of enthusiasm for Faustus's tricks may be interpreted as an illustration of the attraction of sin, an attraction which moral comedy demanded the audience should resist.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, however, there are formal differences between the subplot and these episodes. With the exception of the few clearly juxtaposed episodes, the interpretation of Faustus's adventures in moral terms relies upon more implicit, ironic, parallels than those constructed by the subplot. Although the audience is ultimately shown the fate that awaits Faustus, his comic adventures are both highly attractive to the audience and less explicitly integrated into the play's homiletic framework than the clowns of the subplot.

These issues relating to the comic portrayal of the supernatural in Doctor Faustus need to be considered in the context of the dramatic tensions identified in the play by some previous critics. For Bevington and Rasmussen the play has a complex, dual tragic structure:

Its extraordinary tensions may arise in part from the way it [...] rearranges and subverts Aristotelian norms of tragedy, juxtaposing the punitive tragedy of a bad man with a more ennobling tragic vision of one who wrestles with his fate.<sup>36</sup>

D. J. Palmer also argues that Doctor Faustus is characterized by tensions, rather than artistic unity. In scenes like Faustus's encounter with Helen, Palmer suggests that the audience comprehends both 'the glamour and the sham of the vision, for each has a "reality" of their own' within the confines of the theatre.<sup>37</sup> The list of those aspects of the play, beginning with its 'ennobling tragic vision' or 'glamour', which are opposed to the presentation of a simple and direct homiletic message must also include at least some of the play's comic elements. The appeal to the audience of Faustus's humorous tricks and set-piece entertainments contributes significantly to a wider 'subversive energy' in the play identified by Bevington and Rasmussen.<sup>38</sup> Like Faustus's flights of poetic imagination,

the play's 'middle scenes', D. J. Palmer suggests, cannot 'be redeemed on the grounds that the descent to mere buffoonery and triviality is a deliberate stratagem to underline Faustus's self-deception or the Devil's fraudulency'.<sup>39</sup> Another influential critic has gone so far as to describe at least some of the play's comedy as amoral and Bevington and Rasmussen have suggested that the play demonstrates 'an incoherent delight in stage trickery'.<sup>40</sup>

These issues of homiletic intention and relevance for the audience raised by the comic representation of the supernatural in the play must also be elucidated by a consideration of the wider culture of beliefs and practices with regard to the supernatural in the period. The instabilities of the comic representation of the supernatural in the play, as manifested in a series of tensions between the damnable nature of Faustus's actions and the charismatic nature of at least some of his comic-heroic supernatural feats, can then be considered in the context of the larger series of tensions within the tragic structure of the play identified by Palmer, Bevington and Rasmussen.

Among recent critics, Hilary Gatti has made a notably sustained and detailed attempt to read Doctor Faustus in the context of the thought and apparent contact with English circles of Giordano Bruno.<sup>41</sup> Key details of the play that she identifies with Brunian philosophy include: Faustus's expressions of anti-Ramism, his implicit resistance to Ptolemaic conceptions of the universe, his attraction, in the final act, to notions of metempsychosis and 'the reference to traditional magic as a means of achieving new knowledge of and powers over the natural world'.

Gatti's reference to 'traditional magic' is appropriate, as Faustus's magic does not correspond closely to the kinds of activities associated by Yates with Bruno as part of the hermetic tradition.<sup>42</sup> At the outset of the play, Faustus's magical experiments clearly allude to a wider range of contemporary magical beliefs and practices. Faustus initially attempts to summon infernal spirits using magic with a technique which recalls not the overt demonic pact that ensues, but the practices recorded in late medieval and early modern ceremonial magic. References in Latin to 'Lucifer, Prince of the East' and 'Beelzebub, monarch of burning hell' recall popular forms of magic both in tone and in the infernal origins of the aid demanded.<sup>43</sup> Although Faustus at one point mentions 'Agrippa [...] / Whose shadows made all Europe honour him', there is no allusion to Agrippa's debt to the hermetic tradition. Other references in the play to Roger Bacon and 'Albanus' are also notable. Peter of Abano was the author of the Heptameron, a magical treatise which conformed to

the pattern of more popular, widely-held, theories regarding magic and which was sometimes appended to Agrippa's work.<sup>44</sup>

Some of the supernatural events associated with Faustus as a provider of mirth and entertainment also have analogies with contemporary magical practices. In the A-text Faustus requests that Mephistopheles 'charm me that I may be invisible' (III.i.56), and in the B-text receives from Mephistopheles a girdle to cause the same effect (III.ii.17-18), in order that they shall be able to interfere with the activities of the papal court in Rome. Aside from the dramatic potential of simulated invisibility, which places the audience in the privileged position of observer of both the visible and invisible characters, this use of invisibility has parallels with contemporary magical experiments.<sup>45</sup> In a similar manner, Faustus's supernatural production, with Mephistopheles' aid, of out-of-season grapes for the Duchess of Vanholt has a parallel in the spell 'to make a table with meet appeare' through the aid of spirits to be found in a late seventeenth-century manuscript collection.<sup>46</sup> Many of these episodes draw directly upon the English Faust Book.<sup>47</sup>

The cumulative effect is to locate the magic which interests Faustus at the start of the play within a broad band of widely-held contemporary popular beliefs regarding the efficacy of ceremonial magic. Through an apparent desire to summarize a wide range of contemporary magical aspirations, the portrayal of magic in both comic and tragic elements of the play, therefore, is broadly based rather than specifically relevant to the hermetic tradition in a narrow sense. This intention is further supported by underlying tendencies towards syncretism in thought regarding magic, as well as by the immediate precedent set by the sources for the play.

On one level, the homiletic movement within Doctor Faustus is supported by the revelation from the first scene onwards that, within the world of the play, the kinds of ceremonial magic presented are an illusion. The magician's art represents a covert route to the same pact sought overtly by the witch. This interpretation of Faustus's activities finds some further support within the play from the way in which Faustus's initial worldly magical aspirations, such as to have spirits 'fly to India for gold' (I.i.84 (A), I.i.81 (B)) pointedly become realized only through Faustus's pact with infernal powers. It is Mephistopheles who pointedly passes Faustus a book which will enable him to acquire gold, control the elements and produce 'men in armour' to do his bidding.<sup>48</sup> Other details of Faustus's supernatural adventures might also have been associated more closely in the minds of

contemporary audiences with witchcraft than with conflicting, less critical, conceptions of magical belief or practice. John Henry Jones has observed that many of Faustus's supernatural activities in the English Faust Book, including his invisibility, ability to fly and power to change the shape of living matter, accord with the magical powers attributed to Simon Magus in the Clementine Recognitions. The same would apply to Doctor Faustus.<sup>49</sup> The association of Faustus and his associates with shape changing also finds a parallel in an act of supernatural transgression which is associated with witchcraft in at least one pamphlet of the period. In a similar manner, there is greater evidence for the association of the idea of supernatural transvection with witchcraft rather than magical beliefs in the period.

On another level, however, Doctor Faustus seems more ambiguous in its presentation of Faustus's magic, not only in comic episodes, but also more generally. In both the case of shape-changing and of flying, however, it might be more appropriate to consider early modern beliefs as drawing upon a broader tradition than that of theological attacks upon the evils of magic and witchcraft. As Chapter Two has suggested, narratives both of supernatural aspiration and of demonological condemnation in the early modern period can exhibit a fluid synthesis of ideas that a modern mentality would tend to distinguish as more or less likely to be credible. Beliefs which empirical observation would suggest to a modern audience are more associable with fictional narrative constructions rather than phenomena which could be experimentally achieved, such as the ideas of shape changing, flight and invisibility, retained the potential to be considered as credible manifestations of the supernatural, in several contexts, for some early modern audiences. Possibly the credibility of such ideas was augmented when they were integrated with other ideas regarding the nature of the supernatural concerning the veracity of which there was more widespread agreement.

Doctor Faustus clearly draws upon a range of ideas with contemporary currency in its portrayal of magic. The play resists simple moral interpretation in favour of a more complex exploration of Faustus as a tragic hero. The 'subversive energy' of Faustus's comic adventures contributes vastly to the work's tragic intensity. The adventures expose a tension in the play between its homiletic framework, since they can be interpreted within that structure, and the play's desire to establish Faustus's charisma and engage the audience's sympathy. As in the English Faust

Book, the identification of the supernatural with humour and the creation of entertainment in Acts Three and Four has the potential to elicit a conflicting response from a contemporary audience, rather than be perceived to be purely homiletic. This tension between Faustus as an aspirational, charismatic hero and as a morally culpable tragic villain is furthered by the range of reference to contemporary beliefs and practices regarding the supernatural in the play, which embraces both the aspirational and the condemnatory sides of contemporary belief. It is not only the homiletic side to Doctor Faustus's comedy that, by paralleling demonological condemnation of magic, alludes to wider contemporary thought. In spite of Faustus's eventual damnation, the problematic attractiveness of Faustus's magic in Acts Three and Four must be seen in the context of belief in the possibility of the effective use of magic in the early modern period.

By ambiguously drawing upon conflicting contemporary attitudes concerning magic, Doctor Faustus exposes the tensions between contemporary systems of thought. In the English Faust Book, the attractiveness of Faustus's magic may create something of a challenge to its hermetic framework, but the tension between them remains implicit. Doctor Faustus presents the tension between magical aspirations and orthodox condemnation as a more overt, tragic collision. Although the initial conjuration scene and other magical episodes have analogies in surviving records of early modern magical beliefs, the pact with which Faustus secures his powers, and from which he proves unable to escape, clearly follows the views of orthodox demonological thinkers. Magicians who attempt, as Faustus does, to invoke demonic spirits do, in fact, only have the opportunity of gaining magical powers by entering into a covert and damnable pact with the devil. The genuine attractiveness of Faustus's heroic attack on the Church of Rome and of the entertainments which he creates exists only as an intellectual impossibility within the orthodox demonological framework of the play. At the same time, the audience is encouraged to identify with Faustus's aspirations and enjoy his comic adventures.

The desire to expose the audience to the same tragic tension which afflicts Faustus is central to the totality of the dramatic structure of Doctor Faustus. While this study has argued that portrayal of magic in the play should not be narrowly identified with the aspirations of the hermetic tradition as presented by Yates and others, other aspects of Brunian thinking which were known to the circles in which Marlowe moved may help us to understand the particular character of the play's

tensions. As noted, Gatti has made a case for the influence of various aspects of Bruno's philosophical thinking on the play, including the notion of the 'overreacher'. However, in the unresolved aspects of this play, in its 'subversive energy', the original audience may also have detected the influence of the kind of scepticism, probably influenced by Bruno, that circulated in the intellectual circles in which Marlowe moved. Raleigh's assertion that,

the sceptic doth neither affirm, neither deny any position, but doubteth of it, and opposeth his reasons against that which is affirmed or denied, to justify his not consenting

provides an organisational concept for the tensions within Doctor Faustus with a parallel in Bruno's own writings:

He who desires to philosophize must first of all doubt all things. He must not assume a position in a debate before he has listened to the various opinions, and considered and compared the reasons for and against.<sup>50</sup>

While the play reaches beyond a narrow, modern, conception of hermetic magic in its engagement with contemporary magical beliefs and practices, an understanding of Bruno's philosophical scepticism provides an important context in which the play's structure may be better understood. To examine Doctor Faustus merely as a 'punitive tragedy' is to neglect the way in which it attempts to show the genuine attractiveness of Faustus's imagination and adventures even as it condemns them. Such an approach obscures the way in which the play forces its audience to experience, within the struggle of its protagonist, conflicting impulses of its own culture with regards to widely-disseminated notions of magic. The play certainly seems to attempt this, even if its original audience is explicitly directed to dissociate itself from the play's 'subversive energy'. To this end, the play makes effective use of both tragic and comic resources.<sup>51</sup>

#### IV. Robert Greene's Friar Bacon

John Henry Jones has argued convincingly that the English Faust Book was a major narrative source for a lost prose romance concerning Friar Bacon, evidence for the existence of which survives in the two later extant Bacon romances The Famous Historie and The Most Famous History. There are clear similarities between the the English Faust Book and both the extant Bacon romances and also Robert Greene's The Honorable Historie of frier Bacon, and frier Bongay (?1589-90).<sup>52</sup> Assuming that it is the earlier work, the reputation of Doctor Faustus itself probably also casts a long shadow not only over Friar Bacon, but also over the putative prose source for that play.<sup>53</sup>

However, the presentation of magic in the extant Bacon narratives resembles popular beliefs and practices more consistently than either the English Faust Book, or even the English Wagner Book. Bacon is a powerful magician who uses magic for worldly ends, most famously for the creation of a wall of brass around England. His spirits seem to be of a distinctly infernal kind.<sup>54</sup> Bacon frequently entertains and amuses using his supernatural powers. Near the start of the narrative, for example, Friar Bacon entertains the King and his court, and through them the reader as well. First he employs music and other magical entertainments:

This is, said the fryer, to delight the sense of hearing, I will delight all your other sences ere you depart hence. (I, 194)

Then, to the amusement of those present, Bacon exacts revenge upon a gentleman who doubted his magical powers by instantly transporting, 'the last wench that you lay withall', a 'kitchen-mayde', to their location.<sup>55</sup> Even the conclusion of Bacon's career in the prose romances seems to condemn magic in a slightly ambiguous way. After the death of his colleague Bungay as a result of conjuring, and the deaths also of two young gentlemen students who see their fathers begin a duel in his magic glass, Bacon finally renounces 'the vanity of arts and sciences'. While Bungay and Vandermast die as a consequence of their conjuring in the romances, the fact that Bacon seems to avoid the potentially fatal consequences of his magic suggests a significant deviation from the severe condemnation of magical activities to be found in the works of writers like William Perkins.<sup>56</sup>



Although they ostensibly relate an admonitory tale, the Bacon prose romances also illustrate several more positive and amusing sides to the use of magic.

It is apparent that the representation of Bacon's magic in Friar Bacon has many similarities with these later Baconian prose romances, although it also demonstrates a few significant differences. Like Doctor Faustus, it accentuates the ambivalent association between magic and the creation of humour and entertainment which is to be found in the prose romances concerning Faustus and Bacon. Ultimately, however, Friar Bacon reaches a less problematic accommodation of differing currents of contemporary thought than Doctor Faustus.

Despite its title-page signification as a history, there is general critical agreement that Friar Bacon is, unlike Doctor Faustus, comic in its overall framework and predominantly comic in mood. Indeed, Greene makes conspicuous use of the vocabulary of merriment in the early scenes. Lacy's references to the 'frolic bucks' (i.4) and his 'jolly mates' (i.7) indicate the high spirits of the courtiers, with the exception of the melancholic Prince Edward:

LACY	Nor have I seen my lord more frolic in the chase, And now changed to a melancholy dump.
	(i.10-11)

The same adjectives, 'jolly' and 'frolic', are subsequently used to describe Bacon, the former by Prince Edward and the latter by Bacon himself:

What art can work, the frolic friar knows.<sup>57</sup>

The early scenes also develop a significant association between this mood of festive revelry and the magical activities of Bacon. Burden, one of the doctors of Oxford University, assesses Bacon's magical activities, in an ambivalent light, as 'fooleries' (ii.77). Bacon later describes his own magical inventions as 'toys' (vi.2).<sup>58</sup>

Bacon's first two spectacular acts of magical transportation specifically establish his magic as a source of entertainment. The first involves the transportation of Burden's mistress from Henley

to Oxford. The comedy of the episode is indicated by Mason's play on the word 'mated', which draws on both Burthen's relationship with the Hostess and the terminology of chess in order to describe Bacon's victory over him:

Burden, what, are you mated by this frolic friar?<sup>59</sup>

Even more spectacular and overtly comic is the second transportation, Bacon's removal of Bungay from the wedding of Lacy and Margaret and his transfer to Brazen-Nose College. Edward's reaction, as he observes the distant events with the help of Bacon's 'crystal' (vi.15), is one of amusement:

Bacon, I laugh to see the jolly friar  
 Mounted upon the devil, and how the earl  
 Flees with his bonny lass for fear.

(vi.174-6)

However, there is considerable critical disagreement concerning the implications of the comic mood established by Greene for the interpretation of the play, not to mention implications of the overall comic framework of the play as evidenced by the movement of the play through trials and failures towards a final resolution. Opinion differs broadly between those critics, like Albert Wertheim, who view the play as a moral comedy in which the mood becomes increasingly dark, and those who, like J. A. Lavin, view the play as 'predominantly festive', even to the point of viewing it as a significant contribution to the evolution of English romantic comedy.<sup>60</sup>

As early as Scene ii, Albert Wertheim criticizes Bacon's treatment of Burden, whose 'envy is pointedly and relentlessly pricked'. He suggests that the play increasingly reveals to the audience the moral failings of Bacon's magic. By the point at which Vandermast is defeated in Scene ix, Wertheim argues the playwright's outright condemnation of Bacon's magic, despite its comic appeal, becomes clear:

A positive audience response is stimulated at the same time that the character representing English loyalties is being morally condemned.<sup>61</sup>

This interpretation of the failings and repentance of Bacon in moral terms has some persuasive force. As Bacon's magic passes its apogee, the defeat of Vandermast, and apparently proceeds to contribute to the confrontation between Edward and Lacy (viii), the disaster of the brazen head scene (xi), and the deaths of the fathers and students (xiii), the play does enter a less jovial phase.

Wertheim's theory that there is a moral decline throughout the play which casts a retrospective shadow over the early scenes is not totally convincing, however. In particular, it is weakened by his failure to account for either the unusual tone of Scene xv, the transportation of Miles to hell, or Bacon's final prophecy in Scene xvi, neither of which comfortably fit this pattern. There is a strong case to suggest that Wertheim focuses on only one of the two sides to Greene's portrayal of Bacon, and only one of the two comic modes at work in the play's treatment of magic.

Greene's Bacon, like the Bacon of the prose romances, is identified as being, among other things, a defender of Christian truth and morality. For example, the Bacon of The Famous Historie exposes the manner in which his servant Miles broke his Friday fast and deceives the Devil to save a man's soul.<sup>62</sup> In Friar Bacon, Bacon's magic invariably reveals the truth concerning a situation: Burden's 'book' (ii.114) is the Hostess from Henley, for example, and the perspective glass shows the truth, however painful. This side to Bacon's character clearly ties in with his defeat of Vandermast and desire to 'circle England round with brass' (ii.170). Both associate Bacon with a patriotism which goes beyond mere personal party loyalty to Prince Edward and show him in a generally positive light.<sup>63</sup>

Another interesting example of Bacon's positive use of magic is the episode concerning the scholars' food and the exotic feast. Bacon contrives the scene in order to make a moral point:

BACON                   Content thee, Fredrick, for I showed the cates  
                               To let thee see how scholars use to feed,  
                               How little meat refines our English wits.  
                               Miles, take away, and let it be thy dinner.

(ix.237-40)

Bacon has organized the feast in order to illustrate the glory of English wits such as his own and so to highlight his own didactic point. To interpret this episode, like Cecille Williason Cary, as an illustration of the idea 'that necromancy is inappropriate "fare" for a man of learning' is to suggest a further implied meaning.<sup>64</sup> Although the contrast between this feast and the scholar's frugal meal may betray the element of personal pride which will ultimately doom Bacon's magical aspirations, Bacon's own interpretation also seems, paradoxically, to have some validity. The episode can indeed be interpreted as a humorous illustration of the self-discipline that has led Bacon's English magic to triumph over Vandermast, the German magician.

The comic treatment of magic in Friar Bacon is more complex than readings of the play offered by Cary and Wertheim seem to suggest. Bacon's own didactic aims still associate comedy within the play with the presentation of a moral message, but the comic treatment of Bacon in these episodes is clearly more than a simple homiletic condemnation of his magical activities. Bacon's comic exposure of the truth casts both his character and his magic, at least partly, in a more positive light. As discussed in the context of Doctor Faustus, it is important to remember that ridicule was widely considered an appropriate source of humour in the early modern period: the ridicule of Burden need not be considered to be a reflection of the depravity of Bacon.<sup>65</sup> Bacon's moral lessons and ridiculing of others may unsettle the audience indirectly, since they seem in part to question Bacon's motives by implication. On another level, however, these episodes reflect strengths in Bacon's character as they did in the prose romances and show a positive side to the use of magic. The exposure of the personal weaknesses of others and the positive expression of patriotic pride both demonstrate qualities in Bacon which would not have been considered problematic by the audience. On this level, Bacon's humorous magic contributes to a more general emphasis upon social cohesion and communal pleasure in the play which is ultimately at least as important as Wertheim's homiletic

structure.<sup>66</sup> Although his activities are ultimately shown to be compromised by personal pride, Bacon is clearly a less problematic popular champion than Faustus.

In order to determine the balance between the comic impulses within Friar Bacon, between the condemnation of Bacon and the celebration of his activities, it is essential to consider the overall comic structure of the play. Peter Mortenson has argued that the structure of Friar Bacon is festive, rather than moral, and that the play's structure reverses Barber's theory that comedy enacts the contemporary social transition from collective ritual to individualism. He asserts that Friar Bacon moves towards, rather than away from, points of ritualistic conclusion:

The pattern of festive comedy -disintegration to reintegration- is applied to progressively more impersonal and non-psychological materials: from matters of passionate love, to matters of state, to a vision of cultural history overlaid with classical myth, each displaying a movement through destructive contention (actual or threatened) towards a new reintegration.<sup>67</sup>

Mortenson is right to stress the movement towards the exhibition of positive communal values to the audience in this play. However, his insistence that the 'festive patterns of misrule in love and magic' in the play demonstrate 'a movement through destructive contention (actual or threatened) towards a new reintegration' over-simplifies the relationship between the various kinds of misrule within the play and the display of reintegrated order in the pageant scenes (iv, ix, xii and xvi).<sup>68</sup> Although it identifies a broad issue in the play, Mortenson's argument may be seen to confuse theatre with liminal festive ritual. Rather, it is necessary to recognize that, as a liminoid activity, theatre re-enacts elements of its own culture, including ideas of festive reintegration, in order to develop a complex representation of relevance to its own culture. In Friar Bacon, ideas of festivity and ritual are introduced in order to support a particular ideological point of view, and this process in turn helps to elucidate the play's portrayal of Bacon and his magic.<sup>69</sup>

In its representation both of magic and love as significant forces within its world, Friar Bacon makes an important distinction. The weakness and failings of individuals acting for their own ends are contrasted with the acceptability of actions, even when undertaken by individuals, which contribute towards the stability and improvement of the existing political and social order, in the

case of this play a feudal monarchy. Within this structure, festive misrule is often shown to be prescribed by authority, and cannot be seen to present a genuine threat to that order. In the play, festive licence frequently reinforces the conservative message of the play and Mortenson's 'new reintegration' at the close of the play may be seen to be largely a reaffirmation of the old order.

As Mortenson has pointed out, the play is given an overall shape by the 'Oxford pageant scenes' (iv, ix, xii, and xvi).<sup>70</sup> By helping to enhance social stability and national pride, much of the misrule within the play helps to support this framework of points of resolution. In Scene ix, for example, the magical transportation of Vandermast is undoubtedly intended to be comic, in the manner of the earlier transportations of Burden and Bungay. This transportation and Bacon's presentation of the meal which follows it represent the climax of Bacon's ostentatious patriotic service and, in the overall context of the play, must be felt to reinforce the play's central message concerning the glorious stability of England. Bacon's contribution to Scene xvi not only makes it clear that magic may still contribute to the royal pageant, but that the pageant honours 'Diana's rose' (xvi.62), Queen Elizabeth herself, as well as the dynasty of King Henry.

Indeed, the convivial revelry in the early sections of the play, to which Bacon's magic often contributes, also seems to augment the play's assertion of social stability and royal authority. The association of the courtiers with hunting at the start of the play suggests an idyllic pastoral England which will be integrated into the established social order by the marriage of Margaret and Lacy.<sup>71</sup>

In other places, misrule does present some kind of challenge to the endorsement of parochial social stability within the play. In particular, the use of Rafe, the fool, and Miles, the clownish scholar, as reflections of the actions and motivations of their respective masters sometimes suggests that instability lies beneath the licensed, conservative, levels of festive misrule.

For example, Rafe's early comment that Edward will 'become love's morris-dance' (i.163) as a result of his lust for Margaret fits superficially within the convivial atmosphere of the rest of the scene, but may look forward to the Prince's rash and angry actions in Scene viii. Similarly, Rafe's impersonation of Edward and its comic repercussions in Scene vii raise questions. On one level, this impersonation is a perfect illustration of conservative festive misrule within the play. Once they realize that disruption is being caused by a company largely consisting of noblemen, the Oxford doctors decide not to punish Rafe and his companions:

MASON                    My lord, pardon us; we knew not what you were;  
                                   But courtiers may make greater scapes than these.

(vii.110-11)

However, Rafe's assumption of Edward's identity may reflect the imbalance in Edward's character which leads him to Bacon in order to satisfy his desire for Margaret.<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, Miles initially provides a dramatic contrast to Bacon. When, for example, he plays Bacon to Rafe's Edward in Scene vii, his own stupidity reminds us of Bacon's own authority and his recent demonstrations of his magical powers. In Scene xiii, however, Bacon's trust in Miles reflects his own intellectual overreaching and the personal weakness which leads to his failure to create the Brazen Head successfully. The treatment of the association between festive misrule and Bacon in the play is, therefore, ambivalent. On the one hand, his magic contributes to the maintenance of the political order in the play. On the other, he is associated with misrule that sometimes exceeds a socially constructive communal function. It becomes disruptive and its humour assumes homiletic overtones.

Rather than the 'destructive contention' of festive misrule *per se*, it is the individual failings of both Edward and Bacon that are exposed in the middle section of the play.<sup>73</sup> Edward's failing is obviously the lustful nature of his love for Margaret, which leaves him on the verge of killing both Margaret and Lacy:

LACY                    Love taught me that your honour did but jest,  
                                   That princes were in fancy but as men,  
                                   How that the lovely maid of Fressingfield  
                                   Was fitter to be Lacy's wedded wife  
                                   Than concubine unto the Prince of Wales.

(viii.19-23)

It is only by gaining a new level of self-understanding that Edward realizes his mistake:

So in subduing fancy's passion,  
 Conquering thyself, thou get'st the richest spoil.

(viii.120-1)

In a similar way, the destruction of the Brazen Head reveals that, beneath Bacon's patriotic and altruistic aims, lies a dangerous personal pride:

My life, my fame, my glory, all are past.  
 Bacon, the turrets of thy fame are ruined down.

(xi.93-4)

Greene reveals the problems, as well as the benefits, which attend Bacon's use of magic. Although the expression of this darker theme in the play, as Assarsson-Rizzi notes, may almost assume a tragic form, it may also, as in the interaction between Miles and the Brazen Head, adopt a moral comic mode.<sup>74</sup>

Therefore, while some critics have suggested that Friar Bacon is intended to condemn magic outright as a consequence of such elements, the play's judgement of Bacon is more ambiguous. First and foremost, magic emerges in the play as a tremendously powerful force that can achieve spectacular, humorous and beneficial results. It makes a major contribution to political and social stability in the world of the play and also to the comic expression of that stability in terms of entertainment and communal festive revelry. Admittedly, the power and insight which it offers man, also emerge as potential sources of danger, not only for the practitioner, but also for others.<sup>75</sup> An early warning of this occurs in Scene vi, where Edward, watching through Bacon's glass, tries physically to interfere with the marriage of Lacy and Margaret:

EDWARD            Gog's wounds, Bacon, they kiss! I'll stab them!

BACON             Oh, hold your hands, my lord, it is the glass!

(vi.127-8)



This episode is obviously a precursor not only of Edward's later wrath and threats when face to face with Lacy and Margaret, but also of the second scene in which Bacon uses the glass. On that occasion two young scholars kill each other because the glass has allowed them to see their fathers do the same, in a scene which certainly assumes a tragic intensity. Magic acts as the medium through which personal failings are exposed, whether it is Bacon's own pride, or the excessive and misguided honour of the fathers. In the context of the play as a whole, however, it would be a mistake to over-emphasize the significance of the individual failings of Bacon or Edward. It is important to remember that Edward and Lacy are reconciled as early as Scene viii. The play closes not with the deaths of the fathers and the students and Bacon's repentance, but with the humorous transportation of Miles in Scene xv, which will be considered in greater detail below, and the final royal pageant in Scene xvi.

Friar Bacon ultimately exposes a contrast between the dangerous, individualistic side to festive misrule and its cathartic function as the force which reaffirms a conservative social order and stability. Magic and love have the potential to be turned to either end. However, the play's overall form strongly asserts that the darker side to these forces is limited to specific individual failings. In general the play follows, as Lavin suggested, the humane and venal morality of romantic comedy and its portrayal of magic is subordinated to the play's principle ideological theme: the presentation to the audience of a fantasy of social and political stability appropriate to the years following the Spanish Armada.<sup>76</sup> The portrayal of magic in Friar Bacon consequently stands in stark contrast to its portrayal in Doctor Faustus, in which the possibility of a positive role for magic exists only as an implication of its comic portrayal. In Friar Bacon magic brings with it the possibility of failure and possibly personal danger, but it is also shown more clearly to be a genuine source of considerable worldly power.

Moreover, the kind of ambivalent representation of magic developed in Friar Bacon would have had significant contemporary resonance for its original audience. Even though Bacon reflects many of the characteristics of the romance magician, as defined by Traister, his portrayal is indeed consistent in several ways with contemporary popular magical beliefs.<sup>77</sup> Robert Hunter West has located the play within the context of conflicting contemporary schools of thought regarding magic,

arguing that it 'is occult in that it admits the real power of magic, orthodox in that it insists upon the guilt of magic, though in a degree less than mortal'.<sup>78</sup> West's analysis of the play has been criticized as 'overlooking its whole tenor', since Bacon's damnation is only avoided by his repentance. However, his interpretation seems to be borne out by the close of the play, in which Bacon is pointedly not damned and goes on after his repentance to make a prophecy in the final scene. As West suggests, this conclusion seems to blend a stream of early modern theological thought regarding the power of repentance with another set of contemporary views regarding the potential efficacy of magic.<sup>79</sup>

Robert Hunter West notes particular similarities between Bacon's magic and that of the pseudo-Solomonic treatises. As well as Bacon's ability, shared by Vandermast and Bungay in Greene's play, to avoid destruction, the summoning of devils in Friar Bacon seems to recall the principles of pseudo-Solomonic magic. Both Bacon's magic, when used for appropriate worldly ends, and pseudo-Solomonic magic can be seen as 'truly reverent' in their own terms.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, it can be argued that Friar Bacon presents magic in a more positive light not only than Doctor Faustus or the English Faust Book, but also than either of the extant Bacon prose narratives. In both versions of the latter, magic directly causes the deaths of both Vandermast and Bungay while they are engaged in a magical duel. In The Famous Historie, their destruction is, in both cases, the result of the making of a blood pact with the devil:

For now the time was come, that the Devill would be paid for the knowledge that he had lent them, he would not tarry any longer, but then tooke them in the height of their wickednesse, and bereft them of their lives.

(I, 243-4)

In The Most Famous History, however, there is no pact:

The Spirits growing too strong for these Conjurers and their Charmes, broke into their Circles, and tore them in a thousand Pieces, scattering their Limbs about the Fields; and so ended they their miserable Lives.

(sig. C4<sup>v</sup>)

Friar Bacon avoids such complications because it does not include this scene or a similar one. Although Bacon repents at the end of Scene xiii, he goes on to perform a supernatural act of prophecy in Scene xvi. While Bacon initially states that he will be 'damned / For using devils to countervail his God' (xiii.96-7), his act of prophecy at the end of the play seems to suggest that he has been able to find an accommodation of his magic within his new life of 'pure devotion'.<sup>81</sup> The manner in which Friar Bacon fails in this sort of way to produce psychologically-rounded characterisations, resting instead upon the audience accumulating an understanding of its themes through a sequence of episodes, is perhaps one of the less innovative aspects of its dramatic structure. Seen in its own terms, however, the lesson in Friar Bacon is, as Traister suggests, that finding the correct role for magic, and also love, is more important than condemning either outright.<sup>82</sup>

In addition to Bacon's traffic with devils, several other aspects of his magic recall ideas concerning the supernatural which appear in other contexts in the early modern period. As previously discussed, supernatural flight seems to have maintained a place among those ideas which might be accepted as plausible by an early modern audience. The use of crystal balls and mirrors to view remote persons had been prohibited in the medieval period and their use apparently persisted among early modern cunning folk. John Dee also used a crystal.<sup>83</sup> Contemporary accounts of the supernatural transportation of unwilling parties exist and their status as credible accounts of supernatural activity will be considered further below. Lastly, Bacon's final prophetic statement (xvi.42-62), looking back to the foundation of Troynovant by Brutus and forward to the reign of Elizabeth, also finds parallels in contemporary beliefs. Although sophisticated writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries mostly regarded prophecy with suspicion, it is apparent that prophecy remained of considerable interest to many in the late sixteenth century. Indeed, the historical Roger Bacon was one of the many famous figures associated with prophecy. Friar Bacon

enacts the fundamental purpose of early modern prophecy: to legitimize, or challenge, present regimes through demonstrating their prediction in the past, thereby cementing the relationship between past and present.<sup>84</sup>

Friar Bacon alludes, therefore, to broad currents in early modern thought regarding the efficacy of several forms of traffic with the supernatural. When the play seems to make reference to a more elite form of magic, with hermetic associations, in Scene ix, the magic portrayed is still consistent with systems of thought that would have had a wider currency. The similarities between the magical contest in Friar Bacon and early modern philosophy science has been discussed by a number of critics. Greene's version of the contest begins with a lengthy dispute between Bungay and Vandermast concerning 'whether the spirits of pyromancy or geomancy be most predominant in magic' (ix.24-5), a topic which echoes more elite contemporary forms of supernatural investigation. Bungay and Vandermast make several references to Hermes, the legendary founder of hermetic philosophy, as well as one to 'cabbalists' (ix.28), although it cannot be assumed that the latter term is used with the technical precision of modern historians of early modern magic and science.<sup>85</sup>

Critics have argued that the dispute is devised as a satire of, or some other form of allusion to, the lectures given by Giordano Bruno at Oxford in 1583. It is even suggested that certain phrases in the play echo sections of Bruno's own Cena de la ceneri, published in 1584.<sup>86</sup> Contemporary accounts suggest that Bruno was poorly received in Oxford. The possibility that the dramatization in the play of an episode from a prose source concerning Bacon's patriotic defeat of Vandermast might have been influenced by that visit merits consideration.<sup>87</sup> Certainly the disputation between Bungay and Vandermast is not found in the Bacon prose narratives, unlike the spectacular conjuring contest which follows it, in which Bacon triumphs.<sup>88</sup>

The manner in which Greene introduces this spectacle with a lengthy dispute (ix.24-74) may be attributed in part to a need to respect the limited resources of the theatre, which cannot create spectacle with the ease of the written word. The ostentatious, pseudo-academic style of the dispute has caused Traister to comment that 'Greene's version of the debate is a bit too complex for a largely untrained audience to follow'. Whether he has Bruno's Oxford visit specifically in mind, or not, Greene obviously intends to impress his audience by an imitation of scholarly disputation. However, there is no sustained allusion to hermetic philosophy in the scene and the actual content of the

speeches does not seem to contradict either widely accepted principles of magical practice in the period or the presentation of magic in the rest of the play. For example, the connection which Vandermast makes between the elemental spirits and the fallen angels of Christian theology is consistent with the conjuring of devils practised by Bacon:

For, when proud Lucifer fell from the heavens,  
 The spirits and angels that did sin with him  
 Retained their local essence as their faults.

(ix.58-60)

If Vandermast becomes identified with Bruno in this scene, the fact that he and Bungay dispute concerning which of the fallen angels is 'predominant in magic' (ix.25), ensures that the discussion of magic in this episode remains consistent with its actual portrayal elsewhere in the play.

It is apparent, therefore, that there are several points of contact between the representation of magic in the play and contemporary beliefs concerning the efficacy of magical practices and the possibility of man's control of the supernatural. As a fictional representation which mediates between more and less condemnatory views concerning the use of magic, Friar Bacon alludes to a range of contemporary beliefs and practices and even possibly to relatively recent events. Further insight into the contemporary relevance of the play may be gained from other two episodes: the transportations of Miles, in Scene xv, and of the tapstress, in Scene ii.

Scene xv is particularly remarkable. As Assarsson-Rizzi suggests, the transportation of Miles to hell by the devil is a scene with a clear ancestry in morality and mystery drama, as outlined in the previous chapter.<sup>89</sup> However, within the context of Friar Bacon, the moral dimension to this comedy which might be anticipated by some approaches to such dramatic forms is absent. Like the 'cuppes & cannes' episode from the Chester mysteries and shows, the Scene involves the interaction between a comic human character and a devil or devils and reference is made to tapsters. The bathetic descent from the classical allusions and measured verse of the devil's opening speech into the farcical conversation into which he is lured by the verbose Miles is notable and hints at the diversity and effectiveness of the traditions of performance upon which Greene was able to draw. To

some extent an aura of homiletic justice pervades the scene: Miles's descent to Hell might be seen as a way of qualifying Bacon's place within the play's final resolution. Interestingly, however, the scene remains distanced from any explicit moral message. Indeed, the recognition of convention in Miles's final comment in particular seems to distance this comic performance from the possibility of a more serious moral interpretation:

Oh, Lord, here's a goodly marvel, when a man rides to hell on the devil's back.

(xv.61-2)

Viewed in its context within the play, it is apparent that the tenor of this scene is not overtly homiletic. That magic brings dangers with it is certainly admitted by the play, but magic is also understood in other ways, not least as a source of worldly power and entertainment.

Furthermore, Marion Gibson has recently noted that Scenes ii and xv of Friar Bacon seem likely to have been a source for the 1592 pamphlet A Most Wicked Worke of a Wretched Witch concerning the apparent supernatural transvection of a Richard Burt. In the context of this study, the irreverent humour of the pamphlet is particularly striking, in particular when Burt is flown to Hell:

First therefore (he affirmeth) it was exceeding hot, replenished with more than Cymmerian darknesse, plentiful in filthy odors and stinches, ful of noise and clamours, insomuch that hee seemed to heare infinite millions of discrepant noises but saw nothing save onelie the fire which caused such an unquenchable drouth in his stomach, that presentlye minding a pennie he had in his purse: looked round about for an Alehouse where he might spend it.<sup>90</sup>

A Most Wicked Work raises significant questions regarding the boundaries between early modern notions of fiction and fact concerning the supernatural. Gibson's description of it as a 'wonderfully rich text which refuses to be partitioned between history and literature' and her observation that the pamphlet makes reference to at least one person whose existence can be verified casts a new light on Friar Bacon.<sup>91</sup> The impending visit of Miles to Hell may cause the audience, in part, to reflect further upon Bacon's own moral failings within the play. However, the dominant intention of the

scene, which is horrific, humorous and satirical, seems to be to reassert the use of the supernatural within the play as a source of pleasure for the audience, spiced with the highly comic punishment of a miscreant.<sup>92</sup> However, the analogies between Friar Bacon and A Most Wicked Work also invite a more fundamental reassessment of the relationship between comic representation of the supernatural of the sort which appears in Friar Bacon and accounts like A Most Wicked Work. Gibson is right to observe that A Most Wicked Work 'serves as a sharp warning against accepting the events narrated in witchcraft pamphlets as transparently easy to analyse'.<sup>93</sup> However, the textual relationship between Friar Bacon and A Most Wicked Work suggests that aspects of the play's representation of magic might have been received as more than merely figurative. It suggests that the representation of the supernatural in the play, like that in the pamphlet, was constructed in a more complex way from a collection of materials that would have varied in credibility, and carried meaning and relevance on several levels, for its audience.

Friar Bacon cannot be considered to be principally concerned with magic or related contemporary issues in the manner of Doctor Faustus. At its heart lies an affirmation, in romantic comic form, of a fantasy of political and social order of which the career of Friar Bacon is one of several expositions. However, the representation of magic in the play cannot be considered to be irrelevant or 'fictional' as a result of its subordinate status within the play. Indeed, there is compelling evidence that the play engages with ideas concerning magic which were more widely in circulation in early modern England. Friar Bacon suggests that magic only acts as a catalyst: it is personal deficiencies, such as pride, which are the root of immorality, not magic itself. In this way, the play probably draws upon an existing narrative structure. The portrayal of the magician Bomelio in The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune (pre-1589) questions the propriety of the use of magic, but at the same time makes him a broadly sympathetic, rather than wicked, figure. Bomelio's son, Hermione, denounces the use of magic and burns his father's books, but Bomelio is spared any punishment for his art greater than the temporary insanity brought on by the loss of his books. Bomelio is not excluded from the happy comic ending, but his magic is shown to be a source of potential personal danger rather than strength to him.<sup>94</sup>

In Friar Bacon, however, the limits of magic are more thoroughly explored and embedded within a wider contemporary context. The play envisages, along popular lines, a constructive,

positive, role for magic. Bacon's magic has important associations with the provision of moral lessons and the demonstration of patriotic pride which show it in a positive light, as does its repeated ability to entertain and amuse. The extent to which the audience identifies with, rather than condemns, Bacon's magic anticipates his prophetic contribution to the play's harmonious conclusion. To this end, the portrayal of magic in Friar Bacon is significantly shaped by the play's larger formal comic structure. Greene draws upon comic associations of the supernatural which were in wide circulation in the early modern period, in pamphlet literature as well as works concerned with Faustus and incorporates them within his own comic framework. West's assertion that Bacon is 'exposed to damnation by the bare fact of his voluntary commerce with fiends' is not justified by the overall representation of magic in the play.<sup>95</sup> The clearer paradigm which underlies Friar Bacon is the transformation, often through forgiveness, of individual failings into joyful, festive, comedy.

#### V. **Conclusion: the comic representation of the supernatural in Doctor Faustus and Friar Bacon**

Important parallels emerge between the comic representation of magic in Doctor Faustus and Friar Bacon. To differing cumulative effect, each play presents an over-determined representation of conflicting contemporary ideas, which cannot be reduced to a single identifiable contemporary perspective regarding human traffic with the supernatural. Neither is simply condemnatory of human traffic with the supernatural. Moreover, in so far as each play engages with contemporary notions regarding the efficacy of magic, neither seems to focus on ideas of magic closely derived from the hermetic tradition as defined by Yates. Rather, each engages with more general notions of efficacious magic for which there is evidence in the period.

Doctor Faustus is characterized by a particular tension in its engagement with these contemporary discourses. Although its combination of comic and tragic modes continues to disturb critics, this study has aimed to demonstrate ways in which both modes contribute, in a constructive manner, to the build up of 'subversive energy' within the play. By contrast, Friar Bacon ultimately



suggests through its propitious comic catastrophe that similar conflicting contemporary discourses regarding human attempts to exercise magic may, at least provisionally, be accommodated.

Traister's notion of the formal characteristics of the stereotypical romance magician, available to 'facilitate plot action and provide spectacular effects' clearly has some relevance to both plays. Indeed, irrespective of the disputed authorship of the play's comic scenes, particularly in Acts Three and Four, Faustus's anti-Catholicism and his role as an entertainer have clear parallels with the association of the magician with popular patriotic causes and occasional entertainment in Friar Bacon. Faustus also shares these characteristics, more generally, with several other comic stage magicians.<sup>96</sup> It is apparent that the choice of comic mode by the playwrights provides for spectacular set-piece entertainment, surprising interventions and reversals of plot. However, the ways in which these devices relate to the engagement of both plays with contemporary issues also needs to be appreciated.

The contemporary cultural relevance of both Doctor Faustus and Friar Bacon is best understood when the plays are considered in the context of other early modern English supernatural texts. Such an examination helps to indicate ways in which to approach the relationship between contemporary relevance and fictional shaping which underlies these plays.

Several connections have been identified in this chapter between the comic representation of the supernatural in the plays examined and other early modern texts which are often considered by modern critics to be more directly connected with genuine early modern beliefs concerning the supernatural. Most notable, perhaps, is the connection between Friar Bacon and the A Most Wicked Worke (1592) by 'G. B.' discussed in particular by Marion Gibson. This connection is most plausibly explained in terms of the influence of comic drama on a pamphlet account of supernatural events.<sup>97</sup> Although the inclusion of similar comic elements in both witchcraft pamphlets examined by Gibson and in the plays examined in this chapter may, to some extent, be attributed to commercial motivations, it is not apparent that such connections must be seen simply as devaluing the contemporary relevance of pamphlet literature for a contemporary audience. In Gibson's words, the inclusion of such elements in pamphlet literature need not 'automatically preclude "truthfulness" and authorial earnestness, although it may make us question both qualities' (p. 140). Her suggestion that the fictional and factual emphases of different modes of writing, even within single pamphlets,

are not always easily distinguishable, invites us to consider the relationship between different comic, and non-comic, modes in drama in a similar way.

An older scholarly division of the sources for the Bacon stories into folklore, on the one hand, and a condemnatory framework derived from theological sources, on the other, must also be questioned. This division has the tendency to imply that only the latter aspect actually engages with the wider beliefs concerning the supernatural of an early modern audience. For example, the interactions of Bacon and Miles with devils are apparently informed by proverbial ideas and have affinities with folk beliefs.<sup>98</sup> However, Bacon's magic may also be seen to reflect actual magical beliefs, apparently circulating in the period, concerning the enforcing of unilateral pacts with infernal spirits. This dual point of reference reflects a wider cultural phenomenon: the ease with which ideas could circulate between a proverbial or folktale discourse and discourses associable by the audience with credible magical practice. As considered in Chapter Two, recent discussion of the Robinson narrative, reinforces the notion that modern standards of credibility cannot be applied to early modern narratives of the supernatural. Fanciful stories containing folktale-like motifs could continue to carry credibility in the period.<sup>99</sup> A modern audience must be alert to the cultural specificity of early modern ideas regarding the relationship between fact and fiction pertaining to the supernatural.

A further significant relationship between the formal properties of the comic representation of the supernatural and the engagement of that representation with a wider culture of beliefs and practices may be argued to exist in Doctor Faustus and Friar Bacon. Historical studies make it increasingly apparent that supernatural beliefs had a considerable attraction in the early modern period as a vehicle for the expression of important socio-psychological needs. In addition to the Robinson case, many other contemporary works, such as A Most Wicked Worke and The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chensforde (1566), attest to the attraction of fantastic supernatural narratives for audiences, story-tellers and intermediary figures such as examiners or editors.<sup>100</sup> As Gibson has discussed, this fascination usually emerges overtly in a context of ambivalence towards, or condemnation of, human traffic with supernatural powers. However, this fascination is not inconsistent with the ideas of worldly empowerment and fulfilment that also find expression in Doctor Faustus and Friar Bacon. It is apparent from sources such as

spell books that worldly power was associated with some kinds of practical magical activity from at least the late medieval period through to the seventeenth century. Support for the persistence of more positive attitudes concerning traffic with the supernatural may even be found within the range of self-fashioning strategies employed by those accused of witchcraft and preserved within accounts of early modern witchcraft examinations.

This is not to deny that, to some extent, comic representation provided playwrights and audiences with a chance to enjoy the spectacle of the supernatural at a secure, fictionalized, distance. The theatre was a commodity, purchased by its audiences, which enjoyed a complex relationship with institutions of authority within the state. However, behind these kinds of cultural pressure we may detect a more general tendency within the early modern period in which the supernatural provided a canvas for the expression of powerful fantasies of many kinds, ranging from guilt to worldly empowerment. Both Doctor Faustus and Friar Bacon should be seen in this context. However, as the next chapter will explore in greater detail, it is the less-problematic presentation of this material to the audience in Friar Bacon which has greater parallels with other comic representations of the magician on the early modern stage. At the same time, both Doctor Faustus and Friar Bacon should be seen as informed by ideas regarding the credibility of the supernatural that break down the boundaries between fact and fiction familiar to a modern audience, especially in the context of comedy.

Underlying the comic representation of the supernatural in both plays are notions of theatrical performance which require a particular kind of complicity from their audience. The audience is required to accept that the comic representation of the supernatural is more than a device for spectacle and surprise. It is also a credible medium in which to engage with significant contemporary issues, albeit in a fictional form. This concept both extends and gives a particular comic character to the 'literalist theatre' which McMillin and MacLean have argued that Friar Bacon shares with other of the plays acted by the Queen's Men.<sup>101</sup> In both plays, the plausibility and realism of portraying the supernatural on stage remain unchallenged.

As the following chapters will illustrate, an appreciation of these characteristics in Doctor Faustus and Friar Bacon will enable a better understanding of the comic representation of the supernatural more generally in the period. The following chapters will develop the key themes of

this chapter concerning the relationship between comic form and cultural context, in order to assess the relevance for their original audience of comic portrayals of magicians, fairies and witches in a further series of plays.

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Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Robert Greene, Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, ed. by J. A. Lavin, *The New Mermaids* (London: Ernest Benn, 1969), ii.51. All references will be to this edition, referred to hereafter as Friar Bacon
- <sup>2</sup> Traister, pp. 1-2. Cf. Mowat, p. 302 et passim.
- <sup>3</sup> Traister, pp. 21, 25.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 27.
- <sup>5</sup> cf. Paulo L. Rossi, 'Society, Culture and the Dissemination of Learning', in Science, Culture and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe, pp. 143-75 (p. 157). Rossi suggests that the magic in Ariosto's Orlando Furioso should not be divorced from the contemporary context.
- <sup>6</sup> Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus: A- and B-Texts ed. by David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, the Revels Plays Series (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), hereafter referred to as Doctor Faustus. Doctor Faustus, pp. 1-3, finds 1588-9 and 1592 equally persuasive as dates for the first performance of the A-text. Among older critics, Harry Levin, The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 144, favours 1592 for the A-text; Paul H. Kocher, Christopher Marlowe: A Study in his Thought, Learning, and Character (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 18, dates it to 1588-9. The A-text was first published in quarto in 1604 and the B-text revision in 1616. Subsequent references will usually be made to both texts: 'cf.' indicates substantially similar, but not identical, passages in the two texts.
- <sup>7</sup> The English Faust Book: A Critical Edition Based on the Text of 1592, ed. by John Henry Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); The English Wagner Book of 1594, ed. by Alfred E. Richards, *Studies in English Faust Literature I* (Berlin: Felber, 1907). The English Wagner Book is properly titled The Second Report of Doctor John Faustus, Containing his Appearances and the

Deedes of Wagner (1594). The Famous Historie of Fryer Bacon [...], in Early English Prose Romances, ed. by William J. Thoms, 2nd edn, 3 vols (London: Nattali and Bond, 1858), I, 179-250. Thoms, I, 182, dates this text to the end of the sixteenth century. Jones, The English Faust Book, p. 85, believes it to be a 1629 edition with the date cropped. Several editions survive. The earliest copy in The British Library is dated to 1627, but Jones, p. 55, notes a copy at Harvard believed to date from c1625. Jones, pp. 52-72, identifies The Most Famous History of the Learned Fryer Bacon [...] (London, ?1715) as a short version of The Famous Historie which differs substantially from long versions like the one reprinted by Thoms. He also argues that it is this short version which is 'a representative text (or an abridgement of one) for a late sixteenth-century romance, current either in MS or print in 1590, on which Greene based his play of Friar Bacon' (p. 57). Critics are generally agreed that some form of lost prose version probably preceded the play. All references will be to the 1858 Thoms edition of The Famous Historie and the copy of the Most Famous History in the British Library (shelf-mark 1077.g.32). Significant variations between these editions of the long and short texts will be noted.

<sup>8</sup> The English Faust Book, pp. 52-72, uses a complex analysis of postulated contemporary references and textual borrowings to date the English Faust Book to ?1588-9, Doctor Faustus to ?1589, and both the original Bacon romance and Greene's Friar Bacon to ?1590. See also *ibid*, pp. 256-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 92, 181 (ll. 26-8, 2950-3). The English Faust Book is properly titled The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Dr John Faustus.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 98 (ll. 242-69), 180 (ll. 2918-32).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, *ibid*, pp. 155-7 (ll. 2134-2202).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 158-9 (ll. 2203-40).

<sup>13</sup> The English Wagner Book is prefaced with the phrase 'unto them which would know the trueth'. Richards notes that the Bodleian copy of the Book, which formally belonged to Anthony Wood, is bound (he does not speculate at what date) with five other works of a supernatural flavour, including copies of Adlington's 1596 translation of The Golden Ass and two demonological works, Gifford's Discourse and Dialogue. See, The English Wagner Book, pp. 32, 9-16.

- <sup>14</sup> The English Wagner Book, pp. 52 (l. 5) - 62 (l. 5).
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp. 43 (ll. 1-25); 49 (l. 24) - 50 (l. 14); pp. 32-5.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid, pp. 91 (l. 24) - 98 (l. 12).
- <sup>17</sup> The English Faust Book, pp. 1, 3.
- <sup>18</sup> Frank Baron, Faustus on Trial: The Origins of Johann Spies's "Historia" in an Age of Witch Hunting (Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1992), p. 149.
- <sup>19</sup> cf. The English Faust Book, p. 3: 'the [English Faust] book is undeniably ambivalent in combining exemplary moral exhortation with heroic fashioning, though the extent of the latter depended on the reader's viewpoint: to a Puritan, the pleasurable excesses of the table and the lusts of the flesh were equally reprehensible signs of Faustus' possession, his mock heroism a diabolic satire'.
- <sup>20</sup> e.g., English Faust Book, p. 156 (ll. 2161-3): 'I have a swift spirit, which can in the twinkling of an eye fulfil my desire in anything'.
- <sup>21</sup> The Most Cruell and Bloody Murder Committed by an Innkeepers Wife (London, 1606) in Early Modern Witches, pp 151-7 (p. 156). Gibson, Reading Witchcraft, pp. 151-153 also discusses this episode.
- <sup>22</sup> Gibson, Reading Witchcraft, p. 146.
- <sup>23</sup> I.i.80, 84-7 (A); I.i.77, 81-4 (B). Levin, Overreacher, pp. 42-3, makes the case for the importance of the mighty line in Marlovian tragedy. See also Douglas Cole, Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1962). Both Cole, pp. 240-3, and Bradbrook, 'Eldritch', p. 90, stress the differences between Doctor Faustus and the morality tradition.
- <sup>24</sup> I.iii.28 (A and B). I.iii.44-50 (A); I.iii.42-7 (B). West, Invisible, pp. 117-18.
- <sup>25</sup> Where the early scenes in the main plot employ a distinctively Marlovian tragic mode, the comic subplot employs a more widely-used comic form, as Roma Gill's study of common elements in Doctor Faustus I.iv and Greene and Lodge's A Looking Glasse for London and Englande suggests. See Roma Gill, "'Such Conceits as Clownage Keeps in Pay': comedy and "Dr. Faustus"", in The

Fool and the Trickster: Studies in Honour of Enid Welsford, ed. by Paul V. A. Williams (Cambridge: Brewer; Totowa NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979), pp. 55-63 (pp. 60-1).

<sup>26</sup> For example, The English Faust Book describes Wagner as a scholar for whom the 'sport and life that he saw his master follow seemed pleasant' (see English Faust Book, p. 100, ll. 323-4).

Although his enthusiasm is used in such passages to tremendously ironic, censorious, effect by the author, Wagner's actions in the English Faust Book, unlike Doctor Faustus, do not directly parody those of Faustus. See also The Famous Historie (I, 244-5) and The Most Famous History (sig. C3<sup>v</sup>) for contrast. In the Bacon romances, the attempt of Bacon's servant Miles to conjure seems to increase Bacon's moral authority, since Bacon rescues him from the consequences of his actions.

<sup>27</sup> III.i.192 [s. d.], 197 [s. d.] (B). Leah S. Marcus, 'Textual Indeterminacy and Ideological Difference: The Case of "Doctor Faustus"', Renaissance Drama, 20 (1989), 1-29 (pp. 17-22), discusses the differences between the Roman episodes in the two texts.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 166-7.

<sup>29</sup> IV.i.1-2, 6-7, 8-11 (A). Cf. The Famous Historie, I, 194: 'The king commended him [Bacon] for his modesty, and told him, that nothing could become a wise man lesse than boasting: but yet withall he requested him now to be no niggard of his knowledge, but to shew his queene and him some of his skill.'

<sup>30</sup> IV.i.109-189 (A); IV.iv.1-45, IV.v.35-53 (B).

<sup>31</sup> IV.v.24-34.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas, 'The Place of Laughter', p. 80.

<sup>33</sup> IV.i.139-44 (A); IV.iv.23-8 (B). On the important issue of despair within the moral framework of the play, see Doctor Faustus, pp. 20-1.

<sup>34</sup> II.i.82 [s. d.], II.i.151 [s. d.], II.iii.108-64 (A); II.i.82 [s. d.], II.i.146 [s. d.], II.iii.106-62 (B).

<sup>35</sup> For the dismemberment, see IV.i.174 [s. d.] (A); IV.iv.37 [s. d.] (B). For the beheading, see IV.ii.44 [s. d.] (B). For Faustus's final destruction, see V.iii.6-7 and English Faust Book, p. 180 (ll. 2925-32).

<sup>36</sup> Doctor Faustus, p. 36. Cf. The English Faust Book, p. 2, which sees the tensions within that work as giving its tragedy extra poignancy. Advocates of a purely moral reading of Doctor Faustus

include Robert Ornstein, 'The Comic Synthesis in "Doctor Faustus"', ELH, 22 (1955), 165-72. See also Cole, p. 208.

<sup>37</sup> V.i.82-110 (A); V.i (B). D. J. Palmer, 'Magic and Poetry in "Doctor Faustus"', Critical Quarterly, 6 (1964), 56-67 (p. 64).

<sup>38</sup> Doctor Faustus, p. 35: 'this very need to put the genie back into the bottle attests to the subversive energy released by the theatrical experience of the play'.

<sup>39</sup> Palmer, p. 62.

<sup>40</sup> Bradbrook, 'Eldritch', p. 83 et passim; Doctor Faustus, p. 47. By contrast to the interest of this study in the context of early modern supernatural beliefs and practices, Bristol, pp. 150-5, considers the play's comedy as an act of socio-political subversion.

<sup>41</sup> Gatti, Hilary, The Renaissance Drama of Knowledge: Giordano Bruno in England (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 77-113. Gatti also explores interesting, if not compelling, analogues between the imagery of overreaching in Doctor Faustus and Bruno's work. Other studies exploring the relationship between Doctor Faustus and notions of the humanist or hermetic tradition are provided by Traister, pp. 88-107 and Mebane, pp. 113-36. Both arrive at interpretations of the play tending towards an emphasis on its homiletic, admonitory, message.

<sup>42</sup> See Yates, Giordano Bruno, pp. 265-73.

<sup>43</sup> Doctor Faustus, p. 126, footnote translation of I.iii.18-19 (A and B). Cf. the translation of the list of infernal princes from the Lemegeton in Scot, pp. 217-225. William Blackburn, "'Heavenly Words": Marlowe's Faustus as a Renaissance Magician', English Studies in Canada, 4 (1978), 1-14, by contrast to this study, places Faustus's magic in the context of Pico's concepts of magia and goetia.

<sup>44</sup> I.i.119-120, 156 (A); I.i.111-2, 149 (B). On Peter of Abano, see Butler, p. 156-7.

<sup>45</sup> Bodleian MS eMus. 243, sig. 26<sup>r</sup>. See also Thomas, Religion, p. 275

<sup>46</sup> IV.ii.10-17 (A), IV.vi.16-23 (B); Bodleian MS Douce 166, p. 23.

<sup>47</sup> cf. The English Faust Book, ll. 1329-80, where Faustus 'and his spirit made themselves invisible and came into the Pope's court and privy chamber', and ll. 2134-202, where Faustus produces fruit for the Duchess and a banquet for the Duke of 'Anholt'.



<sup>48</sup> II.i.163-8 (A); the corresponding phrase in the B-text is 'men in harness' (II.i.163).

<sup>49</sup> The English Faust Book, p. 22.

<sup>50</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh, The Skeptic, quoted by Paul H. Kocher, Science and Religion in Elizabethan England (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1953), p. 45. Bruno, De triplici minimo, I, iiiii: 137-38, translated and quoted in Gatti, Giordano Bruno, p. 4. Gatti, Renaissance Drama of Knowledge, passim, explores Bruno's visit to England, and connections with English literary circles. For differing opinions concerning Marlowe's own magical and theological beliefs, the range of which only serves to reveal the impenetrability of the subject, see Blackburn, p. 4; Levin, Overreacher, p. 19; Kocher, Christopher Marlowe, p. 47, p. 68 et passim; Charles Nicholl, The Reckoning: the Murder of Christopher Marlowe (Jonathan Cape: 1992; London: Pan Macmillan, 1993), pp. 191-215.

<sup>51</sup> The title-page classification of Doctor Faustus as a 'Tragicall History' may be felt fittingly to distinguish its overt presentation of tragic tensions to the more latent incidence of similar ambivalences in English Faust Book. Although John Henry Jones detects, probably with some justification, a tragic strain in the English Faust Book, the proper and full title of this work is 'The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Dr John Faustus'.

<sup>52</sup> Friar Bacon, pp. xii-xiii and Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, ed. by Daniel Seltzer, Regents Renaissance Drama Series (London: Arnold, 1964), p. x, date the play's first performance to the period 1589-90. The first printed version is dated 1594.

<sup>53</sup> The early history of the performance of Doctor Faustus is considered in Doctor Faustus, pp. 48-50.

<sup>54</sup> See The Most Famous History (sig. A3<sup>r</sup>) and The Famous Historie (I, 205-11), which should be compared with The Most Famous History (sig. B1<sup>v</sup>-B2<sup>r</sup>).

<sup>55</sup> The Famous Historie, I, 193, 196; cf. The Most Famous History, sig. A2<sup>v</sup>-A3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> I, 248-50. The deaths of Bungay and Vandermast / Vandermaster are found in both The Famous Historie (I, 240-4) and The Most Famous History (sig. C4<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>57</sup> i.126, ii.51. Other examples include 'jolly friar' (ii.139, iv.59, v.73, 80) and 'frolic friar' (i.148). Bungay is also referred to as a 'jolly friar' (vi.14, 174), and is both referred to and refers to himself as a 'merry friar' (vi.178, 87).

<sup>58</sup> OED, 2nd edn, gives one definition of 'toy', in a concrete sense and with Elizabethan examples, as 'a thing of little or no value or importance, a trifle; a foolish or serious affair, a piece of nonsense'. The context in Friar Bacon, suggests that Bacon is not using the term in an overtly self-critical way.

<sup>59</sup> ii.148. In the OED, 2nd edn, the earliest example of the use of 'mate' in the sense of 'to checkmate' is dated to c1320 and the first example in the sense of 'to overcome; defeat; subdue' is dated to before 1225. In the sense of 'to match; to marry; to join in marriage' the earliest cited use is from Shakespeare's Timon of Athens, perhaps suggesting that Greene's use is relatively innovative in this context.

<sup>60</sup> Albert Wertheim, 'The Presentation of Sin in "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay"', Criticism, 16 (1974), 273-86. See also Cecile Williamson Cary, 'The Iconography of Food and the Motif of World Order in "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay"', Comparative Drama, 13 (1979), 150-63; Friar Bacon, pp. xxx, xxi; Kerstin Assarsson-Rizzi, "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay": A Structural and Thematic Analysis of Robert Greene's Play, Lund Studies in English 44 (Lund: C. W. K. Gleeruplud, Berlingska Boktryckeriet, 1972) and Peter Mortenson, "'Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay": Festive Comedy and "Three-Form'd Luna"', ELR, 2 (1972), 194-207.

<sup>61</sup> Wertheim, pp. 277, 275.

<sup>62</sup> The Famous Historie, I, 197-8, 198-204.

<sup>63</sup> See Traister, pp. 71-2.

<sup>64</sup> Cary, p. 161.

<sup>65</sup> See Thomas, 'The Place of Laughter', p. 80. The important issue is to establish what or who is being ridiculed by humour. Although humour might implicitly ridicule its originator, in the manner of the comedy of evil, Thomas's article makes it clear that humorous moral criticism was not always considered implicitly to indicate the turpitude of its originator as well as its subject.

<sup>66</sup> This should be compared with the place of ridicule and other forms of criticism within actual festivity, which is quite unlike the theories of comedy of either Barber or Bernard Spivack. See above, pp. 11-12.

<sup>67</sup> Mortenson, p. 206. *Ibid.*, makes reference to Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, p. 220.

<sup>68</sup> Mortenson, pp. 205, 206. Mortenson's negative attitude concerning magic is ultimately quite similar to that of Wertheim. See, especially, Wertheim, p. 286.

<sup>69</sup> cf. William Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral: A Study of the Pastoral Form in Literature, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1935; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 34. Empson's notion that the friars in the play are "jolly" because they are 'connected with low life or the people as a whole' identifies the importance of festivity in the play, while making use of ideas concerning the proletariat which seem both dated and speculative.

<sup>70</sup> Mortenson, p. 205.

<sup>71</sup> See Cary, p. 151: 'Margaret exemplifies a mean between the extremes of total renunciation and lust'.

<sup>72</sup> For a full discussion of this scene, see Frank R. Ardolino, 'Robert Greene's Use of the Lambert Simnell Imposture in "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay"', American Notes and Queries, 20 (1981), 37-9.

<sup>73</sup> Mortenson, p. 206, quoted in full, above, p. 89. Cf. Assarsson-Rizzi, p. 122, who discusses what she terms the intrusion of 'the world of actuality' into the 'world of romance' in which the play originates and to which it returns. Mortenson, p. 200, compares the Bacon and Edward plots.

<sup>74</sup> Assarsson-Rizzi, p. 131.

<sup>75</sup> See Traister, p. 72.

<sup>76</sup> Traister compares Friar Bacon and Shakespeare's Love's Labour's Lost. Each 'suffers no serious diminishment of joy and celebration, but both plays, by briefly introducing death into their worlds, acknowledge a darker, more complex side to life than their surfaces would seem to suggest' (p. 86). Charles Heatt, 'A New Source for Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay', Review of English Studies, 32 (1981), 180-7, makes an interesting comparison between the comedies of Greene and Lyly.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Waldo F. McNeir, 'Traditional Elements in the Character of Greene's Friar Bacon', SP, 45 (1948), 172-9, who discusses Bacon's magic in the context of romance. McNeir's comment, p. 174, that 'Greene dignified his powerful necromancer by omitting the vulgar japes' of the 'popular romance' is not fully supported by the content of the play.

<sup>78</sup> West, Invisible, p. 134. West's notion of 'occult' embraces the approaches of men like Agrippa as well as practical, popular magic.

<sup>79</sup> Frank Towne, "'White magic" in "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay"?' , MLN, 67 (1952), 9-13 (p. 12). On the theology of repentance, see Doctor Faustus, pp. 19-20. The theological emphasis on God's ability to forgive can sometimes be neglected by those critics who look for a severely orthodox condemnatory message in the drama.

<sup>80</sup> West, Invisible, p. 121.

<sup>81</sup> xiii.96, 86, 107.

<sup>82</sup> Traister, pp. 85-6.

<sup>83</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 302, 255.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 461-514.

<sup>85</sup> Lavin's gloss of 'cabbalists' as 'experts in magic' probably captures the correct level of technical usage. Lavin cites this as 'OED's earliest example'.

<sup>86</sup> James Dow McCallum, 'Greene's Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay', MLN, 35 (1920), 212-7. See also Yates, Giordano Bruno, pp. 205-11, 235-45. Traister, pp. 76-8.

<sup>87</sup> Yates, Giordano Bruno, pp. 208-9.

<sup>88</sup> The Famous Historie (I, 216-19) and The Most Famous History (sig. B4<sup>r-v</sup>) contain more elaborate conjuring matches than Friar Bacon.

<sup>89</sup> Assarsson-Rizzi, pp. 133-4. See above, Chapter Two, Section V.

<sup>90</sup> 'G. B.', A Most Wicked Worke of a Wretched Witch, in Early Modern Witches, pp. 138-145 (p. 143).

<sup>91</sup> Gibson, Reading Witchcraft, 153-6 (p. 155).

<sup>92</sup> See Traister, p.81: 'this final and most unusual transportation scene assures the audience that nothing can for long overcome the comic tone of the play'.

<sup>93</sup> Early Modern Witches, p, 139.

<sup>94</sup> The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune, Malone Society Reprints ([Oxford?]: Oxford University Press, 1930). The play's running title declares in to be 'A pleasent Comoedie'. See Andrew V. Ettin, 'Magic into Art: The Magician's Renunciation of Magic in English Renaissance Drama', Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 19 (1977), 268-94 (pp. 269-72). The Rare Triumphs was printed in 1589. Ettin, p. 270, dates the play to 1582 at the latest.

<sup>95</sup> West, Invisible, p. 112. West's interpretation of Bacon's magic seems to be strongly influenced by Agrippan conceptions of good and bad forms of magic, as his quotation from Agrippa suggests on p. 113.

<sup>96</sup> See Ornstein, 'Comic Synthesis', pp. 165, 166. See Paul Kocher, 'Nashe's Authorship of the Prose Scenes in "Faustus"', MLQ, 2 (1942), 17-40 and Doctor Faustus, pp. 70-7 regarding the possibility that Marlowe was not responsible for the comic additions in the A-text, as well as those to the B-text. For a discussion of the additions to the B-text, see Doctor Faustus, pp. 72-77. Marcus, 'Textual Indeterminacy', p. 3, notes the potential of Greg's important parallel edition to elide the two texts.

<sup>97</sup> Gibson, Reading Witchcraft, p. 153: '[G. B.] reports a perfectly plausible witchcraft fantasy conjured up by a Middlesex farmhand, Richard Burt. But he laces his supposed report with untroubled borrowings from a play by Robert Greene'.

<sup>98</sup> The English Faust Book, p.11, which gives 'folk legend' as a probable source for the Bacon narratives. L. T. Fitz, "'More than thou hast wit to ask": Marlowe's Faustus as Numskull', Folklore, 88 (1977), 215-19 (p. 215). In The Dictionary of Proverbs (London, Kyle Cathie, 1993), pp. 68-70, Linda and Roger Flavell list a series of proverbs associated with the Devil.

<sup>99</sup> See Chapter 2, Section IV.

<sup>100</sup> Gibson, Reading Witchcraft, pp. 25-6.

<sup>101</sup> McMillin and MacLean, p. 134.

## Chapter Four

### 'Fame in Sleights and Magicke Won': Patterns in the Comic Representation of Magic and Magicians in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama

#### I. The Old Wives Tale

This chapter will examine the comic representation of the supernatural in a further six plays. It will explore both continuities and the differences in their representation of magic, and associated supernatural phenomena, with reference to the themes developed in the preceding chapter.

In George Peele's The Old Wives Tale (?1593), the storyteller Madge presents the Tale to the three pages Antic, Frolic and Fantastic in a framing narrative.<sup>1</sup> The Tale itself, which combines a series of literary and other cultural sources, concerns the activities and defeat of the evil magician Sacrapant.

Commentators have noted the use of folktale motifs in the play.<sup>2</sup> Sacrapant is a malicious magician who has learnt his powers from his mother and, having carried off the daughter of a King in the form of a dragon, holds her captive and uses his magic to appear youthful (ll. 352- 69). His magic belongs to a series of supernatural elements of the Tale itself with archetypal qualities, including the resurrections of Huanebango (l. 675) and Jack (l. 724) and the test offered by the Head in the well (ll. 664-74, 811-24).

Alongside the affinities to folktale narratives, the Tale itself alludes classical culture in its portrayal of the supernatural. Sacrapant declares Meroe, one of the witches in The Golden Ass of Apuleius, to be his mother and educator in magic.<sup>3</sup> The spell which causes Erestus to turn into 'an ugly bear' has similarities not only with the transformations in Apuleius, but also with classical literature regarding magic more generally. Using magic to attract the love of others is a trait associated with Meroe and other classical witches. Sacrapant's Furies also allude, in name at least, to the Greek Erinyes or spirits of vengeance of classical culture.<sup>4</sup>

The Old Wives Tale can also be seen as broadly romantic in form, in that it leads through a series of reversals of fortune and surprises to a generally propitious, comic, conclusion once Sacrapant is defeated and beheaded. Patricia Binnie also considers that Sacrapant's name derives

from Ariosto.<sup>5</sup> As an evil magician whose actions provide the motor for the rest of the 'tale' narrative, Sacrapant also demonstrates some affinity with Brian Sans Foy in The Historie of Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes, whose characterization again seems to draw in part on romance stereotypes. As a pathetic, cowardly figure, Sacrapant, like Brian, also has some association with the tradition of the comedy of evil. Sacrapant's use of spells, in particular to disguise his true age and to stimulate unnatural affection in Delia, might be felt to express in a modified form the deceptive qualities associated with the Vice tradition and the comedy of evil more generally.<sup>6</sup>

Other analogues for Sacrapant's magical activities can also be traced which, together with the folktale motifs, suggest less élitist and literary contexts for its portrayal of the supernatural. The circulation in the early seventeenth-century of experiments for inducing love has been discussed in an earlier chapter. Sacrapant's preparation of an apparently magical feast, summoned by the incantation 'Spread, table, spread' (l. 385) also has an analogy in a spell from a manuscript apparently dating from the second half of the seventeenth century which will make 'a table w[i]th [?delicat] meates, for to appeare'.<sup>7</sup> The two Furies under Sacrapant's magical command are at least as akin to the spirits of early modern magical practices as they are to any classical source. Moreover, references to shape changing by humans also appear in a published accounts of alleged supernatural events circulated in the early modern period. A Rehearsall both Straung and True (1579), which relates accusations and convictions for witchcraft in Windsor contains such an account:

Elizabeth Stile confesseth her self often tymes to have gon to Father Rosimond house, where she founde hym sitting in a Wood, not farre from thence, under the bodie of a Tree, sometymes in the shape of an Ape, and otherwhiles like an Horse.<sup>8</sup>

Marion Gibson has noted that this section reads like a record of incredulous cross-questioning of the witness, yet this sensational report, like that concerning Richard Burt in A Most Wicked Worke of a Wretched Witch, found its way into print. The fate of Father Rosimond, whom the pamphlet suggests was both associated with the witches and employed by others as a 'wiseman' to advise regarding counter-measures against witchcraft, is not recorded.<sup>9</sup>

The Old Wives Tale, therefore, brings to the theatrical platform an approach to representation that, in common with a range of early modern stories regarding the supernatural, shows a tendency to fuse folktale motifs with a range of other literary and non-literary points of cultural reference. As Joan C. Marx suggests, the combination of generic elements which make up the play is intended to provide 'a comic sauciness' which is not parodic in a modern sense.<sup>10</sup> The play harnesses powerful syncretic forces which draw together more and less fictional notions of the supernatural in the early modern period, exploiting the fluidity of the boundaries between them. As in Doctor Faustus and Friar Bacon, the play should be understood in the context of an acceptance by early modern audiences that both folktale motifs and also comic stage representations could engage with issues of contemporary relevance regarding the supernatural.<sup>11</sup> Its story of supernatural malice, and some aspects of its magical phenomena, would have resonated with genuine early modern anxieties concerning the supernatural.

Unlike either Doctor Faustus or Friar Bacon, however, in The Old Wives Tale this engagement with supernatural issues is extended through the use made of the framing narrative. The premise of the framing narrative generally enhances the audience's appreciation of the resourceful use of genre in the play.<sup>12</sup> It also provides for a comic moment in the play which rests on uncovering the mechanics of theatrical illusion and reminding the audience that Sacrapant is a stage stereotype. When Sacrapant demonstrates his magical powers by controlling Delia and summoning two Furies to remove the Brothers from the stage, Haunebango and Corebus reappear and Fantastic comments,

Methinks the conjurer should put the fool into a juggling-box.

(ll. 569-70)

This suggests a stage trick in which the clown Corebus is to be made to disappear or is transformed in some way inside a large piece of apparatus, perhaps in the manner of 'the decollation of John Baptist' described by Scot in his Discoverie.<sup>13</sup> This association between the powers of Sacrapant and a spectacular juggling trick exploits the division between the framing narrative and the tale itself. Following the opinions of Scot and others concerning juggling, Fantastic's comment seems



intended to challenge the complicity with which the audience is invited to receive the supernatural spectacles presented in the rest of the play. As such it introduces an important note of demystification into the theatrical texture of the performance.

Although overall is also less complex in its thematic treatment of magic and the supernatural than either Friar Bacon and Doctor Faustus, The Old Wives Tale is, therefore, more ambitious in its comic theatrical structure. The device of the framing narrative accentuates the artistry with which the 'Tale' brings together a wide range of cultural resources. In the juggling box episode, moreover, it employs the device of the Pages' commentary to penetrate the conventions to which it adheres elsewhere in its representation of the supernatural.

## II. John a Kent & John a Cumber

Anthony Munday's manuscript play John a Kent & John a Cumber (?1589-90), establishes close links between its comic structure, which is based around a series of surprising reversals, and the activities of its magicians.<sup>14</sup>

In the play, the duelling magicians John a Kent and John a Cumber are strongly associated with theatrical spectacle, comedy and entertainment. For example, Munday exploits the comic potential of similarity in John a Kent. Rather than attempting to differentiate between his eponymous magicians, Munday emphasises their similarity in temperament and even appearance, a similarity that, it may be assumed, with some magical aid enables each of them to assume the identity of the other. Munday must have signified the disguises of the magicians by the use of appropriate costumes. Modern critical opinion has varied considerably regarding Munday's intentions and the success with which he executes his portrayal of the contest between the magicians in the play. It seems likely, however, that the shortcomings perceived by some modern critics would have been less apparent to an Elizabethan audience receptive to the complexities and reversals of contemporary prose romance. As I. A. Shapiro comments,

it has an extremely ingenious plot, full of surprises and turns which are always plausible, provided we accept the Elizabethans' belief in natural magic. Its unity of action and of time are

quite remarkable, and could hardly be bettered, and it observes the unity of place almost as well.<sup>15</sup>

The magicians share a notable propensity toward humour, merriment and entertainment.

Powesse's introduction of John a Kent suggests:

Thou shouldst be Iohn a Kent, thou art so peremptorie,  
for Iohn a Kent is a bolde merry knaue.

(ll. 78-9)

John a Cumber figures his victory over his rival in humorous terms:

So Iohn a Cumber followes his intent,  
To conquer, sit and laugh at Iohn a Kent.

(ll. 1229-30)

The play's identification of the magicians' scheming as a potential source of comic entertainment is complemented by their association with various forms of occasional entertainment. For example, John a Kent's interference in the main plot takes the form of an entertainment when his servant Shrimp sings 'a Song of the Brydes losse' to the bridegrooms, informing them of John a Kent's success over them (ll. 549-603). Later, John a Kent himself infiltrates the pageant of 'shadowes', which John a Cumber is organising to insult his opponent, in order to win back the brides. He also ensures that John a Cumber is forced to play the fool by the 'Clownes'.<sup>16</sup> Both magicians spend much of their time and skill organising entertainments, whether to insult, to avenge, or simply to entertain. Indeed, John a Cumber is able to assume John a Kent's form and recapture the brides when he arrives precisely because John a Kent has been busy preparing nuptial entertainments:

My boy and I haue for these two houres space,  
 beene greatly busyed in an other place,  
 To tell ye trueth, against the Brydes should rise,  
 to sporte them with some pleasing vanities.

(ll. 887-90)

The comic aims of magic within the play, moreover, must be viewed within a more general festive pattern. The 'Clownes', for example, like the magicians, are involved in the preparation of songs and other entertainments for the nobles.<sup>17</sup> While maintaining a degree of dramatic momentum, the play frequently alludes to, or presents, occasional entertainment. References to feasting in John a Kent also reinforce the holiday mood of the play.<sup>18</sup>

Another feature of this play is the way in which it constantly looks forward towards 'one fit more of merriment' (l. 1352). John a Kent is depicted as a conscious author of parts of the comic structure of the play. He describes himself in terms that merge his roles as author of comedy and skilful manipulator of events with supernatural powers in the idea of 'wit':

And since so good a subiect they present,  
 Vppon these loovers practise thou thy wit.  
 help, hinder, giue, take back, turne, ouerturne,  
 deceiue, bestowe, breed pleasure, discontent,  
 yet comickly conclude, like Iohn a Kent.

(ll. 132-6)

He goes on to put this planned comic interference into action. Having secured the brides Marian and Sidanen for Griffin and Powesse, John a Kent sends his boy, Shrimp, to provoke the other group of nobles in an action which delays the play's conclusion:

Must the first Scene make absolute a play? [...]

O that I had some other lyke my selfe,  
to driue me to sound pollicyes indeed [...]

But since my selfe must pastime w[i]th my selfe,  
Ill anger them, bee't but to please my selfe.<sup>19</sup>

Even the nobles are prepared to become caught up in the magicians' comic schemes. Although Sir Griffin calls John a Kent 'fond' for accepting 'one cast more' (l. 1462) with John a Cumber, he is eventually won over by John a Kent's promise of entertainment at John a Cumber's expense:

JOHN                    would not you laugh to see him let you in,  
                                 and keep them out that [m st] should his wager winne?  
  
S. GRIFFIN            Oh that were excellent, might it be so,  
                                 and if thou list, doubtlesse it shall be so.

(ll. 1543-6)

Although the tone of the play is comic, even festive, some attention is given to the details of the magic practised by both John a Kent and John a Cumber. As befits their similarity in name and character, both magicians are associated with similar supernatural forces, notably the mastery of demonic spirits. John a Kent is also associated with 'a bushell of deuilles' by the Clowns (ll. 1041-2). John a Cumber is twice described as having escaped from the Devil's attentions, first by John a Kent (ll. 543-4), then by Moorton:

Ile poste to Scotland for braue Iohn a Cumber,  
 the only man renownde for magick skill.  
 Oft haue I heard, he once beguylde the deuill,  
 and in his Arte could neuer finde his matche.

(ll. 694-7)

Moreover, John a Kent notably evades Sir Griffin's questions about his magic, the first of which implies that John has knowledge of necromancy:

S. GRIFFIN	Canst thou my freend, from foorth the vaultes beneathe, call vp the ghostes of those long since deceast? Or from the vpper region of the ayre: fetche swift wingde spirits to effect thy will?
JOHN	Can you my Lord, and you, and you, and you, goe to the venson, for your suppers drest: and afterward goe lay ye downe to rest? <sup>20</sup>

In this way, Munday associates his magicians with ideas concerning magic that would have had wider relevance for a contemporary audience. As discussed in Chapter Two, the ability of magicians to control devils or demonic spirits through the power of Christian faith had been a feature of medieval magical lore which continued to be reproduced in early modern collections of such materials. Necromancy was explicitly mentioned in the 1604 (but not 1563) witchcraft act. The penalty was death 'if any person or persons' were convicted of taking up,

any dead man, woman, or child out of his, her, or their grave, or any other place where the dead body resteth, or the skin, bone, or any other part or any dead person, to be employed or used in any manner of witchcraft, sorcery, charm, or enchantment.<sup>21</sup>

Keith Thomas notes the 'occasional appearances in magical formulae' of 'attempts to use the ghosts of dead persons for magical purposes' and similar activities. Although Thomas goes on to suggest that 'the connection between these activities and the theories of contemporary intellectuals was very slight', it is worth noting that John Weever, a Stuart antiquarian, tells how Edward Kelly, who was famously John Dee's scryer, and an associate made a corpse speak 'strange predictions'.

Necromancy was perhaps one of the more fringe areas of magical belief and practice in the early modern period. However, it seems possible that, as with other aspects of early modern supernatural lore, necromancy could be open to different interpretations, even within those systems of belief which generally preserved some notion of the efficacy of magical experimentation. This is to some extent born out by Weever's account. Although Weever himself condemns necromancy as 'diabolical questioning of the dead', he notes that Kelly attempts necromancy with the intention 'the manner and time of the death of a noble young gentleman' with the assistance of one of the gentleman's servants. Weever claims to have received the story from the gentleman and the implication of the story is that Kelly's activities were being undertaken on behalf of the gentleman.<sup>22</sup>

Such ambiguities in the presentation of magic in the play need to be considered alongside the prominent role of supernatural as a comic motive force within play. In several cases the supernatural powers of the magicians are associated with the surprises, reversals, revelations and entertainment of the play's comic plot. Several of the comic situations associated with the magicians rest upon the ability of each to disguise himself as the other, an activity which would carry supernatural overtones for the audience, especially when carried out with such success by characters associated with magic.

Munday, moreover, creates a wider range of comic situations with supernatural overtones through the use of the boy Shrimp, John a Kent's supernatural attendant. A possible dramatic ancestor of Shakespeare's Ariel, Shrimp shares with both Ariel and Puck a boyish exuberance that makes him a more dynamic comic agent than the play's twin magicians.<sup>23</sup> In one episode, he entices the brides and their escorts to follow his music and adds a song to the 'chime' offstage which sends the escorts to sleep. When they awake after another 'chyme', Shrimp deceives them into thinking that he is John a Cumber's servant in order to lead them,

such a merrie walke  
as you therof[ore] shall at more leysure talke.

(ll. 1185-6)

The dynamic and youthful character of Shrimp adds a further, dramatically appealing, dimension to the portrayal of the magicians in the play.<sup>24</sup>

In other ways, however, the play is quite restrained in its staging of magic. With the apparent exception of Shrimp, the play describes but does not actually show human interaction with spirits or demons to the audience. Moreover, although he seems to be a kind of supernatural being, Shrimp's demeanour is that of a juggler's assistant or comic servant boy.<sup>25</sup> The play as a whole seems to be contrived to leave a degree of ambiguity surrounding the details of the magic it portrays and the playwright's judgement concerning the propriety of its use.

In order to be able to address the question of the relationship between the play and contemporary magical practice, another possible objective of the play needs to be taken into consideration. Munday's association with the Marprelate controversy and its relationship to his authorship of *John a Kent* has been raised by critics. Munday was, as Honigmann describes it, 'known to be the Archbishop of Canterbury's pursuivant, and was thought to be an anti-Martinist playwright and pamphleteer'. Honigmann argues that *John a Kent* is most appropriately dated to 1590, at the close of the Marprelate episode, and produced without official sanction by Whitgift or his supporters. Honigmann also suggests that, if *John a Kent* is seen as a broadly flattering portrait of the Archbishop of Canterbury, certain incidental touches, such as his association with magic, would not necessarily please Whitgift. More generally, *John a Kent*'s meddling in the plot may reflect the political aspirations which Marprelate had criticised in the Archbishop.<sup>26</sup> If Honigman is correct, it may be assumed that the representation of magic in the play was considerably shaped by a more immediate aim on the part of the playwright. This was to capitalise on the recent Marprelate controversy and, in particular, to tap into the comic potential of the subject-matter on the stage.

Furthermore, the representation of the supernatural in *John a Kent* exhibits several of the characteristics that Traister associates with the fictional magic of romance. Magic in the play provides a rationale for the play's complex narrative. It justifies the improbable or impossible events

which the play presents to the audience and focuses their attention upon the typical romance motif of the magical contest. The struggle between the two magicians has the formalised distancing from normal life of a game, as demonstrated by the manner in which the final contest is initiated by the surrender of the brides with the full permission of the bridegrooms. However, as this study has already argued in the context of other plays, to suggest that the engagement in John a Kent with contemporary political satire or its debt to the structures of romance can simply be separated from the issue of its engagement with wider cultural beliefs and practices concerning the supernatural is to make an unjustified assumption regarding early modern audiences. Several of the details of the magic in the play are consistent with possible beliefs in the period that might be held at any social levels. At the core of these details is the idea that man could deal with infernal spirits, and even experiment with aspects of necromancy, without facing certain damnation.<sup>27</sup> These connections between aspects of the play's representation of magic and wider beliefs in the period exist alongside, and interact with, questions of political satire, formal romance motifs and comic plotting.

Notwithstanding the ambiguous allusion to necromancy, the portrayal of magic in John a Kent is generally complicit with the idea of the existence of potent and essentially benign magic. The obtrusive comic machinery and emphasis upon entertainment in the play may have been intended to create a fictional play-world environment in which the play's apparent 'hit-and-run satire' of the Marprelate controversy could be played out at a safe distance from reality.<sup>28</sup> The same formal properties of the play may also help to account for the way in which it shows that magic can alter human affairs and act as a potent source of humour without apparent moral danger. Nevertheless, there are analogues between magic, as presented in the play, and early modern beliefs regarding the efficacy of magic. While the dangers of magic, as expressed in particular by those demonologists who saw magical practice as covert witchcraft, are alluded to, these are not coherently articulated or demonstrated.



### III. John of Bordeaux

Existing only in an incomplete manuscript, John of Bordeaux is often described as a sequel to Friar Bacon and the case for Greene's authorship of it has been made on more than one occasion.<sup>29</sup>

The comic structure of John of Bordeaux is less intense and more indebted to the narrative techniques of romance than that of Friar Bacon. Its main plot concerns the attempt of Ferdinand, the Emperor's son, to seduce Rosalind. To this end he contrives to have her reduced to poverty and her husband, John, exiled. These events lead to another struggle between Bacon and Vandermast.

John of Bordeaux does not present this romance narrative within a romantic comic structure, in the manner of Friar Bacon. It makes more extensive use of non-comic elements, such as pathos, particularly in its treatment of the suffering of John and his family.<sup>30</sup> Critics have suggested that John of Bordeaux treats magic with a 'more sober tone' than Friar Bacon, but it still presents magic in a humorous form on several occasions.

Traister argues that the serious tone of the play is marred by a series of irrelevant scenes in which Bacon 'occasionally resorts to a silly demonstration of his magical abilities'.<sup>31</sup> As she later makes explicit, she finds such comedy particularly problematic because it is associated not only with the tricks of Perce, Bacon's assistant scholar, or the magic of Bacon's rival Vandermast, but also with the magic of Bacon himself:

Perhaps the author wished to contrast the "low" tricks of Bacon's clown assistant and the magic of wicked Vandermast with Bacon's own "superior" magic. If so, he did not succeed, for some of Bacon's magical effects are silly and pointless.<sup>32</sup>

In fact, the treatment of Bacon in John of Bordeaux is not dissimilar to that of other stage magicians in the same period either in its comic structure or in its engagement with contemporary beliefs concerning magic.

In John of Bordeaux, Bacon demonstrates considerable and wide-ranging magical powers. As in Friar Bacon, he is able to render physical objects or people immobile, to reveal distant events

and create elaborate supernatural shows, such as the musical performance of fauns and satyrs he creates in order to raise John of Bordeaux's spirits (ll. 764-80). He is also able to gain control over the spirit sent by Vandermast (ll. 652-74).

On more than one occasion, moreover, Bacon's magic power directly manifests itself in a humorous form, as in the early episode (ll. 110-252), where Bacon takes the clothes and regalia belonging to the Turkish Emperor (the 'Turk') after apparently holding his son Selimus to ransom. This episode establishes Bacon's magic in a positive and comic light, even though it appears at one point to take a more tragic course when Bacon seems to have Selimus executed. The fluctuating tone of the current events is clearly noted by Perce's reminiscence as he puts on the Emperor's clothes:

I remembe< onc at oxford in a Commedie yo[r] worship out me to play the part of a chemnie sweper and after to clere the stage yow carried me a waye in a cloke bage now this is Like to prove a tragedie I but on the Turks robes and make an exent in his beest appariell.<sup>33</sup>

The denouement of the scene, however, proves to be fully comic, once the dead Selimus is revealed to have been 'some spright in likenes' (l.242) of the real Selimus, who then reappears. The scene closes with the Emperor swearing revenge, but also expressing considerable relief at the return of his son unharmed:

TURK                    now that I have my selemus a gayne this tragick stur is turned all to Ioy  
wellcom my boy and to my robes adew [...] yet is this frier aman in all his  
word.

(ll. 246-7, 250)

The purpose of this episode is to introduce the audience to the potency of Bacon's magic. His humiliation of an opponent, especially a foreign opponent, recalls both Friar Bacon and the prose narratives concerning Bacon discussed in Chapter Three. Moreover, the Turk's praise for Bacon establishes him as a benign humorist. As in Friar Bacon or the Bacon romances, the

characterization of Bacon in this scene suggests that the attractiveness of the supernatural as a source of comedy was not incompatible with contemporary interest in the efficacy and legitimacy of magical practices. To assume, like Traister, that comic representation of Bacon's magic is 'pointless' because it is not condemned is to examine it anachronistically, and neglect the revised cultural context for such episodes which this study seeks to establish.

In John of Bordeaux therefore, as in Friar Bacon, the humour associated with the use of magic does not always imply moral criticism or condemnation of Bacon's magic. Where Vandermast or Perce's magic does receive critical comic treatment in John of Bordeaux, moreover, it does not necessarily directly reflect in a negative manner upon the magic of Bacon himself.

In a later episode, Bacon refers to himself as 'frolike', as he does in Friar Bacon. Although such epithets do not occur with the frequency in John of Bordeaux that they do in Friar Bacon, the positioning of this one is particularly significant since it occurs at the moment of Bacon's most spectacular demonstration of his magical power, the defeat of Vandermast:

VANDERMAST     whether am I brought

BACON             to me and wellcom I Iaquies to the frolike frier.

(ll. 1162-3)

Vandermast has been involved in Ferdinand's attempt to seduce Rosalind and is now brought to justice by the greater power of Bacon himself. Bacon strikes Vandermast mad as punishment and the audience sees him reduced to accompanying Perce:

geve me perce frier Bacons mann

he and I and we to with a sithern

a bandor to trnchers and a quart pot

will go play Rossalin out of prison.

(ll. 1285-8)

The comedy of this episode must be viewed in moral terms, in so far as it shows Vandermast ridiculed as a punishment for his evil plans. As was the case in parts of Friar Bacon, however, this episode shows Bacon's magic itself as the instrument of ridicule, rather than being ridiculed itself, and so shows it clearly in a positive light and as a source of justice and legitimate humour.

In other episodes, the character of Perce, Bacon's scholarly assistant, is used to explore further the comic potential of magic. On one occasion, for example, he is associated with the comic reduction of magic to mere sleight of hand. When two scholars ask if Bacon has taught him sufficient magic to 'cunger vs to bottel of alle hether' (ll. 380-1), Perce apparently hands over their books of philosophy as payment for their drinks:

IST SCOLLER      grammercie good a thowsand tymes com prethe geve ous o[r] boo< [...]  
 PERCE              nay nay yo[r] books are turned in to toe bottels of alle for as it was a poynt  
                          of magicke to tome yo[r] bookes in to bottells of all so it is a poynt of  
                          phelossophe you should pay fo[r] yo[r] all before you have yo[r] books.

(ll. 398, 400-3)

This episode perhaps serves to undermine a sense of the efficacy of magic in the play as a whole by reducing it to the source for the clown's stage business and quibble. In this case, it stands alone in the play. Instead of mounting a consistent attack upon the existence or the propriety of Bacon's magic, Perce's clowning acts elsewhere as a foil to Bacon's positive use of powerful magic.

Perce is shown to be capable of using real, efficacious, magic to comic effect: to enable himself and the Scholars to make their escape from an inn without paying, Perce apparently magically compels the tapstress and a number of neighbours to dance within a 'crkell' (ll. 806-1). This scene is clearly intended to parallel the magical exploits of Perce and Bacon. Perce's unthankful treatment of the tapstress who feeds him contrasts with John's virtuous acceptance of food from Bacon's fauns and satyrs in the preceding scene (ll. 763-80), while the eventual intervention of Vandermast also serves to parallel the magical actions of Perce and Bacon. As was the case with Miles and Rafe in Friar Bacon, Perce functions, in the terminology of Richard Levin, as a comic foil for his master by ensuring that the audience will judge Bacon's aims favourably by

comparison.<sup>34</sup> It is not the relative efficacy of Bacon and Perce's magic which is the subject under examination, but, as in Friar Bacon, the proper use of such power. In this episode, Perce's magic demonstrates the improper use of such power.

The scene in which Bacon frees not only Perce but also all the other inmates from prison further demonstrates that the connections between his magic and comedy within the play cannot be seen as presenting magic in a purely negative light. Bacon's comments concerning the prisoners range from an enjoyment of Perce's comic banter ('this is excelent' (l. 1199)) to a brief, good-natured homily ('my frends [...] secke not by theft to rob yor neibors goods' (ll. 1221-2)). This comic digression is not apparently intended to reflect badly upon Bacon's magic, but merely to illustrate the comic potential of his considerable magical powers and the scale of his authority.

To some extent, the madness of Vandermast and some of Perce's antics, may be seen to question, and perhaps even to undermine, the central portrayal of Bacon by suggesting that magic is not without potential personal dangers or a hint of charlatanry. Bacon's magic itself, however, is also associated with a more positive comic agency. Rather than signifying his moral corruption, Bacon's comic supernatural power is used to entertain, amuse, surprise and fulfil the collective wishes of its audience. The homiletic comedy of the play is concentrated instead in the episodes which demonstrate the incorrect use of magic by Perce and Vandermast. These failings have little direct resonance with Bacon's own magical activities.

The association of magic with the production of merry entertainment and humorous situations in John of Bordeaux should be seen in the context of the more positive aspects of Bacon's magic as portrayed in the play. Although Bacon stands accused of witchcraft by Ferdinand and Vandermast (ll.956-64), as he does in Friar Bacon, the representation of his magic in John of Bordeaux has affinities with contemporary beliefs regarding the efficacious use of magic to summon and control infernal spirits. Orthodox demonological thought would argue that Astrow could successfully claim Bacon's soul. However, the way in which Bacon foils Astrow's attempt to carry him off to hell leaves no doubt that the play ultimately reflects contemporary beliefs concerning the possibility and propriety of binding demonic spirits in God's name:

BACON                   away presuming speright away thow hast no  
                               pouer over a Cristian fayth willt thow do what  
                               I commaund the do.

(ll. 1144-6)

The name Astaroth appears as that of a demon in the section from the Pseudo-Solomonic Lemegeton reproduced in Scot's Discoverie of Witchcraft as an example of the deceptive activities of alleged practitioners of supernatural arts. Astaroth is described there as 'a great and a strong duke, comming forth in the shape of a fowle angell, sitting upon an infernall dragon'.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, although referred to as 'spirits', the dramatisation of the supernatural agents of John of Bordeaux, as in Friar Bacon, draws heavily upon the conventions of stage devils. Astrow's cry of 'ho ho ho', in particular, identifies Astrow with a number of other literary or stage devils, vices, and fairies.<sup>36</sup>

Although they employ a similar range of comic modes, the deployment of those modes is different in John of Bordeaux from that in Friar Bacon. In John of Bordeaux, the positive presentation of Bacon's magic in a comic mode is not counterbalanced, in anything like the measured way that it is in Friar Bacon, by the representation of magic in a moral comic mode. Despite the way in which the treatment of Perce and Vandermast is possibly intended to raise some questions concerning use of magic, John of Bordeaux ultimately casts Bacon's magic in a more positive light than Friar Bacon does. In Friar Bacon, for example, Bacon attempts, by means of magic, to gain the love of Margaret for Edward to satisfy his unworthy lusts, while in John of Bordeaux an equivalent task is undertaken by Vandermast on behalf of Ferdinand.<sup>37</sup> If there was a repentance scene in John of Bordeaux comparable to that in Friar Bacon does, it has not survived. Although the end of the manuscript is missing, the absence of a concerted questioning of Bacon's magic in the extant portion (which seemingly constitutes most of the complete play) makes the possibility of a lost repentance scene less likely. Friar Bacon shows Bacon involved with the attempt to seize Margaret for Edward against her will, the brazen head scene and the deaths of the fathers and scholars. By contrast, John of Bordeaux shows Bacon thwarting a similar attempt to procure love by force and pointedly shows his magic in a positive, Christian, light in the scene where

Bacon overpowers Astrow. Criticism of Bacon is less direct and consistent in John of Bordeaux than it is in Friar Bacon.

Overall, John of Bordeaux is clearly indebted to Friar Bacon for its subject-matter. However, in terms of the style of its engagement with the theme of magic, John of Bordeaux may be considered to have more in common with a play like John a Kent than with Friar Bacon. In both John of Bordeaux and John a Kent the playwright seems to dedicate considerable attention directly to the power of the stage supernatural as a source of entertainment and amusement. However this does not preclude either play from engaging with wider contemporary beliefs regarding the efficacy of magic.

#### IV. The Merry Devil of Edmonton

In The Merry Devil of Edmonton (?1602) the origins of the magical powers of Peter Fabell, the merry devil of the title, are a prominent theme at the start of the play.<sup>38</sup> The Prologue advertises that the play will employ both tragic and comic modes:

Sit with a pleased eye, vntill you know

The Commicke end of our Sad Tragique show.

(Prologue.40-1)

That there is a comic side to the character of the magician, Peter Fabell, is suggested within the Prologue itself. The audience learns that Fabell,

for his fame in sleights and magicke won,

Was calde the merry Fiend of Edmonton.

(Prologue.14-15)

The idea of Fabell as 'merry' is clearly significant to the tone of the play as a whole. The early reference not only to 'magicke', but also to 'sleights', with its more general suggestion of cunning, is similarly important to an understanding of the rest of the play.<sup>39</sup>

Although the play is predominantly comic in structure, the representation of Fabell's magic spans both comic and tragic modes. The Prologue is followed by the 'Tragique' events of the Induction, which are concerned with Fabell's magic. Coreb, who is described as 'a Spirit' and is clearly a devil, has come to claim his part of the pact by which Fabell has gained his magic powers. Fabell tricks the spirit by trapping him in a magic chair until he gives up his claim, at least for the time being:

COREB

A vengeance take thy art!

Liue and conuert all piety to euill:

Neuer did man thus ouer-reach the Deuill.

(Induction.77-9)

The tone of the Induction is clearly serious, if perhaps not strictly tragic. Traister interprets Fabell's plight, in Faustian terms, as 'the spiritual condition of the overreacher who pridefully wishes to know too much'.<sup>40</sup> Fabell himself comments:

The infinity of Arts is like a sea,

Into which, when man will take in hand to saile

Further then reason, which should be his pilot,

Hath skill to guide him, losing once his compasse,

He falleth to such deepe and dangerous whirlepooles,

As he doth lose the very sight of heauen [...]

Man, striuing still to finde the depth of euill,

Seeking to be a God, becomes a Deuill.

(Induction.50-5, 58-9)



These words hint at the perils of magic in a manner which recalls the work of those writers like William Perkins who identified magical experimentation as a covert form of witchcraft. However, far from ending in disaster, the Induction ultimately enacts the breaking of a demonic pact and demonstrates man's mastery of magic. In this context, Fabell's hyperbolic outburst is rather ambivalent. It can be interpreted as a condemnation of magic, but in the context of the play as a whole, it seems better that it be interpreted as a poetic expression of less severe doubts concerning the dangers of magic. Fabell employs the rhetoric of a Faustian overreacher, but the tenor of the play is in another direction.

After the Induction, the comic structure of the play as a whole becomes evident. The main plot concerns the successful attempt of Raymond Mouchensey, aided by his young friends and Fabell, to marry Millisent, in spite of the altered intentions of her father, Sir Arthur Clare. A subplot presents the poaching activities of a number of colourful local characters on the same night that Millisent escapes from the convent in which she has been placed across Enfield Chase.

Near the outset to the play, Fabell states clearly that he will use his magical abilities to help Raymond and Millisent overcome their fathers:

For age and craft with wit and Art haue met.  
 Ile make my spirits to dance such nightly Iigs  
 Along the way twixt this and Totnam crosse.

(I.iii.136-8)

Fabell notably sees his mission not just in practical terms, but also as a source of comic entertainment. He aims to spread confusion throughout the Chase, where no one will 'to other finde the way at all' (I.iii.147). He also claims that he will make the nuns in the convent 'skip like Does about the Dale' (II.ii.89) and make 'the Abbas weare the Cannons hose' (II.ii.97). Disguised as Frier Hildersham, Fabell apparently distracts the party of Sir Arthur Clare to the point that they feel that their only hope lies in a shadowy rival, 'Fryer Benedicke'.<sup>41</sup>

This potential magical contest is not followed up, however. Although Raymond suggests that 'Fabell will fetch her out by very magicke' (III.ii.149), Fabell uses little, or no, magic to assist

the lovers' escape. His magic may aid the confusion in the Chase, or his impersonation of Friar Hildersham might be considered unnaturally successful, but there is little tangible proof of this. For example, the Priest's comment that he has seen 'fifteen spirits in the forrest' (IV.ii.39) could be seen to be discredited by the way in which the Sexton mistakes the resting Banks for the 'ghost of Theophilus' a few moments beforehand (IV.ii.16). The fact that the Sexton suggests that the 'the deuill with a mans body vpon his backe in a white sheet' (IV.ii.69-71) might have been carrying a woman instead perhaps suggests that the Priest saw part of the escape rather than a supernatural being. Fabell was certainly responsible for switching the signs over between the two inns at Waltham, but the Host makes it clear that this was carried out without magical assistance simply upon Fabell's request:

Faith, wee followed the directions of the deuill, Master Peter Fabell.

(V.ii.116-17)

Fabell's final comments only go some way towards explaining the form of his assistance:

to crosse which match,

I vsde some pretty sleights; but I protest

Such as but sate vpon the skirts of Art;

No coniurations, nor such weighty spells

As tie the soule to their performancy.

(V.ii.139-43)

The recurrence of the general terms 'sleights' and 'Art' leaves the question of Fabell's use of magic at any stage in the main body of the play unresolved. The phrase 'vpon the skirts of Art', in particular, may or may not suggest actions different from 'Art' itself, a term which has been previously associated with real magic by Coreb (Induction.76). Taking these final comments in the context of the play as a whole, it is not clear whether Fabell has been using magic of a relatively

innocuous sort which has not been shown on the stage, or whether he has not made use of any supernatural power after the Induction.

Certainly his earlier comments concerning the use of spirits to secure the lovers' escape and the Induction stand in stark contrast to this final claim. The playwright's intention in both 'Commicke' and 'Tragique' sections seems to be to establish Fabell as a powerful magician capable of binding and controlling demonic spirits, of the sort that there is evidence to suggest still had a wider currency in England in the early modern period. The Induction clearly suggests that such magical techniques might indeed be efficacious and need not constitute, as several demonological writers suggested, an implicit and mortal pact with the devil. However, the remainder of the play portrays Fabell's magic in a more restrained manner. The play's title neatly encapsulates this tension. To an early modern audience, the idea of the merry devil might have been suggestive of the form of homiletic moral comedy, in which evil could be signified by association with humour. However, the Merry Devil is no moral comedy in this regard, and Fabell's comment regarding 'petty slights' cannot be seen to constitute a clear or weighty closing homiletic message. Rather, the play's representation of magic as a whole is cautious in terms of the range of powers employed by Fabell, but not condemnatory in terms of its wider message regarding magic. Fabell is indivisibly both 'merry', in the sense that he is a benign trickster, and a 'devil', in the sense that he is a magician able to control infernal spirits, and is not emphatically condemned to serve such forces.

By explicitly avoiding staging supernatural spectacle after the prologue and by placing more emphasis on comic plotting, The Merry Devil is more restrained in its representation of magic than either John a Kent or John of Bordeaux. However, in a more clearly articulated way than either of those plays, The Merry Devil seems to reflect both some of the more positive notions regarding recourse to magic which circulated in the early modern period and also some of the anxieties. The very absence of magic from Fabell's antics seems to enhance both the potency of the magic which he keeps in reserve, as demonstrated in the prologue, and also reflect upon the potential danger of its use, in spite of his exhibition of control over infernal spirits in the prologue. The Merry Devil seems designed to satisfy an audience's interest in the representation of the supernatural in comic form while, for the most part, presenting what is explicitly categorised as a narrative of human trickery in its place.

## V. The Birth of Merlin

The Birth of Merlin (?1608-1612) is usually attributed to William Rowley.<sup>42</sup> Set a generation before the reign of King Arthur, the main plot concerns the power-struggle between the British kings and the Saxons, and culminates in the accession of Uter Pendragon, Arthur's father. The contemporaneous birth and early achievements of Merlin are also depicted. The plot draws heavily upon on the Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth and the anonymous Vita Merlini.<sup>43</sup> It is notable that the period of likely composition coincides with a renewed interest in the idea of 'British history'. In 1604, King James had sought the title 'King of Great Britain' and the period 1610-1612 saw the publication of several significant works concerned with the history or identity of the British.<sup>44</sup>

The overall structure of the play is that of a history spanning, on a political level, the fall of Aurelius and the rise of Uter. In places, the playwright looks to invoke a sense of wonder or amazement that is in keeping with the mythological stature of the characters and events. This is notable, for example, in the second scene where it is reported that 'the Saxons stood amaz'd' at the sight of the Christian Hermit and Donobert exclaims that the beauty of the Saxon Artesia 'mazes me' (I.ii.21, 91). The play's interest in wonder is most apparent, however, in its allusions to, and representation of, the supernatural. Supernatural spectacle is presented to the audience in several scenes, perhaps most notably in the magical duel between the Hermit and Proximus (II.iii) and the discussion between the Devil and the goddess Lucina (III.iii). The supernatural is associated with many of the characters in the play: Merlin, the Christian Hermit and the Saxon magician Proximus all wield supernatural powers. Joan, Merlin's mother is associated with enchantment as a result of her supernatural pregnancy which is caused by an incubus devil (II.i.204). Artesia is described as 'damn'd witch' (IV.v.69) and her use of poison to murder Aurelius would have carried supernatural associations for an early modern audience.<sup>45</sup>

The association in The Birth of Merlin between the supernatural and spectacle, laughter or the comic is clearly relevant to this study. Laughter is notably associated with the confrontations between Proximus, the Saxon magician and both Christian Hermit and Merlin. When the Hermit agrees to test his power against the pagan Saxon magician Proximus, he observes,

it will be my joy to tell,  
That I was here to laugh at him and hell.

(II.iii.69-70)

Later, Proximus is apparently laughing at Merlin's threats when he destroys Proximus with a falling stone:

MERLIN                    I, so thou mayest die laughing.

(IV.i.233)

Similarly, the scenes concerning Merlin's family, Joan, her brother the clown, and the devil that is Merlin's father are generally comic in character, but particularly notable for their associations between comedy and the supernatural. Merlin's magic in these scenes is a source of entertainment for the audience. For example, his use of a 'little antick Spirit' (IV.i.1 [s. d.]) to pick the pocket of the naïve Clown has obvious comic effect:

CLOWN                    Either it was that Sparrowhawk, or a Cast of Merlins, for I finde a Covy of  
Cardecu's sprung out of my pocket.

(IV.i.13-15)

Later in the play (IV.v), Merlin uses his magic to mute the Clown while he talks with Prince Uter. This comic business is juxtaposed with the serious business of the scene, Merlin's announcement of the murder of Aurelius and Merlin's interpretation of the comet:

MERLIN                    Now speak

Your pleasure, Uncle.

CLOWN                    Hum, hum, hum, hum.

MERLIN                    So, so.-

Now observe, my Lord, and there behold,  
 Above yon flame-hair'd beam that upward shoots,  
 Appears a Dragons head, out of whose mouth  
 Two streaming lights point their flame-feather'd darts  
 Contrary ways [...]

(IV.v.86-94)

In the rest of the play, however, the Clown is not struck mute and provides a humorous commentary on the supernatural elements in the play, including Merlin's paternity:

CLOWN                      For your father, no doubt you may from him claim Titles of Worship, but I  
                                  cannot describe it; I think his Ancestors came first from Hell-bree in  
                                  Wales, cousin.

(III.iv.127-31)

The play, therefore, not only portrays the supernatural as agent in the production of laughter and entertainment but also, through the clown, as a subject which can be regarded as a source for witty comic material. Merlin himself is both a magician and, to some extent, a clown figure, able to outwit his uncle with words as well as with magic:

CLOWN                      Do you know me, sir?  
 MERLIN                     Yes, by the same token that even now you kist the swinherds-wife  
                                  i'th'woods, and would have done more, if she would have let you, Uncle.

(III.iv.39-43)

There is, therefore, a range of associations between the supernatural and humour, entertainment and comedy in the play, focused, although not exclusively, upon Merlin and his family. The purpose of these comic elements and their relationship with the rest of the play has been

a subject of concern to some modern critics. They have tended to view the comic elements as a broadly unsuccessful attempt to widen the potential audience of the play.<sup>46</sup>

However, such opinions both overstate the lack of integration within the play and also fail to take account of similarities to the comic portrayal of the supernatural in other plays. The association of the supernatural with the creation of humorous spectacle is clearly part of a wider pattern of wonder, amazement and spectacle within the play. The play as a whole is not as sober as Reed suggests, but rather has an exaggerated tone that tends towards hyperbole and the spectacular. It has a quality bordering on the burlesque in its representation of devils and magicians not found in Friar Bacon, John of Bordeaux and John a Kent. Even so, its comic representation of the supernatural is not entirely irrelevant to wider contemporary issues.

In some ways, the play appears to observe some of the principles of the moral comic modes that strongly influenced late medieval and early Tudor drama, in which evil is exposed through laughter.<sup>47</sup> This is apparent both in the hermit's desire to laugh at Proximus and also Proximus' laughter at the point of his destruction by Merlin. Some of the humour associated with Joan can also be seen in the context of the late medieval and early Tudor homiletic tradition, in that she is, to some extent, an exemplum of the sins of pride and lust.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the Devil who fathered Merlin makes his first entrance in a manner that may recall the disguises assumed by the Vices of the morality drama:

Enter the Devil in mans habit, richly attir'd, his feet and his head horrid.<sup>49</sup>

In spite of these dramatic debts to the personifications, vices and devils of earlier drama The Birth of Merlin does not offer a homiletic message to its audience. The homiletic significance of Joan's life is not developed within a larger moral framework. The play represents Merlin as basically untainted by his origin and broadly as an agent for good who supports strong British government. To a great extent this portrayal draws upon the Merlin legend as found in Geoffrey of Monmouth.<sup>50</sup> The final act of legitimisation for Merlin is that he prophesies the reign of Arthur, the legendary flowering of the British empire with which James, like the Tudors, identified.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, although the origins of the plot rest in medieval history that was considered by some eminent antiquarians to be of dubious authority in the early modern period, there are some points of similarity between the portrayal of the supernatural in The Birth of Merlin and early modern records of the supernatural which are not normally considered to be works of fiction.<sup>52</sup> As was the case with Peter Fabell's powers, Merlin's control of infernal spirits to some extent resembles the kind of magic which continued to circulate in some spell books. Merlin is represented as overcoming, rather than being overcome by, the infernal powers with which he is associated when he encloses the devil, his father, in a rock:

MERLIN

Ill ransack hell,

And make thy masters bow unto my spells

(V.i.74-5)

With respect to the appearance of the devil in aristocratic disguise, the play is almost contemporary with the first of a series of witchcraft depositions in which it was alleged that the Devil had appeared in a man's form and, on at least one occasion, in rich clothing.<sup>53</sup>

The prophetic powers that Merlin demonstrates also find parallels in wider contemporary culture. At the close of the play, Merlin prophesies regarding Pendragon and Arthur's reigns, accompanied by a silent tableau: 'this King, my Lord, presents your Royal Son' (V.ii.94). Previously, he has interpreted meanings of the white and red dragons (IV.i.258-292) and the portentous 'star' or comet (IV.v). In England during the early modern period the power of prophecy could still be a subject of interest at all social levels. Thomas considers that 'most sophisticated writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries affected to despise prophecies'. However, an indication that prophecy could be perceived as relevant at the highest social levels into at least the late sixteenth century is provided by the association of several members of the Howard family with actions apparently inspired by prophecies.<sup>54</sup> The works of a wide range of historical or, by modern standards, pseudo-historical figures, such as Friar Bacon and Merlin, were considered a source of prophecy. Geoffrey's History includes a set of prophecies, and the Merlin tradition more generally was strongly associated with prophecy. Although the historical British myth exemplified by



Geoffrey's History had been frequently criticised, with Geoffrey himself under attack during his own century, the early modern period saw the resurrection of Arthur and Merlin as proto-Protestants.<sup>55</sup>

It would be a mistake, therefore, to regard the contemporary context for Merlin's prophetic actions in the play as one of wholesale disbelief in prophecy. Although his historical veracity was questioned by some, Merlin's prophecy was a manifestation of a view of history which was not fully extinguished by the turn of the seventeenth century, and which carried with it important undertones regarding man's linkage with the divine and the supernatural.

The Birth of Merlin should clearly be viewed as another comic stage representation of the magician which, to an even greater extent than some of the other plays considered by this study, was not intended to be taken as a literal representation in every detail of contemporary beliefs and practices. Undoubtedly, it represents a concerted attempt by the playwright to offer the audience a piece of relatively straightforward entertainment, an opportunity to revel in a spectacular and sometimes humorous dramatisation of a well-known story. At the same time, however, the possibility that the Merlin legend, in Rowley's version, held some further relevance for a contemporary audience should not be ignored. Indeed, the parallels between the portrayal of the devil in the play and contemporary witchcraft depositions may be seen as a further example of the need to reconsider the distinction between 'fictional' representations of the supernatural and 'factual' records of beliefs and practices in the early modern period.

In some ways, the heightened 'burlesque' tone and generic allusions to history or chronicle plays make The Birth of Merlin anomalous among the plays examined up to this point in this study. In spite of the peculiarities of its tone, it is apparent, however, that there are similarities of mode between its comic representation of the supernatural and that of the other plays under consideration. Moreover, it is notable that the play focuses upon the figure of Merlin, who seems to have retained some association with contemporary magical practices in the early modern period. In spite of the distinctive aspects of the play, therefore, considering it in the context of the other plays is insightful. In particular, this comparison encourages the modern reader to consider ways in which the portrayal of Merlin in The Birth of Merlin might have held a different deeper relevance for a contemporary audience than is perhaps immediately apparent.

## VI. The Two Merry Milkmaids

Although magic is not a central theme in The Two Merry Milkmaids (?1619-20), as it is in some of the other plays discussed above, the play makes a strong connection between a magician and the surprises, complications and spectacles of comic drama.<sup>56</sup>

Set in 'Mysen', the play centres upon the way in which Dorigene's marriage to the Duke is challenged by both the attentions of Dorilus, who loves her, and the attempts of the courtier Raymond to discredit her. A subplot presents the tribulations in love of Bernard and Julia. Landoffe, Bernard's tutor, provides magical assistance for several characters during the play.

The Two Merry Milkmaids draws its presentation of magic from several sources. The play begins with a substantial reworking of the plot of Chaucer's 'Franklin's Tale', from which it borrows the theme of the lover who is set a deliberately impossible test which is overcome by magic.<sup>57</sup> Like The Merry Devil, the play is clearly also imaginatively indebted to the Faustus story. In The Two Merry Milkmaids, however, this extends to overt re-use of Faustian episodes. The collection of a garland made from all the flowers on earth, which is the form taken by the test, is also not original to this play. It has similarities with Faustus' magical journey to find grapes for the Duchess of Vanholt, a tale to which Julia actually alludes. The other impressive magical effects in the play concern the ring of invisibility made by one of Landoffe's spirits, which passes through the hands of Dorilus, with whom Bernard is allied, into those of the unsuspecting Frederick, Dorigene's brother, and finally into the keeping of Smirke, the clown.

The ring of invisibility is only one of several connections between the magic of The Two Merry Milkmaids and contemporary magical theory. For the ring, and many of the names of the demons invoked by Bernard in the first scene, the playwright is clearly drawing upon Reginald Scot's lengthy translation of the Lesser Key of Solomon, or Lemegeton. For example, Bernard's Asmody 'giueth the Ring of vertues, he teacheth Geometry, Arithmetick, Astronomie; to all demaunds he answereth fully and truely: he maketh a man inuisible'. Similarly, the 'Asmoday' of the Lemegeton,

giveth the ring of vertues, he absolutelie teacheth geometrie, arythmetike, astronomie, and handicrafts. To all demands he answereth fullie and trulie, he maketh a man invisible.<sup>58</sup>

Although Scot's intention is to expose such magic as fraudulent, the play interprets Scot's quotation as its original author would have intended. While Bernard's attempt at conjuring fails, the play as a whole demonstrates that such magic is truly efficacious. In this way the play directly contradicts the objectives of the immediate source, Scot, and portrays the magical tradition which Scot is attacking as efficacious.<sup>59</sup>

Like The Birth of Merlin and the other plays considered in this chapter, therefore, The Two Merry Milkmaids demonstrates that a complex relationship existed between fictional, even romantic, magic represented in comic form and actual early modern magical beliefs and practices. In spite of Dorigene's doubts concerning the existence of magic (sig. F4<sup>v</sup>-G1<sup>r</sup>), and her later wish to have Smirke seized 'for a sorcerer' (sig. O3<sup>r</sup>), Landoffe's magic, like that of Fabell, ultimately emerges in a broadly positive light as a force working to secure a propitious ending in the face of the traditional comic obstacles of patriarchal authority and bitterness. The Duke himself at one point declares Landoffe's actions to be 'iust and loyall' (sig. O3<sup>v</sup>).

Indeed, like the other comedies discussed in this chapter, The Two Merry Milkmaids makes a clear connection between magic and entertainment. After its serious purpose has been achieved, both Landoffe and Smirke pass comments which highlight the potential of the ring to create entertaining confusion if it falls into the hands of either Frederick, who is unaware of its powers, or those of Smirke himself:

LANDOFFE            Let him [Frederick] keepe it, for being ignorant in the vertue of it, it may  
be some sport to vs to hear him chafe being lost to all mankind.

(sig. L3<sup>v</sup>)

SMIRKE                Ile shew his Grace some sport my selfe, with helpe of my inuisible Ring.

(sig. O2<sup>r</sup>)

The gradual transition of the ring from the status of a useful tool to a source of inadvertent humour in the hands of Frederick and deliberate humour in the hands of Smirke prepares for Act Five, which consists entirely of entertainments. The Master of Revels for this event is the magician Landoffe. Although he does not use his magic powers in any recognisable way in this act, this appointment further cements an association between magic and comedy in the play. Indeed, the final act and both the successful and failed attempts to use magic together provide most of the entertainment in what is a long, often dark, and sometimes turgid play.

As was the case with The Merry Devil, it would not be correct to give the impression that The Two Merry Milkmaids is dominated by magical spectacle. For example, the spirit appears only twice, once to deliver the ring to Landoffe in III.ii and then to remove it from Smirke in V.i, while the ring itself and the bringing of the flowers are the only other magical spectacles of note.

The Two Merry Milkmaids also, notably exploits the failure of magic to comic effect, but in a way which does not undermine the credibility of magic within the play. The opening scene, in which Landoffe's student, Bernard, attempts to conjure up spirits with his master's magic book, does not culminate in the arrival of these spirits. The invocation is answered not by a supernatural being, but by Landoffe himself, disguised 'like a Spirit' (sig. B2<sup>r</sup>). Landoffe explains that such magic is efficacious, but not for the unskilled and impetuous. Instead, he himself will help Bernard by pretending to be a spirit:

Ile follow him, attending still vpon him,  
 As if I were the Spirit he guesses me;  
 And if there shall be cause, Ile play my part  
 So well, that men shall prayse the Magick Art.

(sig. B3<sup>r</sup>)

The play, therefore, not only presents relatively few directly magical spectacles, when compared with a play like Greene's Friar Bacon, but also uses the idea of faked magic to comic effect. The way in which this scene avoids the direct dramatisation of a successful act of conjuring perhaps suggests a hint of discretion on the part of the playwright.

In the light of the play's restrained presentation of the supernatural, the printer's prefatory letter is particularly interesting. Rather obscurely, it promises that 'no true Spirit will be stir'd' by the 'Coniuring words' in the play, since,

it was made more for the Eye, then the Eare; lesse for the Hand, then eyther.

(*'The Printer to the Reader'*)

This announcement concerning the fictional nature of what is to follow is, of course, strengthened by Bernard's failed attempt to conjure in the first scene. The reader or audience does not need to be concerned about the propriety of watching such a play, especially since its major conjuring scene is itself a piece of theatrical deception on the part of Landoffe. At the same time, however, within its advertised fictional shell, the play upholds the existence of magic, demonstrates its benign and amusing use, and even, apparently, draws material from Scot's reproduction of a real magical treatise. Like The Merry Devil, The Two Merry Milkmaids develops a comic portrayal of magic which in some ways closely parallels contemporary attitudes concerning magic, in particular views which run contrary to the condemnation of such practices by demonological writers. Both plays ultimately represent magic in a manner which rewrites the Faustian tragedy even though The Two Merry Milkmaids alludes to the Faustus story in the garland episode. Both these plays present to their audience a dramatisation of recognizable attitudes concerning the efficacy of demonic magic at the same time that they acknowledge its potential dangers, even though these attitudes deviate from the usual official condemnation of magic by the authorities. The mixture of enthusiasm and discretion shown by both playwrights concerning the presentation of magic and the supernatural is concisely summarised by the reaction of the Duke in The Two Merry Milkmaids. He makes it clear that, within the context of this play, magic is acceptable if used for good. However, it should not be too closely scrutinised:

Thy knowledge in good arts is found Landoff,

Nor will we be inquisitive of more.

Then thou shalt thinke it fit to be reveal'd.

(sig. O3<sup>r</sup>)

## VII. Conclusion: audience desire and the comic representation of magic

The plays considered by this chapter clearly focus to differing extents on the theme of magic and the supernatural. The Old Wives Tale, John of Bordeaux and John a Kent, for example, are far less concerned with the detail of magical practice than The Two Merry Milkmaids. Sacrapant is central to The Old Wives Tale, but as a stereotypical evil magician lacks real depth of characterization. In the case of John a Kent, the creation of a fictional space quite remote from a naturalistic portrayal of contemporary culture may be intended to act primarily as a background for the kind of contemporary satire which Honigman argues appears in the play. The Merry Devil principally presents acts of human cunning, as opposed to magical intervention. Magic is represented with unusual detail and with overt recourse to Scot as a contemporary authority in The Two Merry Milkmaids, but only forms a subplot within the play. The Birth of Merlin is ostensibly a portrayal of magic removed from the reality of early modern culture, yet in Merlin it selects as a major subject a pseudo-historical supernatural figure of continued, if debated, importance during the early modern period.

However, some common features of these plays can be identified. Several of them seem to be directly influenced by the Faustian and Baconic traditions, in particular with regard to characterisation and plot. This is most obviously the case with John of Bordeaux and Friar Bacon, but The Merry Devil and The Two Merry Milkmaids also demonstrate debts to the Faustian tradition. These debts may reflect, at least to some extent, the desire of the playwrights to profit commercially by adopting a formula that had a proven record of success in earlier plays and publications.

Even where these plays do not demonstrate a direct connection with the Faustian or Baconic traditions, it is possible to trace the recurrence of thematic and formal trends with parallels in Doctor

Faustus and Friar Bacon. An understanding of these deeper cultural conventions is central to any understanding of the engagement of plays with issues regarding the supernatural that circulated more widely in early modern England. A clear formal comic convention is the identification of the magician as a creator of comedy or entertainment and the expression of supernatural marvels in humorous terms. In addition, explicit connections have been discussed in several episodes between the supernatural and set-piece entertainment, or between the supernatural and music. Other patterns are also apparent in these plays. As in Doctor Faustus and Friar Bacon, the representation of magic and the supernatural in each is over-determined, in so far as its engagement with wider issues resists simple interpretation. The majority of the plays considered follow the general pattern of Friar Bacon and attempt to present an accommodation of conflicting contemporary viewpoints regarding the supernatural. However, the nature of this accommodation varies.

The ambiguity which this lends to the presentation of the magic is particularly apparent where plays seem to be influenced both by discourses which accept the existence of efficacious spirit-summoning magic and by demonological condemnation of magic. In John a Kent and John of Bordeaux, spirits can be controlled through a knowledge of magic, although the practice is shown to expose the practitioner to some danger. In The Merry Devil, the existence of efficacious magic which can bind demonic agents is not countermanded by Peter Fabell's use of simple human trickery through the majority of the play. Fabell's use of human trickery is used to reinforce a sense of the potential dangers associated with magical studies, but the representation of magic is also a sublimated display of magic in the form of comic human cunning. Traister's comment regarding The Merry Devil, that it seems to suggest that 'an Elizabethan audience could tolerate pacts and black magic', does not adequately summarize the balance of factors established in the play. Rather than a toleration of 'black magic', The Merry Devil is informed by competing contemporary views regarding the morality and efficacy of magical practices.<sup>60</sup> In The Two Merry Milkmaids, direct debts to Scot and overt borrowing from the Faustian tradition form the basis of a paradoxical portrayal which shows magic to be benign and efficacious. Of the plays considered by this study, The Old Wives Tale, provides something of an exception. The contrast developed between Sacrapant's magic and Madge's quasi-magical story-telling powers polarises the moral structure of

the play and establishes Sacrapant's magic as unambiguously malignant, although other positive supernatural forces are also at work within the 'Tale'.

In fact, this binary structure in The Old Wives Tale helps to articulate the competing audience desires which remain implicit in the other plays but which also underpin their portrayals of the supernatural and are key to understanding some of their ambiguity. As Susan T. Viguers has suggested, a tension exists within the narrative of the play between the 'opposing forces' Sacrapant, the magician, and Madge, the storyteller. Madge and Sacrapant are both, to use Viguers's term, 'creators of illusion' locked to some extent in a struggle for control of the play.<sup>61</sup> In this respect, it is notable that Sacrapant is, like Madge, associated with the use of words, or 'enchanted speeches' (l. 837) as they are described by Jack. However, Sacrapant's magic is ultimately contained by the larger narrative of the Tale, over the complex structure of which Madge, within the fictional premise established by the framing narrative, exercises notional control.<sup>62</sup> Through the parallel created between Madge and Sacrapant, Peele in fact creates a parallel between two kinds of audience desire: desire for the rewards of a theatrical experience and desire for fantasies of power and fulfilment associated with the supernatural.

The structure of The Old Wives Tale is suggestive of a more general way in which comic representation could offer a fictional fulfilment, or extension, of the desires that informed a range of early modern beliefs regarding the supernatural. The stage magician as the agent and object of comedy could realise experiences for the audience that could only ever be incomplete in their real lives. The audience could satisfy, even through comic theatre, a desire to comprehend moral evil through the presentation of the supernatural in ways consistent with the demonological condemnation of magic, as most clearly embodied by Peele in the figure of Sacrapant. Condemnation of magical practices associated them, as a covert branch of witchcraft, with a threat to the good order of the household and in some cases the state itself. The theatre could satisfy understandable interest in this threat to person and good order, just as the movement towards good order and social cohesion in The Old Wives Tale are fulfilled by Madge's interventions as storyteller. Moreover, a related kind of theatrical fulfilment could also be identified with more positive, although 'unofficial', views concerning magic which circulated in the period. These



attested to the attraction of magic as a potential source of worldly power to be used for broadly positive, if forbidden, purposes.

In this context, it is also essential to recall the fluidity of the boundaries between fiction and fact in many accounts of the supernatural in early modern culture. It has recently been suggested that 'witch stories are "shaped by contemporary conventions about what would carry conviction as a truthful or entertaining account"'.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, the comic representations of the supernatural considered by this chapter need to be understood as a blend of the truthful and entertaining directed towards audience demands. Plays need to be considered not so much as mirrors of contemporary beliefs and practices, but rather as vehicles which engage in complex ways with beliefs and practices, partly to inform, but also to entertain, alarm or challenge. Even the plays surveyed by this chapter, which might have been discounted as largely trivial, may be seen to engage to some extent with contemporary issues regarding magic and other supernatural subject-matter, even with material steeped in controversy and taboo. While they lack the thematic complexity of Doctor Faustus or Friar Bacon, the plays considered by this chapter satisfied their own kinds of audience need, even where those needs might be in themselves inconsistent. In particular, they brought the audience closer to spectacular, unofficial or taboo supernatural subjects than would have been possible in the real lives.

Indeed, it is possible that the way in which several of the plays considered by this chapter place their supernatural subject-matter at a fictional distance, may to some extent reflect the extent to which the representation of magic, even in comic drama of this sort, could raise controversy. In John a Kent and John of Bordeaux, for example, the generally positive tenor of the treatment of magic is not brought close to the audience by close reference to the details and processes of early modern magic. In The Birth of Merlin, the fictional distance of ancient quasi-history enables Rowley to develop a positive representation of Merlin's magic in spite of its infernal origins which alludes to contemporary ideas in a way which would perhaps have been impossible in a different kind of drama.

What characterizes the synthesis of the more and the less fictional aspects of these plays, however, is the particular kind of complicity with the performance that the representation expects from the audience. As in Doctor Faustus and Friar Bacon, the mechanics of the representation of the

supernatural in each of these plays is not open to scrutiny. In each play, the legitimacy of the engagement between the comic performance of the supernatural and those aspects of early modern schools of thought regarding the subject which inform each play is not challenged. Only in The Old Wives Tale, where a different kind of theatrical experience based on the demystification of the mechanisms of performance is introduced, does the transparency which is central to the comic representation of the supernatural elsewhere in these plays become clear.

Allusion to contemporary beliefs and practices is clearly less purposefully and prominently embedded in the representation of magic in the plays considered in this chapter than in either Friar Bacon or Doctor Faustus. However, the plays considered by this chapter must be seen to belong to the same cultural context as Friar Bacon and Doctor Faustus and make use, for the most part, of a fundamentally similar approach to of comic representation. Alongside any other ambitions on the part of the playwrights, the comic representation of the supernatural in these plays had a wider relevance for their original audience and was responsive to audience interests and desires which extended beyond the merely theatrical. However, these comic representations of the supernatural were conditioned by a range of audience expectations regarding spectacle and sensation, credibility of performance, coherence of plot and controversy of subject-matter which can differ significantly from those which a modern audience would bring to comic representations of the supernatural.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> George Peele, The Old Wives Tale, ed. by Patricia Binnie, The Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), pp. 3-6, dates the play to the period 1588-94, favouring 1593. All references will be to this edition, hereafter referred to as The Old Wives Tale. Robert Rentoul Reed (Jnr), The Occult on the Tudor and Stuart Stage (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1965), p. 131, broadly agrees regarding the date.

<sup>2</sup> The Old Wives Tale, p. 20: 'Peele consciously recreates the basic aim of folklore- to recall to the hearer the instincts and images of his childhood and to reawaken in him a sense of surprise, mystery,

and wonder'. Joan C. Marx, "'Soft, Who Have We Here?' The Dramatic Technique of 'The Old Wives Tale'", Renaissance Drama, NS 12 (1981), 117-43 (pp. 118-21 et passim).

<sup>3</sup> ll. 358-360. Lucius Apuleius, The Golden Ass, trans. by Robert Graves (1950, revised Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), pp. 8-15.

<sup>4</sup> ll. 182-201. See Cohn, pp. 162-4.

<sup>5</sup> The Old Wives Tale, footnote regarding the 'Dramatis Personae'. p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Clyomon and Clamydes, Malone Society Reprints ([London?]: Oxford University Press, 1913). First printed in 1599, Traister, p. 35, suggests Clyomon and Clamydes was first staged in the 1570s or 1580s. The nature of the comedy surrounding the Vice, particularly the degree to which the comedy should be interpreted morally in later plays such as Clyomon and Clamydes, in which the Vice adopts the more naturalistic role of a servant, is in itself problematic. See Wiles, p. 4, on the fluid relationship between the role of the Vice and the natural fool.

<sup>7</sup> Bodleian MS Douce 116, pp. 23-4. The dating of this manuscript is taken from the Bodleian catalogue. Cf. with the supernatural banquet in The Tempest, ed. by Stephen Orgel, The World's Classics (1987; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), III.iii.19-109

<sup>8</sup> A Rehearsall Both Straung and True (1579), in Early Modern Witches, pp. 33-40 (p. 38).

<sup>9</sup> Gibson, Early Modern Witches, p. 38 (footnote); Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618, ed. by Barbara Rosen (1969; repr. Amhurst, Massachusetts, 1991), p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> Marx, p. 119.

<sup>11</sup> Purkiss, Witch, p. 166, provides the following summary of the meanings of folk tales: 'the stories had meaning because they expressed common concerns: how to deal with those much more powerful than you, the cunning needed to live at the bottom of a hierarchical society, the constant desire for both food and money, and the inability to imagine them on the scale enjoyed by the rich'.

<sup>12</sup> Frolic's comment, 'why, this goes round without a fiddling stick' (l. 253), is an obvious humorous device by which the audience is encouraged to reflect on the narrative form of Madge's tale.

<sup>13</sup> Scot, pp. 198, 203.

<sup>14</sup> John a Kent & John a Cumber, ed. by Muriel St. Clare Byrne, Malone Society Reprints (London: Oxford University Press, 1923). All references to this play will be to this edition. The manuscript ends with a date which has been read variously as December 1596, 1595 or 1590. See E. A. J. Honigman, “‘John a Kent’ and Marplelate’, The Yearbook of English Studies, 13 (1983), 288-93 (p. 288); William B. Long, “‘John a Kent and John a Cumber’: An Elizabethan Playbook and its Implications’, in Shakespeare and Dramatic Tradition: Essays in Honour of S. F. Johnson, ed. by W. R. Elton and W. B. Long (Newark: Associated University Presses, 1989), pp. 125-43 (pp. 125, 130).

<sup>15</sup> I. A. Shapiro, ‘Shakespeare and Munday’, Shakespeare Survey, 14 (1961), 25-33, p. 28. Barbara Freedman, p. 3 et passim, presents an interesting approach, strongly influenced by psychoanalysis, to mistaken identity on the stage, a typical consequence of the appearance of identical characters in comedy. Traister, p. 46, considers that the play attempts and fails to make a distinction between the two magicians. Reed, pp. 109, 107, by contrast, argues that the two are more or less distinguishable because John a Kent is established as the greater magician and because his ‘art is dedicated to the reuniting of true lovers against the will of tyrannical fathers’.

<sup>16</sup> ll. 984-1436. For Elizabethan associations of the term ‘clown’, see Wiles, p. 12 et passim.

<sup>17</sup> For example, see ll. 554-75. This entertainment quickly becomes manipulated by Shrimp (ll. 576-83).

<sup>18</sup> See ‘banquet’ (l. 125) and ‘messe’ (l. 848). The OED, 2nd edn, entry for ‘mess’ (definition II), of which ‘messe’ listed as a variant, gives its meaning as ‘company of persons eating together’.

<sup>19</sup> ll. 530, 541-2, 547-8. The superscript contraction retained in the Malone Society Reprint at l. 547 has been expanded and normalised. Some critics, however, have argued that the idea of the struggle between the magicians is overworked and that the continuation of the plot on two occasions (l. 528 and l. 1446) when it has in fact reached a point of resolution makes the play ‘wearisome’. See Reed, p. 107. See also Traister, p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> ll. 108-14. The term ‘necromancy’ is often used vaguely in this period. The OED, 2nd edn, entry for ‘necromancy’ (definition I), gives ‘the pretended art of revealing future events, etc., by means of communication with the dead; more generally, magic, enchantment, conjuration’.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Jac. I, c. 12, in Witchcraft in England, p. 57.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas, Religion, p. 274; John Weever, Ancient Funerall Monuments within the United Monarchies of Great Britaine, Ireland, and the Isles Adiacent [...] (1631), pp. 45-6.

<sup>23</sup> Shrimp is also, like Ariel and Puck, associated with supernatural miniaturisation. See ll. 983-4.

<sup>24</sup> Associations between the supernatural and music are notable both in dramatic representation and more widely in early modern thought influenced by neoplatonic philosophy and accounts of witches' sabbats. See Shakespeare, Anthony and Cleopatra, in The Complete Works, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), IV.3; Clark, Thinking with Demons, pp. 218, 23. Music is also particularly strongly associated with the presentation of the supernatural in The Tempest, considered below in Chapter Five and The Witch, considered below in Chapter Seven.

<sup>25</sup> See Mowat, pp. 297, 300-1. Mowat suggests that Shrimp, shares with Shakespeare's Puck and Ariel a common origin in the servants of jugglers.

<sup>26</sup> Honigman, *passim*; quotation from p. 288. On the Marprelate controversy, see William Pierce, An Historical Introduction to the Marprelate Tracts: A Chapter in the Evolution of Religious and Civil Liberty in England (London: Archibald Constable, 1908).

<sup>27</sup> See Thomas, Religion, p. 274.

<sup>28</sup> Honigman, p. 291.

<sup>29</sup> John of Bordeaux: Or the Second Part of Friar Bacon, Malone Society Reprints (London: Oxford University Press, 1935 (1936)). All references to the play will be to this edition, referred to hereafter as John of Bordeaux. The title of the edition is editorial. Superscript characters preserved in this edition have been placed in square brackets for quotations. On the authorship of the play, see John of Bordeaux, p. xi-xiii; Traister, p. 47. Traister, p. 40 dates the play to 1588-92.

<sup>30</sup> John of Bordeaux is not utterly devoid of the references to feasting and festive ceremonial scenes which set the tone of Friar Bacon, however, as the first scene, especially the reference to feasting (ll. 69-70), suggests.

<sup>31</sup> Traister, p. 48. See also Paul Dean, "'Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay' and 'John of Bordeaux': a Dramatic Diptych", ELN, 18 (1981), pp. 262-6.

<sup>32</sup> Traister, p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> ll. 213-17. It is suggested that 'but' be read as 'put'. 'Exent' appears apparently for 'exeunt' elsewhere in the MS.

<sup>34</sup> See Levin, The Multiple Plot, pp. 111-12: 'a "foil" rather than just another direct contrast, in the strict sense that it is a devalued background added to bring out the superior qualities of the "centrepiece" characters belonging to a very different order of being'.

<sup>35</sup> Scot, p. 221. See also Cohn, p. 105. Interestingly 'Astoreth [...] queen of heaven, with crescent horns' appears later among John Milton's fallen angels and is identified with the Phoenician 'moon-goddess and Venus' by a modern editor. See Paradise Lost (1667), ed. by Alistair Fowler, (1968; repr. Longman: London and New York, 1971), I.437-8 and footnote.

<sup>36</sup> l. 1143; cf. Like Will to Like, l. 1291: 'Ho ho ho mine owne boy make no more delay'. See Weimann, pp. 194-5.

<sup>37</sup> Friar Bacon, v.96-103; John of Bordeaux, ll. 643-5. In neither play can magic directly influence or change a character's affections. See John of Bordeaux, ll. 310-11.

<sup>38</sup> The Merry Devill of Edmonton, in The Shakespeare Apocrypha, ed. by C. F. Tucker Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), pp. 263-84. All further references to the play will be to this edition. Traister, p. 51, dates the play to 1602. The play is mentioned in The Black Book, which was entered in the Stationer's Register for 22 March 1604. The first quarto appeared in 1608. In his edition of The Devil is an Ass, Peter Happé notes that The Merry Devil was performed at Court in 1613, 1618 and 1638, and printed 'at least five times between 1608 and 1631'. See Ben Jonson, The Devil is an Ass, ed. by Peter Happé, The Revels Plays (Manchester and New York, Manchester, 1994), footnote to Prologue, l. 22.

<sup>39</sup> The OED, 2nd edn, entry for 'sleight' (definition 1) dates its earliest example of usage in the sense of 'craft or cunning employed so as to deceive' to c.1275. Definition 3 dates its first example of usage in the sense of 'skill, skilfulness, cleverness or dexterity in doing or making something' to 1300.

<sup>40</sup> Traister, p. 52.

<sup>41</sup> III.ii.147. The full extent of Fabell's strategy to confuse his opponents is later made clear (V.i.83-117).

- <sup>42</sup> The Birth of Merlin: Or the Childe Hath Found his Father, in The Shakespeare Apocrypha, ed. by C. F. Tucker Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908) pp. 349-82. All references will be to this edition. First printed in 1662, Traister, p. 55, speculates that the first staging was in 1608; Reed, p. 112, dates it to about 1612.
- <sup>43</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, The History of the Kings of Britain, ed. by Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966). On the origins of the Merlin legends, see W. D. Nash, 'Merlin the Enchanter and Merlin the Bard' (1865-99), in Merlin Through the Ages: A Chronological Anthology and Source Book, ed. by R J Stewart and John Matthews (London: Cassell, 1995), pp. 17-24, *passim*.
- <sup>44</sup> Rowland Wymer, 'The Tempest and the Origins of Britain', Critical Survey, 11 (1999), 3-14 (pp. 4-5)
- <sup>45</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 226, 520.
- <sup>46</sup> See Reed, p. 112: 'the coarse humour of The Birth of Merlin contrasts markedly with the sobriety of the source material'. See also Traister, p. 55, who describes the play as a 'conscious updating of the romance to provide the almost mandatory stage clowns'.
- <sup>47</sup> See, in particular, Spivack, The Comedy of Evil, p. 51: 'evil as non-Being deserves to be laughed at.' See also *ibid*, pp. 13-30. Consider also Artesia's burst of laughter when she is condemned to death (V.ii.59).
- <sup>48</sup> For Joan's pride, see IV.i.189-90, 199-201. For her rejection of pride and lust, see V.i.29-36.
- <sup>49</sup> III.i.195 [s. d.]. Original in italics.
- <sup>50</sup> The Birth of Merlin does not extend to include the assistance offered by Merlin which enables Uther to seduce Ygerna, Merlin's last action in Geoffrey.
- <sup>51</sup> V.ii.94-104. Reed, p. 112, notes that Merlin 'appears to wear a barely visible halo'.
- <sup>52</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, 'Introduction', pp. 29-30.
- <sup>53</sup> Sharpe, Instruments, pp. 74-5.
- <sup>54</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 469, 480.
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 464-5, 486, 508; Geoffrey of Monmouth, pp. 28, 170-85; 'The Poems of Merlin', trans. by John Matthews, in Merlin Through the Ages, pp. 25-38.

<sup>56</sup> I. C., A Pleasant Comedie, called the Two Merry Milke-Maids. Or, The Best Words Weare the Garland (1620). All references to the play will be to this edition. The earliest dated copy in the British Library dates from 1620 and all references will be to this edition. Traister, p. 54, dates the play to 1619.

<sup>57</sup> sig. E4<sup>r</sup>, G1. Cf. Doctor Faustus, IV.ii.1-38 (A-text); IV.vi.1-35 (B-text).

<sup>58</sup> sig. B1v; Scot, p. 222. See also Cohn, pp. 105-6.

<sup>59</sup> Bodleian MS eMus. 243, sig. 26<sup>r</sup>, has a spell entitled 'Invisible to be', also involving a ring.

<sup>60</sup> Traister, p. 53.

<sup>61</sup> Susan T. Viguers, 'The Hearth and the Cell: Art in "The Old Wives Tale"', SEL, 21 (1981), 209-21 (pp. 211, 213).

<sup>62</sup> Sometimes the narrative seems to escape from Madge's control, as the pages' comment at line 253 seems to suggest. See also Viguers, p. 216.

<sup>63</sup> cf. Gibson, Reading Witchcraft, p. 8, quoting Jonathan Barry: "the line between fact and fiction [...] will be blurred, not just for the subsequent historian but also for the contemporary participants".



## Chapter Five

### “The Tempest” and the Limits of ‘Rough Magic’

#### I. Prospero: a Baconic magician?

But this rough magic  
 I here abjure; and when I have required  
 Some heavenly music –which even now I do-  
 To work mine end upon their senses that  
 This airy charm is for, I’ll break my staff,  
 Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
 And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
 I’ll drown my book.

(The Tempest, V.i.50-7)

Prospero’s renunciation speech illustrates the more general issues of comprehension which face a modern audience in The Tempest (1611).<sup>1</sup> Prospero’s use of magical powers to bring his enemies under his control on ‘an uninhabited island’, the roles of the ‘airy spirit’ Ariel and the monstrous witch’s son Caliban, and Prospero’s final renunciation of magic are familiar in performance to modern audiences.<sup>2</sup> However, the detail of the presentation of the supernatural in the play remains obscure in many modern productions. What does it mean for Prospero to describe his magic as ‘rough’ at this decisive point, and how does this relate to what we see of his magic throughout the play? How should ‘heavenly music’ be interpreted as a product of ‘rough magic’? What more general significance might Prospero’s ‘staff’ and ‘book’, identified as the sources of his magical power, have held for a contemporary audience? In short, what would this speech, and this most famous of early modern representations of the magician as a whole, have meant to its original audience?

Previous critical accounts of the play have reached radically differing conclusions concerning the extent to which the portrayal of Prospero endorses or condemns the use of magic. For example, D'Orsay Pearson has interpreted it as an attack on magic consistent with orthodox demonological thought and Curry and Kermode, among others, as a broadly positive representation of the hermetic or neoplatonic magician.<sup>3</sup> Applying the approach established in previous chapters, this study will re-evaluate the place of Prospero's magic within its various cultural contexts and demonstrate that, at least in some ways, each of these readings must be seen as incomplete. Central to this re-evaluation will be an exploration of the comic modes employed for the play's portrayal of the supernatural, in particular through a consideration of the relationship between The Tempest and other comic representations of the magician already considered by this study. This consideration of the comic structure of the play, and affinities to other contemporary dramatic representations of the magician, will facilitate a better understanding of its complex portrayal of magic. As in earlier chapters, an attempt will be made to assess not only parallels between Prospero's magic and a range of contemporary beliefs, but also the significance of the way in which the play presents its subject matter in a fictionalized comic form.

Purely in terms of its presentation of magical spectacle and some aspects of its narrative structure, The Tempest has parallels with both the prose narratives about Bacon and Greene's Friar Bacon. Prospero and Bacon create similar magical effects: the appearance of 'shapes' with a banquet, magical paralysis, and the use of magic to compel characters to follow an inconvenient detour. Both magicians renounce their magic at a decisive moment, although Prospero's surrender of his magical powers seems more total than that of Bacon in Greene's play. Indeed, the similarities between episodes in the prose The Most Famous History of the Learned Fryer Bacon and The Tempest have prompted John Henry Jones, the most recent editor of the English Faust Book, to argue that 'much of Prospero's magic is Baconic magic'.<sup>4</sup>

Certain general similarities are also apparent between Prospero's magic and that of Baconic magicians in other comic plays concerned with magicians in the period discussed by this study. For example, Prospero is a creator of set-piece stage entertainment, most clearly when Ariel appears 'like a Harpy' and makes the magical banquet disappear (III.iii.52 [s. d.]) and when he creates the

masque of classical goddesses for Ferdinand and Miranda (IV.i). Such events belong to the tradition of stage magicians associated with the creation of strange wonders and amazement among the audience on-stage and, by extension, the audience off-stage.<sup>5</sup> Like many of the stage magicians already considered, Prospero also exercises a power to command various spirits which has affinities with contemporary ideas regarding the summoning and binding of spirits. Prospero has manifestly used magical knowledge to bind Ariel to his service:

PROSPERO                                 How now? Moody?  
   What is't thou canst demand?  
 ARIEL                                      My liberty.  
 PROSPERO             Before the time be out? No more!

(I.ii.244-6)

Like the other spirits commanded by magicians that this study has considered, Prospero's control of Ariel, has little obvious affinity with angelic magic or even with the compelling of lesser evil spirits by the voluntary intercession of greater and beneficent supernatural powers suggested by Agrippa. Rather, Prospero's spirit magic is closest in ethos to the binding of spirits advocated by popular magic of the sort discussed in preceding chapters. For all Prospero's comments that, as Duke, he was 'neglecting wordly ends, all dedicated / To closeness and the bettering of my mind' (I.ii.89-90) there is little else to associate Prospero's magical career with the hermetic tradition.<sup>6</sup> Prospero's actions are those of a worldly magician who uses his power to effect considerable direct changes on the physical world, including the ostensibly deadly tempest with which the play starts. The techniques and practical aims of Prospero's magic, in so far as they are revealed, seem to refute those critics, like Curry and Kermode, who postulate an analogy between Prospero's career and the spiritual ascent of the hermetic magus.<sup>7</sup> Rather, Prospero's magic, like the spirit magic of other plays already considered by this study, should be considered in the context of a far wider set of early modern ideas regarding the command of spirits which circulated not only among an élite few, but probably through a wider cross-section of society. Indeed, Prospero's initial creation of the tempest

to draw his enemies to the island exactly echoes the sort of powers which Reginald Scot states that 'conjurors' claim for themselves:

These I saie (among the simple, and where they feare no law nor accusation) take upon them also the raising of tempests, and earthquakes, and to doo as much as God himselfe can doo.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the apparatus of Prospero's magic (the magic circle, the book and staff) is also associable with this range of contemporary magical practices. The magic circle, which also appears in The Famous Historie of Fryer Bacon, Doctor Faustus and The Two Merry Milkmaids, was frequently associated with magical practices during the early modern period. Keith Thomas notes that 'the rituals for such spirit-raising varied, but usually involved such procedures as drawing chalk circles on the ground'.<sup>9</sup> The additional authority lent to magical activities more generally by books is apparent from the epigraph to this chapter and the circulation of magical texts is considered in Chapter Two.<sup>10</sup> The use of staffs or wands in magical experiments is also noted by Thomas, and may be illustrated by a surviving manuscript recording 'a godly way to have a familer sperit which will tell you all wayes your desire without any h[u]rt[e] or ffeere'. At the start of the process is the instruction to 'goe where a Pallme tree groweth [&] cut 3 wands thereof which must be of one yeeres growth'. The 'wands' become the focus for the magical operation.<sup>11</sup>

At least on a superficial level, therefore, the business of Prospero's magic bears some similarity to that of several other magicians considered by this study, most notably those stage magicians which most resemble Greene's Friar Bacon. Like those other stage magicians, Prospero's magic also has affinities with contemporary beliefs and practices. Assessing the potential meaning of these affinities for a contemporary audience will require a more detailed examination of the representation of magic and the supernatural in The Tempest.

## II. Ariel and Caliban

The presentation of Prospero's magical practices in The Tempest exceeds the complexity of the equivalent elements in Friar Bacon and similar plays. Moreover, the presentation of Ariel and, in particular, Caliban, demonstrates a subtlety and novelty in the presentation of supernatural beings not evident in the plays examined in preceding chapters.

As a supernatural dramatic agent, Ariel has clear similarities to other comic supernatural agents. His association with nature and his enjoyment of trickery and leading men astray also identify him with stage fairies through similarities to Shakespeare's fairy jester, Puck. The manner in which Ariel leads men astray on the island with magical music is also reminiscent of Shrimp, as are the responses he makes to Prospero.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, Ariel's costuming on two occasions is intended to allude to specific supernatural creatures drawn from classical literature: the 'nymph o' th' sea' (I.ii.301) and the 'Harpy' (III.iii.52 [s. d.]).

Ariel's dramatization sometimes seems to recall the associations between the manifestation of the supernatural and entertainment or amusement already noted in several other plays. This is most obvious in his use of invisibility and ventriloquism to disrupt the plotting of Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban in III.ii and the humorous manner in which he leads them astray around the island:

STEPHANO            I would I could see this taborer; he lays it on.

(III.ii.148-9)

The expression of Ariel's supernatural power in the form of relatively harmless humour and entertainment certainly echoes the pattern already established in the comedies of the period, especially since his observation and delay of the servants and Caliban did not require comic treatment. The more macabre side to Ariel's humour, however, is altogether more sophisticated than the combination of terror and humour which is found in other plays. This is particularly apparent when he mocks Ferdinand with grotesque songs and animal noises in I.ii:

ARIEL

The watch dogs bark:[Burthen dispersedly.] Bow-wow.Hark, hark! I hearThe strain of strutting chanticleerCry- [Burthen dispersedly.] Cock a diddle dow.

(I.ii.385-9)

Despite the similarities between them, Ariel is obviously a more complex and original theatrical creation than the stock supernatural agents summoned by magicians such as Bacon. The appearances of the latter could possibly rely upon a considerable degree of familiarity on the part of the audience with the traditions of stage and festive devils, and the demonic agents of prose narratives like The Famous Historie. The presentation of Ariel, by contrast, seems designed to go beyond the stereotype in order to defamiliarize the subject-matter. The unfamiliarity of Ariel's stage presentation, furthermore, would have compounded the difficulty that an early modern audience would have had when attempting to relate him, with certainty, to wider contemporary supernatural beliefs.

Beyond the broad similarities between Prospero's spirit summoning and contemporary beliefs already noted, the reactions of characters to Ariel introduce uncertainty concerning his place within contemporary systems of belief. Apparently according to his mood, Prospero describes him as either 'brave spirit' (I.ii.206) or 'malignant thing' (I.ii.257). Ariel's initial attack upon the courtiers' ship sees him associated with devils by Ferdinand (I.ii.214-15). By contrast, Stephano describes him as a 'fairy' (IV.i.196). Kermode has interpreted Stephano's 'Jack' (IV.i.197) as a glancing reference to another traditional supernatural figure, the jack-o'-lantern or will-o'-the-wisp.<sup>13</sup>

These terms of reference are clearly specific to their context. At the height of his apparently destructive raid on the ships and when he counters Prospero's wishes, Ariel is ascribed demonic overtones. His treatment of the servants ensures that he is described, in less overtly condemnatory terms, as a fairy. The appropriateness of characters' comments to their context does nothing to

clarify Ariel's place within contemporary systems of belief, however. His associations with the natural world, epitomized by his song 'where the bee sucks', seems to associate him more with elemental daemons than the devils of the Bacon plays.<sup>14</sup> The pseudo-Solomonic Key of Solomon suggests, however, that elemental spirits, as well as infernal spirits, appeared in widely-circulated attitudes concerning efficacious magic, and not only the hermetic tradition as defined by Yates and others.<sup>15</sup> Although Prospero reminds Ariel that he was 'too delicate' (I.ii.272) to be controlled by the evil Sycorax, the play does not otherwise indicate that Ariel is particularly to be identified with the neoplatonic daemon. An association between fairies and the agents of the Devil was also common in this period in demonological works condemning traffic with the supernatural. Each of these contemporary veins of thought might be considered to have some bearing on the wide range of terms used to describe Ariel.<sup>16</sup>

Although Prospero's control of Ariel appears, therefore, to be broadly Baconic, the play leaves Ariel's place within contemporary systems of thought deliberately unclear. Robert Hunter West's suggestion that the obscurity in Shakespeare's presentation of Ariel is deliberate isolates a central theme in the play: "'malignant thing" and other equivocal items in the picture of Ariel are Shakespeare's reminders that apparition is essentially an intrusion of the unknown into our world'.<sup>17</sup> It is only with difficulty that man interprets the workings of the supernatural. Ariel, like Prospero's magic, seems to conform at least as closely to popular ideas about the behaviour of the supernatural agents as to the hermetic tradition proposed by Yates and others. The play ultimately leaves Ariel's place within contemporary supernatural theories uncertain and problematic. Certain parameters are established concerning Ariel's nature: he is not essentially malicious and the play makes no serious attempt to suggest, in the orthodox manner, that Prospero's pact with him is, in fact, the consequence of a covert pact with the devil. However, the obscurity of Ariel's relation to wider contemporary systems of belief complicates, rather than resolves, the play's treatment of magic.

The representation of Caliban raises questions concerning the limits of human understanding of the unknown or supernatural even more directly than that of Ariel. Caliban's place within contemporary systems of thought concerning the supernatural and his analogues within contemporary drama are even less obvious than those of Ariel and his characterization even more

ambiguous. For example, Caliban's alleged fathering by a devil might draw upon several contemporary modes of thought.<sup>18</sup> West's argument, that Shakespeare is following Classical or Renaissance occult theories on this issue, isolates only one possible source. Since the method of Caliban's conception is not revealed, even the practice described in the Malleus Maleficarum by which incubus devils effect procreation through the use of specially selected and appropriated semen to produce offspring 'perverted by witchcraft' would not stretch the sense of the play on this point.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, the imaginative sources for Caliban seem to rely at least as much on an early seventeenth-century conception of the exoticism of the natural world, as on supernatural theory in a modern sense. Shakespeare's conception of Caliban as half-human savage, half-animal is another example in The Tempest of radical experimentation in the portrayal of the supernatural, or perhaps 'semi-supernatural', since monsters of this sort are not common in the supernatural drama of this period.<sup>20</sup> Characters in the play employ an even wider sphere of reference in order to describe Caliban than Ariel. Apparently humanoid in form, he is also referred to by Prospero as 'tortoise' (I.ii.318), which, in early modern English, suggests that he may resemble either the terrestrial tortoise or even the marine turtle.<sup>21</sup> His aquatic affinities are reinforced when Trinculo and Antonio each, on their first encounter, compare Caliban to a 'fish' (II.ii.25-7 and V.i.266). Although Stephano at one point speculates that Caliban might be a 'devil' (II.ii.99), he and Trinculo settle upon the more mundane, but still terrifying, epithets of 'moon-calf' (II.ii.107) and 'monster' (II.ii.31 etc.). Trinculo and Stephano also both make comments that link Caliban with American Indians.<sup>22</sup>

The originality of Caliban as a dramatic creation means that, even more than with Ariel, the audience's reaction to him is determined by the comments made by the human characters. These comments, in turn, are highly revealing about the speaker. In a play which repeatedly examines questions of vision, ambition and political authority, an encounter with Caliban reveals the limited, mundane, vision of Trinculo (II.ii.28-34) and Antonio (V.i.265-6). They both see him as a source of financial profit. In a similar manner, Caliban arouses the imperial ambitions of Stephano (II.ii et passim). Caliban's eventual promise to be 'wise hereafter' perhaps indicates that the theories concerning nature and nurture which have previously determined Prospero's treatment of him are



not sufficiently flexible to describe Caliban's true character. This may be seen to reflect poorly on Prospero's wisdom and authority.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to appreciate the implications of Caliban's representation from an early modern perspective. Distinctions between the supernatural and the natural ran counter to much early modern natural philosophy. For example, as Stuart Clark comments in the context of witchcraft, the devil's works, 'were not qualitatively different from other extraordinary natural effects'. According to many authorities, including Francis Bacon, for example, truly supernatural events (miracles) were achievable only by God, with demonic agents normally being constrained to operate within natural laws. Such arguments could be extended to the point whereby the distinguishing factor became whether the supernatural was to be used for good or evil, with the magical basis for each remaining the same.<sup>24</sup>

The effect of extending the representation of the supernatural to include the monstrous Caliban, as well as the spirit Ariel, therefore, is merely to extend the context in which the play illustrates the limits of human understanding. When Alonso comments towards the close of the play that,

These are not natural events; they strengthen  
From strange to stranger.

(V.i.227-9)

he advances an interpretation of the events of the play as a whole, and of Prospero's power in particular, which reduces the full complexity of the play's representation of the supernatural world. The play's approach to the relationship between the natural and supernatural worlds is obscure.

These similarities of representation, which draw Ariel and Caliban together not only through the playwright's method for their presentation but also as a consequence of early modern notions regarding nature and the supernatural, should not be allowed to detract from the distinctions drawn between them. There is an obvious opposition between Ariel and Caliban within the play. Ariel's airy insubstantiality and role as servant contrast with Caliban's sensuality, his threatening sexual

power, and his rebellious and aggressive relationship with Prospero at the time of the play.

However, the characterizations of both have important ambiguities which disconcert the audience.

Ariel attempts to resist serving both Prospero and Sycorax and his place within contemporary thought remains unidentified. For all his unpleasantness, Caliban's representation seems calculated to arouse the audience's interest as a wonder of super-nature and, on certain occasions, perhaps their sympathy.

### III. Prospero's 'rough magic'

In The Tempest, therefore, the appropriateness of man's traffic with the supernatural is examined, as it is in several other plays previously considered. However, Shakespeare's play also addresses a more fundamental, related, question concerning the extent to which mankind, from a limited earthly perspective, can come to understand and so successfully control the supernatural at all.

Baconic in its general form, Prospero's characterisation as a magician is developed in new and complex ways. In spite of the considerable magical expertise that Prospero exhibits by his control of Ariel and the other spirits, his ability to make completely successful and positive use of such power seems to be made problematic from the start. Beyond the similarities, already discussed, between his magical technique and some early modern beliefs or practices, the representation of Prospero's magical practices includes many significant ambiguities which contribute to what is, ultimately, a complex thematic treatment of magic. In particular, Prospero's desire to justify his studies becomes a theme in the play, but his explanation to Miranda of their expulsion from Milan is full of significant ambiguities.<sup>25</sup> He makes several references to the excitement with which he embraced his magical studies in the period before Antonio seized power. In a series of comments which hint at contempt for those who did not understand such privileges or who aimed to profit, like Antonio, from his distraction, Prospero describes himself as 'transported / And rapt in secret studies' (I.ii.76-7). He goes on to picture himself, at that time, as,

neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated  
 To closeness and the bettering of my mind  
 With that which, but by being so retir'd,  
 O'er-priz'd all popular rate.

(I.ii.89-92)

Finally, he styles himself as a 'poor man' for whom his 'library / Was dukedom enough' (I.ii.109-10). As a person who admits his own neglect but who seems unable to accept the responsibility which he, and his studies, may share for the loss of his dukedom, Prospero emerges as somewhat self-deceptive and perhaps overly proud of his magical achievements. Although the general similarity between his creation of set-piece entertainment and that of other stage magicians has already been noted, the relative absence of indications to the audience that these should be greeted with amusement is also apparent. By contrast even to Friar Bacon, Prospero is a self-consciously serious magician. His major demonstrations of magical power, the harpy banquet in III.iii and, particularly, the masque in IV.i, are not accompanied by the indications that it is appropriate to laugh at and be entertained by such spectacles that are a feature of other plays. Although Prospero fulfils the role of entertainer, the audience is required to regard this as a sombre spectacle, which is serious, rather than humorous, in tone and purpose. The harpy banquet, for example, is intended to drive Prospero's enemies to distraction and the masque, in a fittingly formal mode, emphasizes the chaste pleasures of marriage.

Furthermore, as the play continues, Prospero demonstrates not only love and concern for Miranda, but also 'fury' (V.i.26) and an obsession concerning the completion of his magical 'project' (V.i.1). The last two may be intended to illustrate that his good judgement is clouded or that he is experiencing a degree of inner conflict. A series of scenes open or close with references to Prospero's plans. These seem to stress the pressure of time upon him, a pressure accentuated by the compact timescale of the play as a whole.<sup>26</sup> The speech which he writes for Ariel to present to the 'three men of sin' (III.iii.53) is the culmination of his attempt to secure justice for himself and Miranda, and to ensure that his enemies come to feel remorse and recognize the need to atone for

their behaviour. Although these intentions are in many ways reasonable, the tone of the speech which Prospero has prepared suggests a conflict between his desire for justice and an angry desire to inflict punishment: the nobles will be terrified out of their minds ('I have made you mad' (III.iii.58)) and are told they will experience a living hell ('Ling'ring perdition' (III.iii.77)). Prospero's approach is not to awaken remorse but to induce it almost by force. He has given them no choice but to express remorse and reform themselves.<sup>27</sup>

West is surely correct to suggest, in Shakespeare and the Outer Mystery, that Prospero's magic is 'a disappointment to him, and that his processes were an anxiety and a danger'.<sup>28</sup> His anger and haste seem to dramatize not only a degree of doubt concerning magic of the sort expounded by demonologists, but also worries concerning the importance of personal preparation by the magician common to widely-held attitudes regarding the efficacy of magic. Most dramatically, Prospero's masque of spirits, which itself is suggestive of his unresolved inner concern regarding Miranda's chastity, is terminated prematurely (IV.i.139). The need for the magician to undertake some spiritual preparation was a feature not only of the élite forms of theurgy advocated by men like Agrippa and Bruno, but also of the more widely-circulated worldly notions of spirit-summoning identified by this study.<sup>29</sup> The way in which Prospero abandons both his 'fury' and 'vengeance' (V.i.26, 27) along with magic in Act Five is consistent with the opinion of both traditions that magic should not be practised under the influence, or even the partial influence, of such emotions.<sup>30</sup>

Further uneasiness within the play concerning Prospero's magic is also manifested by the way in which his speech renouncing magic echoes Medea's words in Metamorphoses.<sup>31</sup> The raising of the dead in either corporeal or spirit form seems to have remained a disputed branch of magical belief in the early modern period and the shadowing of the words of a notorious witch is undoubtedly unsettling in this context.<sup>32</sup> Stephen Orgel has, quite persuasively, argued that the Medea passage is part of a broader strategy within the play which disconcerts the audience by identifying Prospero's magic with that of the malevolent Sycorax.<sup>33</sup> Ariel's unwillingness to obey the commands of Prospero may be seen to parallel his refusal to carry out the 'earthy and abhorred commands' of Sycorax (I.ii.242-4, 270-93). Indeed Prospero threatens to confine Ariel in an 'oak', just as Sycorax had done in the 'cloven pine'. The parallels established between Prospero and both

Medea and Sycorax reinforce the way in which the play, while offering no outright condemnation of the use of magic by Prospero, unsettles the audience by hinting that there might be problems and dangers associated even with Prospero's magical activities.

Other characteristics of the play's form also enable its supernatural subject-matter to be developed with a novel complexity. Friar Bacon and Doctor Faustus, the most complex representations of magicians already considered by this study, drew heavily upon preceding dramatic tradition in which illustration through individual exemplary episodes is at least as important to their dramaturgy as thematic or character development. By contrast, the Terentian dramatic structure of The Tempest provides both narrative pace and, in particular, enhanced opportunities for the development of themes and characters throughout the play. For example, it is apparent as the play unfolds that not only the early episodes of the play have been organized by Prospero, but that apparent events, such as the tempest itself, or the loss of Ferdinand, have been partly illusory. However, as the play develops, thematic structures other than those imposed by Prospero also become apparent which add further depth to the treatment of supernatural, as well as other themes in the play. The relationship between the comic subplot and the main plot in The Tempest makes a more specific and consistent use of comic contrast than other comic plays concerned with magicians in the same period. In Friar Bacon, for example, there is a complicated interplay between Friar Bacon and the fools, Miles and Rafe, at the core of which lay Greene's wish to show magic to be both a source of festive comedy and the object of critical comedy. Shakespeare's use of clowns in The Tempest is clearly more consistent in intention. The subplot concerning Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban represents a caricatured version of the greedy and uncivil lust for power of Antonio and Sebastian and, in turn, may suggest further weaknesses in the character of Prospero himself.<sup>34</sup> The technique seems to be essentially that of comic parody, as defined by Richard Levin, although at several crucial moments, especially towards the close of the play, the rudeness of the clowns comes to act as a foil to Prospero's more civilized aims. The structure of The Tempest is far closer in conception to Levin's theories than many of the plays already considered by this study. As both a foil and a parody, the subplot encourages the audience to respond wholly negatively to its comedy. Only in the character of Caliban does the subplot offer a figure for whom the audience might feel

some sympathy, as opposed to total antipathy.<sup>35</sup> The subplot, like Prospero's set-piece demonstrations of magical power, for the most part avoids making the direct connection between magic and humorous entertainment which is a feature of several other plays already considered by this study. In terms of its portrayal of the supernatural, it derives its comedy more from carefully structured analogy than the spectacular manifestation of the supernatural. The analogies which are created may be considered to complicate further the play's representation of Prospero.

The ambiguities of Prospero's representation as a man and magician culminate in his renunciation of magic. In Act Four, Prospero acknowledges the limitations of humanity:

We are such stuff

As dreams are made on; and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep.

(IV.i.156-8)

Such thoughts are clearly disturbing for a magician who looks to fulfil human aspirations in the material world through his activities. In particular, in their vision of frail humanity, they reflect the way in which it is forced beyond Prospero's magic which ultimately bring the events of the play to a favourable conclusion.

As Stephen Orgel comments, Prospero's 'great scheme is not to produce illusions and good weather, it is to bring about repentance and reconciliation; and here we would have to say it works only indifferently well'.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, the larger scheme within which Prospero finds solace is one in which he totally renounces magic in order to devote his life to Christian forgiveness and temperance:

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,  
 Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
 Do I take part: the rarer action is  
 In virtue than in vengeance.

(V.i.25-8)

The idea of the surrender of worldly power and submission to Christian Providence also informs Prospero's rejection. At its moment of fruition, he abandons his plan to let loose his own supernatural 'ministers of Fate' (III.iii.61) on his enemies in a numinous display of power. Instead he concentrates upon his inner life and leaves the outcome of the plot concerned with his brother and Alonso, to Christian providence.<sup>37</sup>

#### IV. Magic and Providence

Several characteristics of Prospero's representation, including his status as a powerful spirit-summoning hero-magician, the spectacular set-piece entertainments, and the renunciation of magic, clearly lie within a Baconic tradition. In The Tempest, however, these elements receive novel and subtle exploration. As with several other comic stage magicians, the provenance and morality of Prospero's supernatural powers are rendered uncertain. The Tempest unsettles its audience by presenting ideas concerning the supernatural which are ultimately conflicting or ambivalent and takes this strategy of over-determination to a new level of thematic consideration. The representation of the wonderful and supernatural in the play reflects, to differing extents, a range of early modern ideas, in particular popular beliefs regarding efficacious spirit magic, demonological condemnation of magic, the supernatural of classical literature and New World exoticism.<sup>38</sup> While Prospero's intentions when he uses magic to bring together Ferdinand and Miranda are clearly not really questionable, even as early in the play as Act One, little else regarding the supernatural in the play is certain.<sup>39</sup> To some extent, Prospero's magic controls and employs to his purposes the natural wonders of the island: both Ariel and Caliban belong on the island and are found there by Prospero.

Ariel's 'where the bee sucks' song indicates that he will go on living on the island, alongside creatures of the natural world, after Prospero's departure. Caliban's comment that 'the isle is full of noises, / Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not' (III.ii.133-4) may refer simply to the results of Prospero's magic. However, it also seems to reinforce the idea that the island, itself a microcosm of the mundane universe, contains its own wonderful natural and supernatural forces which Prospero can exploit, but only with partial success. This blending of the natural and the supernatural is completely consistent with early modern Natural Philosophy and as such feeds into the complex presentation of Prospero's magic.

In so far as Friar Bacon is a homiletic play, the personal deficiencies of Bacon suggested that human weakness would always, to some extent, limit mankind's magical achievements. In a similar way, in The Tempest it is not so much Prospero's magic itself but the frailty of its human operator which, it is implied, cause it to be 'rough' (V.i.50), a term which seems to encapsulate both the idea of imperfection and also of confinement in a world of material corruption.<sup>40</sup> However, Shakespeare's play goes beyond the accommodation of conflicting ideas regarding the morality of practising magic that is to be found in Friar Bacon, for example, and explores more fully the question of the limitations of understanding and perception. Prospero, Ariel and Caliban are all used to illustrate with novel depth the relationship between the limitations and dangers of magic and the limits placed on human understanding by the limits of sensory perception itself.

In The Tempest, God's Providence is the only ultimately successful and unconditionally permissible supernatural force. Human attempts to comprehend and control the supernatural are doomed to fail. Although not a direct source of damnation, attempting to practise magic is shown inevitably to expose the weaknesses of the human operator and the incompleteness of human comprehension. Prospero has sufficient magical power to secure the return of his dukedom for his daughter, but not to bring his brother to repentance. By choosing 'virtue', and so overcoming his inclination towards 'vengeance', Prospero indicates to the audience that, despite the dual definition of the word in the period, true 'virtue' lies within each person, rather than directly in external force.<sup>41</sup>

The Epilogue recapitulates Prospero's renunciation of magic, by wittily placing the audience in the magician's role. It is now the audience which has the magical power, through its



suspension of disbelief concerning the play as dramatic fiction, to keep the actor playing Prospero on the imaginary island (Epilogue.7-8). The audience is called upon to follow Prospero's lead by replacing their 'spell' with 'indulgence', or applause:

And my ending is despair,  
 Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,  
 Which pierces so, that it assaults  
 Mercy itself, and frees all faults.

As you from crimes would pardon'd be  
 Let your indulgence set me free.

(Epilogue.15-20)

Whether the 'prayer' is that of Prospero or of the audience, it is clear that the actor playing Prospero looks to the audience to grant his performance generous applause, just as his character showed compassion towards his enemies. Prospero's rejection of action in favour of forgiving has a religious undertone not apparent in plays like Friar Bacon. 'This thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine' (V.i.275-6) may have a slightly biblical ring to it, particularly in the context of a play in which ideas of moral ambivalence and limited intellectual understanding lie just beneath the surface.<sup>42</sup>

When compared with the admonition of Greene's Bacon, Prospero's surrender of his powers and his submission to Christian Providence is both more immediately dramatically effective, since he has materially more to lose at the start of Act Five than Bacon at the point of his renunciation, and also more complete. Unlike Bacon, Prospero does not continue to prophesy.

The Tempest develops a more sophisticated presentation of the supernatural in additional ways. The drive in plays like Friar Bacon towards the comic fulfilment through theatrical experience of contemporary aspirations to achieve worldly ends through the use of magic or towards the revelation of moral evil seems less overt in The Tempest. Instead, the play develops a more overt study of the association between magic and the fulfilment of desires charted by the career of Prospero, which itself forms part of a larger examination of the nature and attraction of power in the

play, as manifested by the courtiers, the servants and Caliban. The provision of wish-fulfilment through the comic representation of the supernatural, discussed in Chapter Four, continues to be present as one aspect of the representation of magic in The Tempest. In The Tempest, however, the desire to control the supernatural is more complexly developed on a thematic level.

While these enhancements to the Baconic magician are significant in our understanding of The Tempest, some core characteristics of its comic theatre remain those of Friar Bacon, and also of a wider set of the plays already considered by this study. When considering The Tempest, it is important not to bring a late twentieth-century rationalist sophistication to our reading and thereby divorce the play both from the subtleties of its general historical context and from its place within the tradition of comic representation of the supernatural.<sup>43</sup> As Sisson suggests, the play demands a 'submissive assent' from its audience.<sup>44</sup> This gives the deep comic dramatic structure of The Tempest a closer affinity with plays like Friar Bacon than the additional dramatic sophistication of Peele's Old Wives Tale or the self-conscious theatricality of Jonson's supernatural plays which will be considered in Chapter Eight. The play offers no concrete indication that it should be enjoyed with the anachronistic 'blend of seriousness and jest, of belief and scepticism' suggested by Barbara Mowat.<sup>45</sup> Rather, the complicity expected of the audience with the comic representation of the supernatural is notable. At times, in particular in the masque episode (IV.i), this is informed by an awareness of affinities between the supernatural and theatre. However, the acknowledgement of those affinities does not ultimately challenge the legitimacy within the play of comic representation as a medium for the sustained exploration of complex issues regarding the nature and extent of human control of supernatural powers which takes as its starting point the existence of such powers.<sup>46</sup>

In this context, a useful contrast can be made between The Tempest and Dryden and Davenant's adaptation, The Tempest: or The Enchanted Island (1667).<sup>47</sup> As C. J. Sisson noted, the 'submissive assent' of The Tempest can be contrasted with the way in which the Prologue of The Enchanted Island distances the writers from the magical business of Shakespeare's play, while making an appeal to the 'pow'r' of Shakespeare's poetic magic:

I must confess 'twas bold, nor would you now,  
 That liberty to vulgar Wits allow,  
 Which works by Magick supernatural things:  
 But Shakespear's pow'r is sacred as a King's.  
 Those Legends from old Priest-hood were receiv'd,  
 And he then writ, as people then believ'd.<sup>48</sup>

This distancing from 'legends' of magic also finds thematic expression within this later reworking of The Tempest. More directly than Shakespeare's, the Prospero of Dryden and Davenant describes his magical powers as limited by comparison to the powers at work within the natural and supernatural worlds, as if a firmer assertion of magical power would not be accepted by a Restoration audience:

[...] perhaps my Art it self is false: on what strange grounds we build our hopes and fears; mans life is all a mist, and in the dark, our fortunes meet us.

(III.v.154-7)

Other aspects of the The Enchanted Island, such as the 'fat Spirits' who deliver the banquet to the nobles, dance and depart (III.ii) and Caliban's sister, Sycorax, replace the complexities of the representation of the supernatural in The Tempest with a more direct comedy. This might also reflect the taste of an audience less credulous regarding the powers of magicians. The Enchanted Island does not entirely dispense with the 'submissive assent' of The Tempest, however. For example, it makes use of the idea of a weapon salve, belief in the efficacy of which remained a subject for intellectual debate into the mid seventeenth century.<sup>49</sup>

The representation of the supernatural in The Tempest, therefore, is multi-layered and in many ways ambivalent, but belongs significantly within the prevailing beliefs and attitudes of the early seventeenth century and draws upon existing traditions of comic representation. The Tempest builds upon that tradition to illustrate to its audience that human comprehension of the supernatural will always ultimately be determined by the limits of human sensory perception. Consequently, the

ability of magicians like Prospero to use magic safely and successfully will always be problematic and surrender of human will to Christian Providence the only ultimate release from human frailty. As a reflection on human interaction with the unknown through the attempted use of magic, The Tempest thereby offers an interesting parallel to arguments put forward regarding natural philosophy in Francis Bacon's Aphorisms in the Novum Organum (1620):

The mechanic, mathematician, physician, alchemist and magician all immerse themselves in Nature, with a view to works, but all so far with feeble effect and slight success [...]

The subtlety of Nature is far greater than that of the sense and the understanding, so that all our beautiful speculations and guesses and controversies are absurd, only there is no one at hand to observe this fact.<sup>50</sup>

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, The Tempest, ed. by Frank Kermode, The Arden Shakespeare, (Methuen, 1954; repr. London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. xxi-xxii, argues persuasively that the first performance of The Tempest may be dated with reasonable certainty to 1611. The text was first published in the 1st Folio of 1623. All references to the play will be to this edition unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> The Tempest, p. 96. The dramatis personae and scene for the play are noted at the end of the text in the First Folio. See The First Folio of Shakespeare, The Norton Facsimile, prepared by Charles Hinman (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> D'Orsay W. Pearson "'Unless I Be Reliev'd by Prayer": The Tempest in Perspective', Shakespeare Studies, 7 (1974), 253-82; Walter Clyde Curry, 'Sacerdotal Science in Shakespeare's The Tempest', in Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University

Press, 1937), pp. 163-98; The Tempest, ed. by Kermode, pp. xlvii-li. See also Traister, Heavenly Necromancers, pp. 125-49; Mebane, pp. 174-99. Mowat, pp. 281-3, reviews early criticism.

<sup>4</sup> The English Faust Book, pp. 57, 258 (Appendix 4). The episodes Jones parallels in The Most Famous History and The Tempest are the shapes with a banquet (sig. A3<sup>r</sup>; cf., III.iii.17-52), magical paralysis (sig. C2<sup>r</sup>; cf. III.iii.66-8 and V.i.60-1) and the magical 'pied piper' associated with mire and briars (sig. B2<sup>r</sup>; cf. IV.i.175-84). Jones also notes that both texts contain a renunciation of magic (sig. C4<sup>v</sup>; cf. V.i.50-7 and 331-4). See also Mowat, p. 289.

<sup>5</sup> Consider, for example, Prospero's comment before the discovery of Ferdinand and Miranda that he will 'bring forth a wonder to content ye As much as me my dukedom' (V.i.170-1).

<sup>6</sup> Cohn, pp. 107, 109. Cf. Sisson, 'Magic of Prospero', pp. 75, 76. Sisson describes Prospero's magic simply as 'white', but distances it unnecessarily from contemporary beliefs. Cf. also Pearson, pp. 262-3.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, The Tempest, ed. by Kermode, p. xlvi: 'when Prospero achieves this necessary control over himself and nature he achieves his ends [...] and has no more need of the instrument, "rough magic"'. See also the attack on Curry in Virgil K. Whitaker, Shakespeare's Use of Learning: An Inquiry into the Growth of His Mind and Art (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1953), p. 321. Whitaker's argument elsewhere departs considerably from that of this study, however.

<sup>8</sup> Scot, p. 217. Scot goes on to illustrate this kind of conjuring, which he refutes as 'knaverie' without foundation in fact, with the long quotation from the pseudo-Solomonic Lemegeton noted by Cohn, pp. 105-6.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the references to the 'book' and 'staff' and circle in V.i.54, 57 and 57 [s. d.]; The Famous Historie, I, p. 323; Doctor Faustus, I.iii.8 (A and B); Two Merry Milkmaids, sig. B1<sup>v</sup>; Thomas, Religion, p. 273. See also Butler, p. 55, describing the 'Clavicles': 'it begins with the tracing of the magic circle with the Knife of the Art'.

<sup>10</sup> See above, Chapter Two, Section II. Prospero's 'book' also presents an interesting parallel with the symbolic focus of a much earlier stage magician, Bomelio's, magical powers in his books, which are burnt by his son Hermione. See The Rare Truimphs, ll. 1332-71, 1493-1519.

- <sup>11</sup> Thomas, Religion, p. 273. Bodleian MS Ballard 66, p. 1.
- <sup>12</sup> Mowat, p. 297. Mowat's interpretation of the use of the servant relationship in both plays overestimates its significance. In both examples, the association of the spirit with the servant in a juggling act should only be interpreted as a successful and expedient method for the presentation of subject matter which is obviously difficult to stage.
- <sup>13</sup> The Tempest, ed. by Kermode, p. 107 (footnote to IV.i.197). This is convincing, although it predates the earliest example of this usage of 'jack' in the OED, 2nd edn, by fifty years.
- <sup>14</sup> V.i.88-94. Although we cannot assume the influence of the playwright, it is also notable that in the dramatis personae of the First Folio, Ariel is described as 'an airy spirit'.
- <sup>15</sup> Butler, pp. 59-60. Agrippa, Occult Philosophy, pp. 391-2.
- <sup>16</sup> West, Shakespeare, pp. 81-2.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid, pp. 88-9. West's approach continues, however, to adopt a reading of the play which is closer to a demonological condemnation of magic than this study and makes assertions regarding early modern conceptions of the difference between 'nature and supernature' which this study does not support.
- <sup>18</sup> I.ii.321-2, IV.i.188.
- <sup>19</sup> Malleus Maleficarum, pp. 26-7. Robert Hunter West, Shakespeare and the Outer Mystery (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968), pp. 87-8
- <sup>20</sup> One of Caliban's nearest literary and dramatic analogues is the savage man, although he clearly does not belong to this literary and dramatic type in the way Ariel does to the type of the dramatic spirit-servant. See The Tempest, ed. by Kermode, p. xxxix.
- <sup>21</sup> The OED, 2nd edn, entry for 'tortoise' (definition 1a), suggests that the various early modern English derivations from the Latin root could be applied equally to the tortoise or the turtle.
- <sup>22</sup> II.ii.31-5, 58-9. For a discussion of the development of interpretations of the play in a New World context, see Alden T. Vaughan, 'Shakespeare's Indian: The Americanization of Caliban', Shakespeare Quarterly, 39 (1988), 137-53. Tempest, ed. by Orgel, pp. 31-6. The Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1973) cites 70 uses of the word

'monster' in his works: of the 38 in *The Tempest*, 16 are in II.ii, 12 in III.ii, and 10 in IV.i. 'Servant-monster' is also used 3 times in III.ii and 'man-monster' once.

<sup>23</sup> V.i.294. See also, I.ii.353-64, IV.i.188-93, V.i.275-6.

<sup>24</sup> Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, pp. 233, 256 and 234.

<sup>25</sup> On the dominance of decorum over naturalism in the characterization of Prospero, see *The Tempest*, ed. by Kermode, p. lxxviii.

<sup>26</sup> III.i.92-6; III.iii.88-93; IV.i.262-6; V.i.1-3.

<sup>27</sup> III.iii.81-2: 'nothing but heart-sorrow And a clear life ensuing'. See *The Tempest*, ed. by Kermode, p. 91, and *The Tempest*, ed. by Stephen Orgel, *The Oxford Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987; repr. 'World's Classics', 1994), p. 168. Both interpret 'is nothing but' as meaning 'there is no alternative'. Laroque, p. 268, notes that the banquet constitutes a 'travesty of a feast', intended to convert the 'pangs of hunger into pangs of conscience'.

<sup>28</sup> West, *Shakespeare*, p. 85.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas, *Religion*, p. 273. Cohn, p. 110: 'Some of the books of magic even add that unless the magician, when attempting a conjuration, is in a state of grace and has a clear conscience, he may find that instead of commanding the demon he is commanded by it.' See also Scot, p. 226 and Agrippa, *Occult Philosophy*, p. 350.

<sup>30</sup> Contrast with Curry, p. 188. Prospero's human frailties also sustain comparison with Hermione's description of Bomelio in *The Rare Triumphs* who, wishing to be revenged on Fortune, sets about 'inchaunting and transforming that his fancy did not fit' (l. 1352-5).

<sup>31</sup> V.i.48-50. *The Tempest*, ed. by Kermode, pp. 147-50, reproduces Golding's translation of Ovid. See also Ovid [Publius Ovidius Naso], *Metamorphoses*, trans. by A. D. Melville with introduction and notes by E. J. Kenny, 'World's Classics' (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 150-1.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas, *Religion*, p. 274. Agrippa, *Occult Philosophy*, pp. 490-1, outlines both corporeal and spiritual variants, although he claims they form no part of his own beliefs. On the passage in *The Tempest*, see *The Tempest*, ed. by Orgel, p. 53: 'at this moment Prospero is all enchanters, black and white, classic and modern'.

- <sup>33</sup> The Tempest, ed. by Orgel, pp. 18-23. Orgel, however, possibly pushes this identification too far.
- <sup>34</sup> cf. Pearson, p. 270.
- <sup>35</sup> Levin, The Multiple Plot, pp. 111-12. This study does not share Levin's reservations concerning the intentional combination of the 'foil' and the 'parody'. See *ibid*, p. 115.
- <sup>36</sup> The Tempest, ed. by Orgel, p. 51.
- <sup>37</sup> cf. Pearson, pp. 276-7. See also, West, Shakespeare, pp. 28-32, on the Christian framework of Jacobean drama concerning magic.
- <sup>38</sup> On the New World associations of the play see The Tempest, ed. by Kermode, pp. xxv-xxxiv, 135-41 and The Tempest, ed. by Orgel, pp. 31-9.
- <sup>39</sup> See I.ii.422-4.
- <sup>40</sup> See the discussion of 'rough magic' in The Tempest, p. 115, although Kermode's notion of neoplatonic ascent has already been questioned, and The Tempest, ed. by Orgel, p. 190.
- <sup>41</sup> OED, 2nd edn, entry for 'virtue', gives both 'voluntary observance of the recognized moral laws or standards of right conduct' (definition 2a) and 'the power or operative influence inherent in a supernatural or divine being' (definition 1a).
- <sup>42</sup> cf. King James Bible, Job 38:2: 'Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?' It is interesting to compare the behaviour to which Prospero comes to aspire with the surrender to God's will of Job, who was considered by some Protestants as a model for how the moral man should conduct himself in the face of tribulations, including being assailed by supernatural forces. See Clark, Thinking with Demons, p. 445.
- <sup>43</sup> This sort of approach informs the work of several critics. See, for example, Mowat, pp. 302-3, and David Young, 'Where the Bee Sucks: A Triangular Study of "Doctor Faustus", "The Alchemist" and "The Tempest"', in Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered, ed. by Carol McGinnis Kay and Henry E. Jacobs (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), pp. 149-66 (p. 166 et passim). D. G. James, The Dream of Prospero (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 59, in an equally anachronistic manner, stresses the decline of magic in this period.
- <sup>44</sup> See C. J. Sisson, 'The Magic of Prospero', Shakespeare Survey, 11 (1958), 70-7 (p. 74).



<sup>45</sup> Mowat, p. 283.

<sup>46</sup> cf. Young, 'Where the Bee Sucks', pp. 150-1, who sees *The Tempest* as Shakespeare's attempt to 'retain and even restore what was explosive and thrilling about Marlowe's theater, while acknowledging and accepting many of the changes engendered by Jonson's artistic example'.

Jonson's supernatural comedy will be considered further in Chapter Eight.

<sup>47</sup> John Dryden and William Davenant (after Shakespeare), *The Tempest: or The Enchanted Island*, in *Shakespeare Made Fit: Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare*, ed. by Sandra Clark, Everyman Paperbacks (London, Dent 1997), pp. 79-185. All quotations are from this edition. *The Enchanted Island* was first performed in 1667 and published in 1670.

<sup>48</sup> 'Prologue', ll. 21-6. Italic text of Clark's edition is suppressed.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas, *Religion*, p. 225.

<sup>50</sup> Francis Bacon, 'Aphorisms concerning the Interpretation of Nature and the Kingdom of Man', in the *Novum Organum: With Other Parts of the Great Instauration*, trans. and ed. by Peter Urbach and John Gibson (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, Illinois, 1994), pp. 44-5 (Aphorisms 5 and 10). Urbach and Gibson gloss magic in this context as 'the art of exploiting the hidden qualities of bodies', citing Porta's *Natural Magic* (1558) as an example.

## Chapter Six

### ‘I Will Show Thee Wonders ere We Part’: The Comic Representation of Fairies in “James the Fourth” and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”<sup>1</sup>

#### I. Fairies in early modern English drama and literature

In this chapter the wider relevance for an early modern audience of the comic representation of fairies on the early modern English stage will be examined with particular reference to two plays, Greene’s James the Fourth (?1588-92) and Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream (?1594-6).<sup>2</sup> The exploration of form and context undertaken in preceding chapters will be developed to assess those characteristics which distinguish the comic portrayal of fairies in these and other plays. Similarities between the comic portrayal of fairies and the comic portrayal of other supernatural phenomena on the stage will be explored.

The complex relationship between fairy beliefs and other branches of early modern thought was considered in Chapter Two.<sup>3</sup> Like the comic representation of magic on the stage, the comic representation of fairies also needs to be seen in a broader context of portrayal in poetry, romance, pamphlets and performance. Fairies, or fairy-like supernatural creatures, are to be found in medieval and early modern romance.<sup>4</sup> Fairies also appeared in a number of entertainments for the court that were subsequently published, in the drama of Lyly, and in more workmanlike stage romance.<sup>5</sup> The latter is exemplified by Guy Earl of Warwick, a ‘Tragical History’ in which ‘Oberon King of the Fairies’ appears in an episode derived from Huon of Burdeux.<sup>6</sup> Undoubtedly the most famous literary fairies of the late sixteenth century are those of Spenser’s Shepherd’s Calendar and Faerie Queene.<sup>7</sup>

Diane Purkiss has identified a series of themes, most notably death and sexual power, associated with fairies in medieval and early modern romance, ballads and poetry. It is certainly possible to argue for the influence of folktales and wider beliefs regarding fairies behind the presentation of such themes in literary works. However, the influence of a broad range of cultural pressures is often apparent upon the presentation of fairies in this literary tradition, including the

powerful influence of classical mythology. It is apparent that, as with some of the representations of magicians considered in Chapter Four, portrayals of fairies could employ supernatural subject-matter while minimizing their engagement with wider cultural issues relating to the supernatural. In The Shepheardes Calender, for example, 'E. K.' dismissively observes that fairies 'sticketh very religiously in the myndes of some', but confidently asserts that 'there be no such thinges'.<sup>8</sup> Spenser, like Milton after him, conforms quite closely to Purkiss's notion of the literary 'jobbing tailor', who preserves in the representation of the supernatural only isolated echoes of wider contemporary beliefs.<sup>9</sup>

There were, also, other aspects to the portrayal of fairies in early modern England. In several publications, fairies of the Robin Goodfellow sort, like stage magicians and devils in other contexts, were closely associated with humour and entertainment.

Dick Tarlton, the most famous clown of the pre-Shakespearean stage, was associated both with the Vice and also, at least after his death with the figure of Robin Goodfellow.<sup>10</sup> In Tarlton's Newes out of Purgatorie [...] Published by an old companion of his, Robin Goodfellow (London, 1590), attributed to Tarlton's protégé Robert Armin, Tarlton's ghost returns from Purgatory 'attired in russet with a buttond cap on his head, a great bagge by his side, and a strong bat in his hand'. This is noted to be the attire of a clown, but also seems to associate him, as Armin's Tarlton acknowledges, with the Robin Goodfellow of the fairy traditions:

Sith my appearance to thee is in resemblance of a spirite, thinke that I am as pleasant a goblin as the rest, and will make thee as merry before I part, as ever Robin Goodfellow made the country wenches at their Creame bowles.<sup>11</sup>

Weimann notes that it is not known whether Tarlton played Robin Goodfellow or not, but suggests 'that the stylized goblin type readily took on many clowning features'. This included picking up on the meaning of "'Hob'" or "'Rob=Robin'" as a generic name for a "'rustic'" or "'clown'"'.<sup>12</sup>

Robin Goodfellow also appears in his own right in a series of works which combine elements of fairy tradition with gentle humour and social satire. The Robin Goodfellow of Tell-

Trothes New-yeares Gift 'never did worse harme then correct manners, and make diligent maides'.

Although he is associated with hell, Robin comes to earth to dissuade mankind from committing the sin of jealousy. In the seventeenth-century Robin Good-Fellow, His Mad Prankes and Merry Iests, Robin is instructed by a scroll to harm only 'knaves and queanes, / But love thou those that honest be'.<sup>13</sup> In the latter, Robin's cry of 'ho, ho, hoh' (sig. D4<sup>v</sup>) recalls the voice of the Vice and, more interestingly, the stage devils of the period.

In his association with folly, merriment and a degree of social satire, rather than directly with demonic temptation, the Robin of such works also recalls certain aspects of stage devils. This affinity is also apparent in Grim the Collier of Croydon (1600?). In a plot with some parallels to The Devil is an Ass Belphegor, a devil, is sent to earth to consider the state of women's morality accompanied by a minor devil, Akercock, as his servant. The stage direction for the fourth scene describes Akercock entering 'as Robin Goodfellow'. In a later scene the stage direction indicates that he enters 'in a suite of leather close his body, his Face and Hands coloured russet-colour'. Akercock-Robin's intentions echo other accounts of fairy pranks:

Thus therefore will I live betwixt two shapes,  
 When as I list in this transform'd disguise,  
 I'll fright the Country people as they pass,  
 And sometimes turn me to some other form,  
 And so delude them with fantastick shows.<sup>14</sup>

If Armin's account of Tarlton suggests an association between fairies and the traditions of folly, Akercock's fairy disguise suggests an association between fairies and stage devils. Although the evidence is too sketchy to be conclusive, the play does suggest that the idiom for such a stage presentation might have been widely understood by that time. It might be speculated that Tarlton, and perhaps others, performed in a fairy persona before the composition of the Dream. At the same time, there is something elegiac about the extant Robin Goodfellow literature, including its

association with Tarlton, which makes such speculation problematic. Associations clearly could be made, however, between fairies and folly, and between fairies and stage devils.

The context in which James the Fourth and A Midsummer Night's Dream should be considered is, therefore, complex. It includes not only branches of wider contemporary thought regarding the supernatural, but also literary, and possibly performance, traditions with fairy connections which themselves related in various ways to the wider culture of supernatural beliefs. By appreciating the balance between these elements, and also the relationship between the comic portrayal of fairies and of other manifestations of the supernatural, the wider cultural relevance of these plays for their original audience can be explored.

## II. Greene's James the Fourth

The Scottish History of James the Fourth draws closely upon one of the novels of Cinthio's Hecatommithi for its main plot.<sup>15</sup> In the play James, the King of Scotland, marries Dorothea, the daughter of the King of England. However, James falls in love with another noble lady and, having been encouraged and corrupted by the parasite Ateukin, agrees to the murder of his queen. Dorothea escapes and seeks refuge in the house of Sir Cuthbert Anderson. She finally returns to her husband in order to stop the impending conflict between him and her father, an event which leads to the fall of Ateukin and the promise of King James to reform. This story is framed by a second plot, in which the play's narrator, a malcontent Scot named Bohan, discusses his own life and the meaning of the play with Oberon, the King of the Fairies.<sup>16</sup>

The play as a whole, including the comic mode of the framing narrative, has received little detailed analysis from modern critics. In 1877, for example, J. M. Brown conceived the framing narrative of the play in a way which anticipates the lyrical analyses of A Midsummer Night's Dream proposed by Latham and Briggs:

Its fairy framework is to the play like the garden perfume that preludes and closes a shower, -it is dainty, sweet and subtle.<sup>17</sup>

More recently, Kenneth Muir's survey of Greene's dramatic work attacked such sentimental interpretation, but only to question more fundamentally the effectiveness of the framing narrative:

Although rash critics have compared Bohan to Jaques and Aster Oberon to Shakespeare's Oberon and Prospero, the induction and the choric interludes between the acts are tedious and unnecessary.<sup>18</sup>

Catherine Lekhal's speculative classification of Oberon as 'a pagan deity' working with God 'on Dorothea's -hence on the Protestants'- side' shows a more concerted attempt to read the play on its own terms, as opposed to reading it in the shadow of A Midsummer Night's Dream. However, her categorization of Oberon seems somewhat simplistic.<sup>19</sup> More recently, Diane Purkiss has noted the way in which Greene's Oberon preserves, as King of the Fairies, 'some of the links with the dead suggested by his status'.<sup>20</sup> A more detailed review of the structure and contexts of the framing narrative in James the Fourth is both enlightening and overdue.

The main plot of James the Fourth is certainly formally indebted to the morality tradition.<sup>21</sup> It contains moral satire of various professions and offices of the sort which is common in later morality drama but which is not present in Cinthio, for example. In the character of Ateukin, moreover, the influence of the Vice of the later moralities is clear. Although he is not an abstract superhuman being in the manner of the Vice, his association with the magical arts of astrology, herbalism, and 'charms and spells' (I.i.195-278) nevertheless connects the issues of moral turpitude and the supernatural within the play. Ateukin is also ironically described by his servant Andrew as having been touched by fairy magic, as well as being marked out by a portent in the classical manner:

For I heard the midwife swear at his nativity that the fairies gave him the property of the Thracian stone; for who toucheth it is exempted from grief, and he that heareth my master's counsel is already possessed of happiness; nay, which is more miraculous, as the noble man in his infancy lay in his cradle, a swarm of bees laid honey on his lips in token of his eloquence.

(IV.v.19-26)

The similarities between Ateukin and the Vice only serve to highlight the dissimilarity between Greene's Oberon and the homiletic comedy commonly associated with morality drama. Oberon is a powerful but inscrutable figure who does not share the desire of the Vice or Ateukin to corrupt mankind:

I tell thee, Bohan, Oberon is king  
 Of quiet, pleasure, profit, and content,  
 Of wealth, of honour, and of all the world;  
 Tied to no place, yet all are tied to one.  
 Live thou in this life, exiled from world and men,  
 And I will show thee wonders ere we part.

(Chorus I.4-9)

Greene's Oberon draws instead upon different literary sources. In his size and title of King of the Fairies, he particularly resembles the Oberon of Huon of Burdeux.<sup>22</sup> Both Oberons are associated with contrary attributes: each is isolated, inscrutable and distinctly non-human, but, at the same time, periodically benign towards humans.<sup>23</sup> The wish of Greene's Oberon to expose worldly corruption opposes him to Ateukin as the Vice figure. The comic mode generally associated with Oberon himself, and his support of Bohan's sons looks forward to, and also works towards, the restoration of social order and moral values in the main plot through the play's propitious comic ending.

The framing plot containing Oberon and Bohan is generically signified as comic. It recalls both the associations of fairies with mirth in non-dramatic fiction and also, more generally, some of

the associations of the supernatural with humour, spectacle, entertainment and the comic already considered by this study in the context of the representation of the magician.<sup>24</sup> Both Oberon and Bohan are associated with comedy, sport and dancing:

OBERON                   And to gratulate thee, I bought those Antics to show thee some sport in  
dancing, which thou hast loved well.

(Ind.77-9)

BOHAN                    To change that humour, stand and see the rest:  
I trow my son Slipper will show's a jest.

(Chorus II.12-13)

While such references to comedy and 'sport' are initially confined to the framing narrative, their field of reference becomes expanded by the particular interest of Oberon and Bohan in the activities of Bohan's sons, the clowns Slipper and Nano in the main plot, and Oberon's eventual intervention to save Slipper (V.vi.57 [s. d.]). When Oberon first promises, in the manner of many supernatural figures in stories, to watch over Bohan's sons, the term 'sport' clearly refers to the jig that they have just danced (Ind.98-103, 94). By the time Oberon reiterates his offer in Chorus IV, dance has become conflated with other elements of Slipper's clowning that the audience has witnessed:

Yea, and yon laddie, for his sport he made  
Shall see, when least he hopes, I'll stand his friend,  
Or else he capers in a halter's end.

(Chorus IV.8-10)

The vocabulary of merriment, specifically the term 'jig', also becomes generally applied to the main narrative by Bohan's comment at the end of Chorus II, just after Slipper and a partner have danced 'a hornpipe' (Chorus II. 13-14):



Now after this beguiling of our thoughts,  
 And changing them from sad to better glee,  
 Let's to our cell, and sit and see the rest;  
 For I believe this jig will prove no jest.

(Chorus II.14-17)

Norman Sanders notes that the 'jig' was 'a performance normally of a lively or comical nature', but that here it apparently means simply "a play", a meaning not recorded in O.E.D..<sup>25</sup> Technically, the stage jig was a song, often satiric, accompanied by dancing. It is clearly the dance element which is stressed in the earlier stage direction 'the two dance a jig' (Ind.94). The term 'jig' had a wide and varied currency at the end of the sixteenth century, and its application to the main narrative employs the word in a variety of senses, each one of which, however, clearly has comic overtones.<sup>26</sup>

The assertion that the 'jig' which follows will 'prove no jest' establishes a sense of alternating rhythm within the play between the merriment of the framing narrative, over which Oberon as 'king Of [...] pleasure' (Chorus I.4-5) presides and the more generally serious matter of the main narrative, through which Bohan illustrates the evils of the social world. To this end, Bohan describes the main narrative as 'interlaced with merriment and rhyme' (Chorus III.8).

Greene, however, develops a more serious side to the spectacle of the framing plot. As a malcontent, Bohan's hatred of the world expresses itself in his desire to demonstrate worldly corruption and also in his angry temperament, aspects of his character which complement his use of comedy to express his alternative view of the world, but are not comic in themselves.

Oberon also demonstrates a more serious side. Although he promotes and organizes comic material in the play, he also emerges as a figure who can create more serious spectacle. For example, when Oberon causes Bohan's sword to be held by magic in his scabbard and then magically prevents him from striking, the demonstration of his powers is far from jocular:

Draw it out. [Bohan draws his sword.] Now strike, fool, canst thou not?

(Ind.33-4)

Oberon's two dumb shows make a similar use of the prestige associated with classical material exploited by Kyd in the contemporaneous The Spanish Tragedy (?1589-92). These dumb shows reinforce through their own dramatic mode the demonstration in the main narrative of the wretchedness of life without Christian repentance.<sup>27</sup>

As a result of their position in the framing plot, Oberon and Bohan assume an important interpretative role over the main narrative. As Dieter Mehl has suggested, 'Oberon and Bohan are carrying on a kind of competition in which each tries to outdo the other with his own performance.' This competition begins with the dances of the Induction, and Bohan's boast to Oberon that his sons 'with one Scottish jig shall break the neck of thy Antics' (Ind.81-2), but ultimately includes Bohan's narration of the main narrative and Oberon's production of the dumb shows.<sup>28</sup> Their comments and interpretations as a whole, however, jointly cause the audience to consider more closely its response to the main narrative.

In Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play, Anne Righter argues for the development, from the middle of the sixteenth century, of a new dramatic self-consciousness concerning the 'play as illusion'.<sup>29</sup> One of the principal manifestations of this new drama is the use of the play metaphor within the drama itself. Another, in many ways a physical manifestation of the other, is the use of a framing plot observing the main plot in the manner of the audience itself. Greene uses this technique in another play, A Looking-Glass for London and England, co-written with Thomas Lodge. Other significant uses of a supernatural framing plot in the period are Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy (?1589-92) and Peele's The Old Wives Tale (?1593), both of which parallel certain aspects of the framing plot of Greene's James the Fourth.<sup>30</sup> The impact of the framing plot can be destabilizing. Righter suggests that the presence of two levels of drama, one acting as a more direct reflection of the real audience, ensures that 'the relation of illusion to reality, actors to audience, is constantly being examined and redefined'.<sup>31</sup>

In James the Fourth the framing narrative clearly challenges the audience to reconsider some aspects of the play. With his final introductory comment, 'That will I see [...]' (Ind.114), Oberon himself raises the issue of the visual qualities of the drama, the aspect which is most immediately seductive and also most clearly demonstrates the dangers of illusion. In a limited attempt to counter this, Oberon's dumb shows demonstrate an attempt to fix the meaning of the purely visual, following what Huston Diehl has more generally described as the Protestant desire 'to scrutinize and demystify these visual displays'.<sup>32</sup> After each, Bohan demands further information from Oberon concerning what he has seen. However, the way in which Oberon's attempts to clarify Bohan's own narrative result in Bohan requiring more information from Oberon communicates a sense of anxiety rather than confidence concerning drama as a medium for communication.

A consequence of this instability and questioning is that Bohan and Oberon come to be seen as unreliable authors and commentators. Oberon is unable to maintain the audience's confidence. Moreover, the form of the framing narrative needs to be considered in the context of wider early modern associations between fairies and illusion which are important to an understanding of the wider contemporary relevance of Oberon as a fairy. As noted in Chapter Two, the name Oberon appears in the context of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century conjuration, in addition to the literary works already noted by this chapter. In certain circumstances, fairies could still be thought by some to offer worldly aid to humans on occasion, just as Oberon does. However, the play's exploration of questions of illusion engages its representation of the supernatural with a range of contemporary debates which included that regarding the very existence of fairies. Indeed, in the sixteenth century the term 'elf', virtually synonymous with 'fairy', had also apparently entered the ranks of terms synonymous with illusory display and was used to describe the deception of Catholic ritual.<sup>33</sup>

Oberon's association with the unreliable witness Bohan brings this contemporary relevance into clearer focus. Bohan has close associations with the type of the malcontent and so with contemporary notions of melancholy. This, in part, may explain his juxtaposed interests in both merriment and misery, since contemporary theories of melancholy equated one form of the melancholic state with comedy or dancing. In his A Treatise of Melancholie (1586), for example, Timothy Bright suggests that, in a state of 'vnnaturall melancholie', serious matter 'is turned into a

iest, & tragedies into comedies, and lamentation into gigges and daunces'.<sup>34</sup> Being a melancholic makes Bohan profoundly unreliable as a judge and witness both of the events in the play and of his supernatural companion. Laurentius, for example, views the melancholic as 'assayed with a thousand vaine visions, and hideous buggards'. Bright declares that the 'fantasie' of the melancholic helps to produce terrifying 'disguised shapes' or 'counterfet goblins which the brayne of right discerning, fayneth vnto the heart'.<sup>35</sup>

As with several of the comic magicians already discussed, the portrayal of Oberon reflects, and perhaps to some extent offers a comic fulfilment of, some of those strands of contemporary belief which held that powerful supernatural forces, perhaps even fairies, might be of material benefit to humans. Oberon does not, however, emerge as an unproblematic fictional presentation of that possibility. In spite of his self-identification with pleasure, spectacle and the comic, he remains an inscrutable figure within a framing narrative that also explores issues pertaining to dramatic illusion and the unreliability of human perception of the supernatural. By exploring these issues, James the Fourth engages more directly with wider contemporary beliefs regarding the supernatural than Spenser's fairies. The identification of the supernatural with humour, spectacle and entertainment, in the play is similar to several stage portrayals of the magician. The effect of the exploration of questions of illusion within the play is, however, to complicate this mode of portrayal. The Old Wives Tale had used the device of a framing narrative to explore the mechanics of performance. In James the Fourth the device helps to explore some strands in early modern thought concerning the existence and powers of fairies. Like The Tempest, James the Fourth is particularly concerned with questions of interpretation raised by encounters with the supernatural.

### III. Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream

Modern studies have suggested that A Midsummer Night's Dream is closely indebted to a wide range of literary and other written sources, including Chaucer's Knight's Tale, North's Plutarch, Huon of Burdeux and Scot's Discoverie of Witchcraft. Reviewing the full range of sources, Howard F. Brooks has put forward an additional case for the influence of Spenser's

Shepherd's Calendar. Most recently, Diane Purkiss has argued for the particular influence of Seneca's Hippolytus on Puck's 'Cupid-like activities' and the classical Anacreonta with its 'festive aesthetic of drink and desire' on the tone of the play. François Laroque and David Wiles have considered the play in a broader context. Laroque has considered early modern festivity as a general source for the imagery for the play. Wiles has considered the meaning of the play in the specific context of a putative first performance to coincide with the aristocratic wedding of Elizabeth Carey, the daughter of George Carey, the future patron of Shakespeare's company.<sup>36</sup>

Fairy power is expressed by a number of the play's facets. Shakespeare's Oberon is more consistently a serious, even a sinister, figure than Greene's. Oberon and Titania clearly share an exoticism, which represents the supernatural in a serious and sensual manner different from the more overtly comic modes of supernatural representation on which this study has focussed.<sup>37</sup> However, the complex representation of fairies in the Dream does still include the sophisticated combination of a range of comic resources. In addition to classical sources, the representation of Puck, in particular, draws upon other, contemporary, traditions of humour. By making him Oberon's jester (II.i.44), Shakespeare reaffirms the relationship between folly and fairies associated with Tarlton, and between comedy and the supernatural more generally. However, like The Tempest, it perpetuates those sorts of relationships as part of a more sophisticated dramatic structure which has several debts to Roman comedy.<sup>38</sup> The account, partly Puck's own, of his foolish activities (II.i.1-58) not only serves to relate him to classical dramatic models; it also makes an important association between fairies and foolish forms of comedy. Puck's antics do not go on in private, but, like stage comedy, before an audience, for whom Puck makes the 'saddest tale' of the 'wisest aunt' humorous:

And then the whole quire hold their hips and loffe,

And waxen in their mirth, and neeze, and swear

A merrier hour was never wasted there.

(II.i.55-7)

Puck performs similarly humorous acts during the play. He promises to lead the Mechanicals astray with animal noises (III.i.101-6) and performs the more easily staged trick of mimicry to deceive the Athenian lovers before he puts them to sleep (III.ii.401-63).

Puck's actions during the play, both deliberate and accidental, associate him with destabilization and defamiliarization of the normal world.<sup>39</sup> By presenting contrasting reactions to Puck's comedy within the play, Puck's subjection of characters to his supernatural comic antics draws the audience into an assessment of its own reactions to the supernatural as it is presented in comic form. In III.ii, Puck's own humorous reading of events comes under scrutiny. While Oberon is unhappy at Puck's 'misprision' of one Athenian for another (III.ii.90), Puck is apparently particularly delighted at the ensuing possibility for confusion, since it provides great entertainment:

Then will two at once woo one:

That must needs be sport alone;

And those things do best please me

That befall prepost'rously [...]

And so far am I glad it did so sort,

As this their jangling I esteem a sport.

(III.ii.118-21, 352-3)

By contrast, the language of the lovers in the ensuing scene absorbs and employs negatively the vocabulary of humour and merriment normally associated within the play either with fairy activity or the promised festive closure of the drama in marriage, as announced in the first scene (I.i.18-19). In the wood, Helena attacks what she considers the aggressiveness of her companions' humour in, as she perceives it, pretending to love her for their own amusement. She considers that this undermines the principles of courtesy:

HELENA

I see you all are bent

To set against me for your merriment.

If you were civil, and knew courtesy,

You would not do me thus much injury [...]

Now I perceive they have conjoin'd all three

To fashion this false sport in spite of me [...]

Hold the sweet jest up;

This sport, well carried, shall be chronicled.<sup>40</sup>

The other lovers adopt this form of interpretation:

LYSANDER

'Tis no jest

That I do hate thee, and love Helena.

HERMIA

Oh me! [To Helena] You juggler!

(III.ii.280-2)

While Puck reminds the audience of the pleasure generated by humour, the lovers emphasize its viciousness. Helena misguidedly attributes to spite the same events which entertain the audience. Seen from an objective point of view, the patriarchal threats, anxieties, enchantments and bewilderment which characterize the human plot of the play are preposterous and humorous. The limited perspective of the lovers ensures that they fail to see the humour of their situation, especially the way in which the shifting of their affections as a result of magic raises deeper questions regarding human love. There is a definite and deliberate conceptual shortfall between Helena's restricted, aggressive view of what is happening to her, and Puck's actions and comments: Puck's 'sport' is not inspired by the sort of spite she imagines and its consequences are, in the end,

benign. Bottom's more affable reaction to his comic fate suggests a human interpretation more in sympathy with the comic values of fairy magic:

I see their knavery: this is to make an ass of me, to fright me if they could.<sup>41</sup>

Puck's actions are not directly prompted by malice, although his intentions are impenetrable to, and misunderstood by, the lovers. Oberon initiates the movement towards the play's happy resolution, but Puck's association with the final festivities in the play suggests that his humour is at least potentially useful and ultimately a benign force, even if it causes incidental (and amusing) distress. Puck certainly aims to ridicule the fickle affections and limited perceptions of these lovers, but ultimately bears no malice towards them. It is Puck who delivers the epilogue which expresses the desire not to have caused offence. However, the lovers' conception of humour does provide a timely warning regarding the potentially aggressive qualities of humour. Especially in fairy hands, the gravitation of humour towards providing wish-fulfilment can cause chaos and distress, at least at a local level.<sup>42</sup>

The creation of comic situations by Puck is a manifestation of his considerable supernatural power. In the same way that Greene uses his Oberon, Shakespeare uses his Oberon and Puck to draw an analogy between supernatural power and theatrical direction. In the Dream this takes the form of a more frequent, and highly humorous, manipulation of the main plot. Oberon and Puck are each given some power over the actions of other characters. They observe the effects of their influence over others, while the total scene is observed by the audience. This structure is most obvious in the scenes involving Puck and the lovers (III.ii), Oberon's enchantment and taunting of Titania (IV.i) and Puck's interference with the Mechanicals:

I'll be an auditor;

An actor too perhaps, if I see cause.

(III.i.75-6)



The audience delights in these episodes because it is allowed to identify with the power exerted by the fairies over the human characters. On the stage, fairy power exploits the potential for humour, noted by Bergson, of any event secretly manipulated by external forces:

Any arrangement of acts and events is comic which gives us, in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement.<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, Puck's preposterous humour also provides pleasure for the audience because it gently undermines some of the more conventional aspects of civilized social order by demonstrating the arbitrary nature of the lovers' passion and matching the Fairy Queen with an artisan in a parody of courtly love.<sup>44</sup>

As in James the Fourth, therefore, the power of the fairies in the Dream finds significant expression in comic form. Again, the association with humour and spectacle has some general similarities with the comic representation of magicians in other plays. However, Shakespeare's use of this resource is clearly more sophisticated and reflective than that of his contemporaries. In the Dream, the capacity of the victim of supernatural comic trickery to feel harmed is also shown.

Although the fairies emerge on the side of social cohesion and order in the play's conclusion, Puck's comedy is also identified with other, more ambivalent, impulses in the play. Laroque and Wiles have, for example, noted the contribution of complex festive imagery in a play which is both an amalgamation, and also an examination, of several aspects of early modern festive experience.<sup>45</sup>

Other types of comedy also contribute to the representation of fairies in the play. Although critics are interested in the association between Shakespeare's fairies and miniaturization, few consider whether the fairies were played by boy actors.<sup>46</sup> The assumption of those who do, however, is that all the fairies, including Oberon, were played by boys.<sup>47</sup> The fairies therefore would offer all the more striking a parody of Theseus' court, magnified by the disparity between the size of the actors, although it is difficult to recover a sense of distinct, prevailing attitudes towards the boy players on the professional stage.<sup>48</sup> What may be concluded, however, is that Shakespeare's fairies would be a shock to any familiar with those of Lyly's boys' plays. The mix of boys and men among

the corps of actors on the men's stage and the sheer range of reference to different dramatic and non-dramatic supernatural material would have undermined the standards set by Lyly's comic drama. The Dream, moreover, maintains a similarly oblique relationship with the fairies of court entertainments. In Shakespeare's play, power is invested in a fairy king, to the diminishment of the fairy queen's authority, and the scenes between Bottom and Titania seem to parody aristocratic notions concerning romantic love.<sup>49</sup> Shakespeare's fairy play is alive with references to its dramatic heritage, but these are often twisted into new, comic, forms.

Within this complex dramatic structure, the play engages with wider contemporary debates regarding the supernatural. In both its humorous and exotic dramatic modes, the Dream portrays fairy power, in a comic and certainly fictional form, as highly potent. As already noted by this study, the ability of the fairies to influence love, create illusions and control invisibility is consistent with wider beliefs in the early modern period concerning the efficacy of supernatural power. Even the antics of Puck find a parallel in the accounts of mischievous spirit-fairies from the early seventeenth-century Rye case. The play is not a simple dramatic fantasy regarding supernatural power. As in James the Fourth, the representation of fairies in the Dream reflects several conflicting interpretations of the origins and the activities of its fairies.

The more sinister potential of supernatural power finds expression in the idea of Puck's humour as a potentially dangerous anarchic force and also in Oberon's angry passion. Furthermore, a darker interpretation of fairies, more consistent with those demonologists who associated fairies with diabolical agents, seems to be raised as a possibility by Puck's reference to the 'damned spirits':

Damnèd spirits all,  
That in cross-ways and floods have burial,  
Already to their wormy beds are gone,  
For fear lest day should look their shames upon.

(III.ii.382-5)

The mention of 'damned spirits' raises the possibility of an alternative interpretation of the fairies presented in the play. Although Oberon declares his fairies are 'spirits of another sort' this passage, like the multiple interpretations of Puck's actions, raises alternative, unsettling, possibilities for the audience.

The numerous references to the limitations of perception and problems of deception, particularly visual, through the play also pertain to its representation of fairies by questioning the reliability of human senses. The opposing views of Hippolyta and Theseus concerning the lovers' experiences (V.i.2-22, 23-7) force the audience to consider whether what they have seen has been true, and so a dramatization of a genuine encounter with the supernatural, or a delusion, and so ephemeral. Although there is no simple solution to this question, Hippolyta's response, for all its lack of logic, comes closer to the truth. The humorous illogic of Bottom's interpretation of his experiences, his misquotation of 1 Corinthians and his warning that 'man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream' (IV.i.209-12, 205-6), however, underlines in comic form the impossibility of verifying what has happened in the wood.

These various themes and strands of allusion within the play have a cumulative effect upon the audience. The dissolution of fairy power at the play's end noted by Hare is a consequence of a dual movement. Although the play accumulates more and more detail concerning the mysterious fairies, it becomes increasingly clear that the subjectivity of human perception precludes the possibility of reaching any firm conclusion concerning the place of Shakespeare's fairies within contemporary thought or even of establishing with certainty whether they are anything more than a product of the human imagination.<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, the representation of Puck on the stage may be construed as a sly joke about perception, delivered at the expense of Shakespeare's most famous source for fairy 'beliefs', Reginald Scot. The actor playing Puck is literally present on stage and performing the role of jester. As Shakespeare probably knew Scot's work, this perhaps picks up that author's use of terms such as 'knaverie', 'knave' and 'follie' in association with foolish beliefs, and so in a witty manner undermines Scot's attack on fairy belief by presenting as large as life one of the phenomena Scot

dismisses as mere superstition. The bodily presence of the actor amusingly conflates the issues of illusion and reality central to drama with the question of fairy existence itself.<sup>51</sup>

The idea of the dream is itself ambivalent and important to an understanding of the play's representation of fairies. Far from simply superseding fairy power with a conception of safe fantasy, the notion of the dream is initially established within the play as a manifestation of fairy power.

Oberon is able to effect that,

When they next wake, all this derision  
Shall seem a dream and fruitless vision.

(III.ii.370-1)

When, therefore, Puck offers the audience the consolation that the play could be viewed as 'No more yielding but a dream' (V.i.414), he is merely perpetuating a fundamental irresolution within the play.

In early modern culture, the illusions created by the supernatural, as interpreted either within an orthodox demonological tradition of thought or within more popular forms of supernatural belief, were not considered easily distinguishable from illusions experienced merely as a result of hallucination. A rationalist interpretation of the events of the play as the result merely of an over-active imagination, the mental faculty in Renaissance psychology which stood between the senses and the mind, might be proposed. Alternatively, the play might be interpreted as portraying the dangerous illusion associated with supernatural activity by orthodox demonological thought.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, the possibility also existed that the events of the play might, in some way, be more literally true, which, in the case of the Dream, would tend to endorse a less severe, more popular, attitude concerning the implications of man's interaction with the supernatural. The more literal truth of the play, however, would still leave the audience with the problem of assessing the importance of the 'Damned spirits all' speech and addressing their enjoyment of some of the less pleasant consequences of Puck's humorous fairy magic. In a more emphatic way than James the Fourth, the Dream makes it clear that it is impossible to arrive at a single solution concerning the true nature of fairies.

The notion within the play that fairies can be explained in terms of popular supernatural beliefs, and also the possibility that they are purely a hallucinatory illusion of some form, each find some support in Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy.<sup>53</sup> The Daemonologie of King James gives an example of the sort of condemnatory demonological approach which might be applied to the Dream:

For may not the deuill object to thier fantasie, their senses being dulled, and as it were a sleepe, such hills and houses within them, such glistering courts and traines, and whatsoeuer such like wherewith he pleaseth to delude them.<sup>54</sup>

In its development of the theme of dreaming and illusion, the Dream never finally adjudicates between three possible interpretations. The first is the existence of fairies as part of a world-view which allowed for efficacious, autonomous and potentially benign supernatural forces. The second, the view of those who, like Scot, considered fairies as a clear example of superstitious nonsense. The third, the views of those demonologists who suggested that all manifestations of the supernatural should be suspected to emanate from diabolical sources. Although the majority of the Dream suggests that benign, but inscrutable, fairies exist, Oberon and his court might ultimately be interpreted from each of these positions.

The treatment of fairies in the Dream and James the Fourth is similar in a number of ways. The Dream shares with the earlier play a thematic interest in the inscrutability of fairies and in the final impossibility of assessing whether fairies are simply some kind of illusion. Principally through the character of Puck, the Dream, like James the Fourth, associates fairy power with comedy, although it also makes more extensive use of modes which do not directly associate fairies with humour, especially in the scenes between Oberon and Titania. The conclusion of the Dream is clearly intended to be inclusive of its various groups of characters and kinds of comedy. The closure of the play is finally defined not only by the aristocratic dignity of Theseus' court, but also the good-natured popular humour of Bottom and his unskillful comrades, and also the arrival of the fairies.<sup>55</sup> The representation of the fairies within the play, even at the close, is ultimately ambivalent, however.

In the epilogue, the whole play has become, potentially, 'no more yielding but a dream' presented for the enjoyment of the audience (V.i.414). The play is, however, a 'dream' which both presents and anatomizes contemporary fairy literature, drama, and also wider beliefs using a variety of comic strategies.

#### IV. Conclusion: Queen Mab and the merry fairies of Windsor

While the influence of more clearly literary sources on James the Fourth and, especially, the Dream, should be recognized, both plays are also significantly engaged with other strands of contemporary thought regarding the supernatural in general, and fairies in particular. Once again in this study it has proved important to reconsider modern notions of the boundary between fact and fiction presented by early modern comic modes of representation. Both plays require a particular kind of complicity from the audience with regard to the representation of fairies. Each establishes the comic as a credible medium in which to engage with a range of early modern thinking regarding the supernatural, in which the identification of fairies with the manifestation of credible supernatural power over human actions remains a significant and genuine interpretative possibility. Other, formal, parallels with the comic representation of magicians are also apparent. In particular, the morally ambivalent, but ostensibly benign, power of the fairies finds expression at several points through association with spectacle, entertainment, surprise and humour. The audience is able to share in the pleasure generated by the fairies' supernatural powers from a privileged viewpoint.

The portrayal of the supernatural in both plays is particularly informed by issues of fantasy and wish-fulfilment, with the exploration of moral considerations taking a more subsidiary role. As such, these plays seem to belong to a wider pattern in which fairies are identified with fantasy and wish-fulfilment in Britain in the early modern period. This pattern is detectable in a range of literary and non-literary contents, ranging from literary court fantasy regarding the Fairy Queen to domestic fantasy regarding the discovery of treasure or compensation through supernatural intervention for misfortune.<sup>56</sup> The Dream, and James the Fourth reflect this rich contemporary context. In both, the fairies are established both as the agents, and also the subjects, of fantasy and wish-fulfilment, with

the result that illusion, perception and the interpretation of the supernatural become thematic interests in their own right. The treatment of this subject-matter, which finds expression in the articulation of multiple interpretative possibilities in both plays, sustains some comparison with the exploration of the limit of man's understanding of the supernatural in The Tempest

In reaching these conclusions, however, it should be noted that the Dream, and James the Fourth do not represent the only tradition of comic fairy representation in the period. Two other famous, if incidental, comic representations of fairies in Shakespeare's work offer a series of important contrasts to both the Dream and James the Fourth.

The first of these, and probably the earlier, is Mercutio's Queen Mab speech in Romeo and Juliet.<sup>57</sup> There are several clear affinities to the fairies of the Dream. Like Puck, Mab is, in part, identified with homely mischief-making:

This is the very Mab

That plaits the manes of horses in the night

And bakes the elf-locks in foul sluttish hairs,

Which, once untabled, much misfortune bodes.

(I.iv.88-91)

She also shares with the fairies of the Dream associations with love, exoticism and sensuality, even sexuality:

And in this state she gallops night by night

Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love

(I.iv.70-1)

There is perhaps also, as in the Dream, an indirect association of Mab with Cupid, whose mythological agency in love is referred to twice in the dialogue preceding the speech (I.iv.4, 17).

The Queen Mab speech, however, differs significantly from the Dream in some details of its comedy, its portrayal of the relationship between dreams and the supernatural and its context. The set-piece description of Mab's miniature fairy court seems to look forward more directly than the Dream to the satirical depictions of fairy luxury epitomized later by Robert Herrick's poems, with their sexual and, possibly, religious overtones. As a result it fits more easily than the Dream into Purkiss's notion of Shakespeare as the originator of a literary tradition removed from engagement with wider contemporary supernatural beliefs.<sup>58</sup> Similarly the way in which Mab is contained within a speech about dreams allows none of the delicate ambiguity in the representation of the supernatural achieved in the Dream:

MERCUTIO

True, I talk of dreams,  
Which are the children of an idle brain,  
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy.

(I.iv.96-98)

In Romeo and Juliet, a rationalist explanation for fairies, that they are a figment of the imagination, is not rendered problematic by other, conflicting, interpretations. In any case, the Queen Mab speech is less concerned with any wider issues regarding the supernatural than with the psychology of fantasy and its relationship to desire. Mab's most prominent comic action is to fulfil the desires of a series of sleeping human types: the lover, the courtier, the lawyer, the lady, the parson, the soldier and the maid (IV.i.70-94). As Diane Purkiss has suggested, the comedy of the Queen Mab speech is limited and ultimately contained within the play. She is 'a consolatory fantasy, dreamt up by a man who cannot control anything larger or more important'.<sup>59</sup> Its isolation within the play serves to underline the uncompromising tragic message of the play as a whole. In spite of affinities between the representation of fairies in the Dream, James the Fourth, and the Queen Mab speech, the comic representation of fairies in Romeo and Juliet engages in a less complex manner with wider contemporary issues. This more limited representation of the supernatural, however, forms part of a wider strategy to develop a particular kind of tragic world-view in that play.



The second of these further examples of comic representation is the last act of The Merry Wives of Windsor, in which the fairies are openly humans in disguise. They are ostensibly a contrivance to punish Falstaff, although the opportunity is also taken to allude for the audience's benefit to the court of Elizabeth I and in particular the Order of the Garter.<sup>60</sup>

MRS QUICKLY     Search Windsor Castle, elves, within and out; [...]  
                           Worthy the owner, and the owner it.  
(V.v.57, 61)

The basis for this trap for Falstaff is, allegedly, a local superstition regarding a ghost:

MRS PAGE            There is an old tale goes that Herne the hunter,  
                           Sometime a keeper here in Windsor Forest,  
                           Doth all the winter-time, at still midnight,  
                           Walk about an oak, with great ragg'd horns [...]

PAGE                 Why, yet there want not many that do fear  
                           In deep of night to walk by this Herne's oak.  
(IV.iv.28-31, 39-40)

This story is transformed into a trick to mock Falstaff, whereby he will assume the role of Herne, only to be pinched by a group of young people dressed as 'urchins, ouphs, and fairies [...]' til he tell the truth' (IV.iv.49, 60).

Interestingly, some of the characteristics of the comic representation of fairies in other plays are reproduced in modified form in this episode. For example the idea of amazement at the supernatural, shared by fairies with other forms of the supernatural, appears in the play but only in the context of the wider comic plot to mock Falstaff:

MRS PAGE            If he [Falstaff] be not amazed [by the appearance of the 'fairies'], he will  
be mocked; if he be amazed, he will every way be mocked.

(V.iii.18-19)

Similarly, the classical associations so effectively employed in the Dream assume a farcical tone when Falstaff, in the Herne disguise, refers to Jupiter's amorous adventures in animal disguise, and also to Cupid (V.v.3-15, 28-30). The Windsor 'fairies' are given a parodic semblance of court structure, with a Fairy Queen and 'Crier Hobgoblin', Pistol (V.v.42). Even the ostensibly moral purpose of the trick perhaps parodies the ultimately benign, if obscure, motivations of both Greene and Shakespeare's Oberon (V.v.91-2).

Needless to say, the performance of these fairies is less than thoroughly convincing. Falstaff is presented as initially credulous about what he is seeing, but even he is not deceived for long:

And these are not fairies? I was three or four times in the thought they were not fairies; and yet the guiltiness of my mind, the sudden surprise of my powers, drove the grossness of the foppery into a received belief, in despite of the teeth of all rhyme and reason, that they were fairies.

(V.v.122-7)

The fairy court of the Dream, and also to some extent of Spenser and Lyly is replayed in The Merry Wives as a middle-class pantomime. These stage fairies belong to a worldly farce, albeit one which, even for Falstaff, moves towards a reasonably propitious resolution.

Both the Queen Mab speech in Romeo and Juliet and the fairies in The Merry Wives of Windsor provide useful points of comparison with fairies in the Dream and James the Fourth. They serve as a further reminder that even the comic representation of the supernatural could adopt many forms in response to the needs of the particular context. This study will return in particular to the question of demystification and parody in the representation of the supernatural in Chapter Eight, in the context of Ben Jonson's plays.

The comic representation of the supernatural in both the Dream and James the Fourth tend towards a more complex, open-ended and ambivalent engagement with wider contemporary issues than either the Queen Mab episode or the Windsor fairies. While the ultimate source of magic, and its proper use, remain problematic issues in several comic representations of magicians in the period, the autonomy of the fairies, together with a certain degree of erratic behaviour, gives them a particularly disconcerting kind of inscrutability. The way in which both plays interweave a wide range of contemporary resources again shows a complex balance between fiction and fact in the comic representation of the supernatural. Both the Dream and James the Fourth may usefully be seen to perpetuate, in their comic representation of fairies, some of the ambiguity and flexibility of meaning that Purkiss attributes to the stories about fairies told by Scottish witches in the early modern period,

that is, stories told as a pastime, for fun, for a giggle, for instruction, for warnings. Individuals might seize on some of these stories, love them, adapt them, make them their own.<sup>61</sup>

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Robert Greene, The Scottish History of James the Fourth, ed. by Norman Sanders, *The Revels Plays* (London: Methuen, 1970), Chorus I.9. All references to the play will be to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, ed. by Harold F. Brooks, *The Arden Shakespeare*, (Methuen, 1979; repr. London: Routledge, 1988). All references to the play will be to this edition. *Ibid*, p. lvii, concludes that the play 'can be dated with confidence between autumn 1594 and spring 1596, and with certainty before 1598'. James the Fourth, pp. xxv, xxix, dates that play to 1588-92, favouring 1590. The first published edition of the Dream is the quarto of 1600 and of James the Fourth the quarto of 1598.

<sup>3</sup> See above, Chapter Four, Section IV.

<sup>4</sup> Important examples include: Sir John Bouchier, The Boke of Duke Huon of Burdeux (printed 1534), Early English Text Society Extra Series numbers 40-1, 48 and 50 (London: Trübner, 1882-7); Sir Orfeo, in Middle English Verse Romances, ed. by Donald B. Sands (1966; Exeter: University of Exeter, 1986) pp. 185-200; and The Wife of Bath's Tale and The Merchant's Tale, in The Canterbury Tales, The Riverside Chaucer, 3rd edn, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 105-22, 154-68. For a wider survey of medieval fairies, see Purkiss, Troublesome Things, pp. 52-82.

<sup>5</sup> 'A Discourse of the Queenes Majestie's Entertainment in Suffolk and Norfolk', in John Nichols, The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth, 3 vols (London: Nichols, 1823), II, 212-13; J. W. Cunliffe, 'The Queenes Majesties Entertainment at Woodstocke', PMLA 26 (1911), 92-141 (pp. 98-101); John Lyly, Gallathea, in The Complete Works of John Lyly, ed. R. Warwick Bond, 3 vols, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), II, 417-72, and Endimion, ed. by David Bevington, The Revels Plays, (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), IV.iii.33-45.

<sup>6</sup> B. J., The Tragical History, Admirable Achievements and Various Events of Guy Earl or Warwick [...] (London 1661), sig. B4<sup>r</sup>-C1<sup>r</sup>. Helen Cooper, 'Did Shakespeare Play the Clown?', TLS, 20 April 2001, 26-7, dates Guy of Warwick to 1580s, with editing and additional versification by Ben Jonson in the 1590s.

<sup>7</sup> Edmund Spenser, The Shepheardes Calender (1579), in The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser, ed. by William A. Oram and others (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 1-213; The Faerie Queene (1590, 1596), ed. by A. C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 1977). Spenser's depiction of magic may influence the Bacon romances: see The English Faust Book, pp. 62, 65.

<sup>8</sup> p. 115. Purkiss, Troublesome Things, considers the relationship between fairies, sexuality, power and death in medieval romances (p. 52-82).

<sup>9</sup> Purkiss, Troublesome Things, p. 158: 'like a jobbing tailor using up the ends of fabric rolls, Shakespeare pieced together his sweetly tiny fairies from a number of sources, but none was directly

folkloric'. John Carey has charted, for example, the literary antecedents of the 'Faëry Mab' of Milton's L'Allegro (1631?) in the works of Shakespeare, Jonson and others. See John Milton, Complete Shorter Poems, ed. by John Carey (Harlow: Longman, 1968, repr. paperback edn, 1971), pp. 130-9 (l. 102 et passim).

<sup>10</sup> A Whip for an Ape (1589) alludes to the dead Tarlton as a Vice. Quoted by Weimann, p. 158.

<sup>11</sup> Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie [...] (London, 1590), p.2. The narrator's reaction to this ('In nomine Iesu, auoid Sathan for Ghost thou art none, but a very diuel') may allude to confessional arguments concerning Purgatory.

<sup>12</sup> Weimann, p. 194, quoting the OED. See also OED, 2nd edn.

<sup>13</sup> Tell-Trothes New-yeares Gift Beeing Robin Good-fellowes newes out of those Countries, where inhabites neither Charity nor Honesty, ed. by Frederick J. Furnival, New Shakespeare Society Series VI no.2 (London: Trübner, 1876), 1-46 (p. 3). Robin Good-Fellow, His Mad Prankes and Merry Iests, Full of Honest Mirth, and is a fit Medicine for Melancholy (London, 1628), sig. B2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> I. T., Grim the Collier of Croydon, ed. by John S Farmer, Tudor Facsimile Texts (1913; repr. New York: AMS, 1970), reprinted from Gratiae Theatrales (1662), p. 52. Farmer considers the text to have been adapted by John Tatham (1632-64) from an earlier play. H. Dugdale Sykes, 'The Authorship of "Grim, the Collier of Croydon"', Modern Languages Review, 14 (1919), 245-253, notes the probable composition of the play in about 1600 and attributes it to Haughton.

<sup>15</sup> The novel, which is Decade III, Novel I of the Hecatommithi, is reprinted in translation in James the Fourth, pp. 133-42. Differences of emphasis, style and location are discussed in James the Fourth, pp. xxix-xxxiii.

<sup>16</sup> This framing plot presents certain interpretative difficulties. The staging of the framing plot has to remain a matter of conjecture. More importantly, the placement of some of the text of the framing plot in the original edition presents certain difficulties. These difficulties are not really significant with regard to this study, however, and the decisions made by Sanders seem sound. See Richard Hosley, 'Was there a "Dramatic Epilogue" to The Taming of the Shrew?', SEL, 1 (1961), 17-34 (pp. 23-4), for an overview of the subject of framing plots.

- <sup>17</sup> The Life and Works of Robert Greene, MA, ed. by the Rev. A. E. Grosart, 15 vols, The Huth Library ([n.p.]: [n.pub.], 1881), I, p. xxxviii.
- <sup>18</sup> Kenneth Muir, 'Robert Greene as Dramatist', in Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honour of Hardin Craig, ed. by Richard Hosley ([n.p.]: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 45-54 (p. 50).
- <sup>19</sup> Catherine Lekhal, 'The Historical Background of Robert Greene's "The Scottish History of James the Fourth"', Cahiers Elizabethains, 35 (1985), 27-45 (p. 36).
- <sup>20</sup> Purkiss, Troublesome Things, p. 176.
- <sup>21</sup> James the Fourth, pp. xlvii-xlviii.
- <sup>22</sup> Latham, p. 188 (footnote 82). Purkiss, Troublesome Things, p. 176.
- <sup>23</sup> 'Auberon the Fairy King' is also mentioned in Lyly's Entertainment at Elvetham of 1591, but does not appear. See The Complete Works of John Lyly, ed. by R. Warwick Bond, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), I, 431-52 (p. 450). *Ibid*, pp. 525-6, notes that the relationship, if any, between this work and James the Fourth is obscure.
- <sup>24</sup> The full title of the quarto edition is The Scottish Historie of James the Fourth, slaine at Flodden. Entermixed with a pleasant Comedie, presented by Oboram King of Fayries. The facsimile of this reproduced in the Revels Plays edition has 'of James the Fourth, slaine at Flodden' crossed through and 'or rather fiction of English & Scotish matters comicall' added by hand, suggesting that the whole play could be seen as comic. Dessen, Late Moral Plays, p. 11, discusses the vagueness with which late morality drama is generically classified on its title-page. Greene and his contemporaries may be perpetuating this sort of vagueness. Greene may simply be indicating a vaguely happy resolution by the term 'comic', as seems to be the case with the title-page of the 1599 quarto edition of his Comicall Historie of Alphonsus, King of Aragon.
- <sup>25</sup> James the Fourth, p. 59 (footnote to II.Chorus ii).
- <sup>26</sup> Charles Read Baskervill, The Elizabethan Jig and Related Song Drama (1929; repr. New York: Dover, 1965), Chapter One et passim. Baskervill, p. 16, describes references to 'jig merely as dance' as 'very numerous'.

<sup>27</sup> Chorus VI and Chorus VII. Dieter Mehl, The Elizabethan Dumb Show: The History of a Dramatic Convention (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 83-4. Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy, ed. by J. R. Mulryne, The New Mermaids (London: Black; New York: Norton, 1989).

<sup>28</sup> Mehl, p. 84.

<sup>29</sup> Anne Righter, Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play (London: Penguin, 1962), p. 54.

<sup>30</sup> The Spanish Tragedy, pp. xiii-xiv. The play probably dates from the later part of the period 1582-92. See The Old Wives Tale, p. 5. Greene and Thomas Lodge, A Looking-Glass for London and England (1594), Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932) uses the prophet Oseas to provide a choric interlude, set above the stage in the manner of Oberon and Bohan. The play, however, possesses no induction and the epilogue is spoken by the other prophet, Ionas. James the Fourth may be imitating the structure of The Spanish Tragedy, which enjoys a higher reputation among modern critics. However, it is not possible to determine the order of composition of these plays, and so assess the possible influences of one on the other.

<sup>31</sup> Righter, p. 73. See also The Taming of the Shrew, ed. by Brian Morris, The Arden Shakespeare (Methuen, 1981; London: Routledge, 1981), Induction and I.i.248-53.

<sup>32</sup> Huston Diehl, 'Observing the Lord's Supper and the Lord Chamberlain's Men: The Visual Rhetoric of Ritual and Play in Early Modern England', Renaissance Drama, 22 (1991), 149-74 (p. 159).

<sup>33</sup> Diehl, p. 154: 'They [Reformers] sarcastically refer to the sacred images of the Roman church as theatrical properties- "puppets, maumats, and elves" (Foxe 5:409)'. OED, 2nd edn, entry for 'elf' (definition 2b), gives 'a tricky, mischievous, sometimes a spiteful and malicious creature'. However, OED, 2nd edn, does not record the theatrical overtones in the quotation from Foxe. On anti-Catholicism, see also King James, Daemonologie, pp. 73-4. A little later, Robert Herrick's poetry employed ornamental fairy imagery apparently to satirize Catholic ritual.

<sup>34</sup> Timothy Bright, A Treatise of Melancholie (London, 1586), pp. 110, 111. See also Robert Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy, ed. by Thomas Faulkner and others, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), I, 392-3. On 'unnatural melancholy', see Lawrence Babb, The Elizabethan

Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642 (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1951), p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> Laurentius, Discourse, quoted by Lyons, p. 13. Bright, p. 103.

<sup>36</sup> Dream, pp. lxi-lxii. Ibid, pp. lviii-lxxxviii, reviews a wide range of sources. Laroque, pp. 228-30; Wiles, 'Carnavalesque', passim; Purkiss, Troublesome Things, p. 167-8.

<sup>37</sup> Consider in particular, the references to India at II.i.22, 69 and 124. Bakhtin, pp. 344-7, discusses 'Indian wonders'. See also ibid, pp. 396-404, for a discussion of travel literatures. The sinister disturbance of nature (II.i.87-117) caused by Oberon and Titania's dispute finds a corollary in the powers of Oberon's horn in Huon of Burdeux: 'out of [th]e whiche issuyd out suche wynde a and tempest so horryble to here that it bore downe trees, and therwith came such a rayne & hayle that semyd that heuen and the erthe hade fought together' (Chapter 23, p. 67).

<sup>38</sup> Leo Salinger, Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 79, notes 'some debt still to the criss-cross arrangement of the Menaechmi' in the Dream.

<sup>39</sup> cf. Elissa Beatrice Hare, Enchanted Shows: Visions and Structure in Elizabethan and Jacobean Comedy about Magic (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Princeton, 1985), p. 99: 'perhaps the only constant in the Dream is that everything familiar must be put in jeopardy'. Although different in its aims and its conclusions to those of this study, this study is indebted to Hare's detailed and stimulating analysis of the relationship between fairy magic and dramatic structure in this play.

<sup>40</sup> III.ii.145-8, 193-4, 239-40. Courtesy itself constitutes an important theme through the play.

<sup>41</sup> III.i.115-16. Cf. Patterson, p. 67.

<sup>42</sup> cf. Freedman, p.163: 'we can look on at others, invisible ourselves, and play pranks or indulge in fantasies of omnipotence with no concern for others' welfare'.

<sup>43</sup> Bergson, p. 69. Many of Bergson's theories fit the comedy of the Dream particularly well. See Hare, p. 131.



<sup>44</sup> T. Walter Herbert, Oberon's Mazed World (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1977), p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Laroque, pp. 228-30 and Wiles, 'Carnavalesque', p. 77, who notes allusions in the play to the festivals of Saint Valentine's day, May Day and Midsummer and suggests that the conflation of festive occasions might 'reflect symbolically three phases in the life cycle of the young person'.

<sup>46</sup> The question of whether the miniature size of fairies predates their transition into mythology is difficult to answer with certainty, however. Latham, pp. 67-70, notes that there is little evidence in favour, but unconvincingly sees this as proof that miniature size was too common a feature of fairies to be worth mentioning.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Ronald Watkins and Jeremy Lemmon, In Shakespeare's Playhouse: "A Midsummer Night's Dream" (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1974), p. 26.

<sup>48</sup> For example, see Ivor Brown, Shakespeare and the Actors (London: Bodley Head, 1972), pp. 102-22.

<sup>49</sup> Louis Adrian Montrose, "'A Midsummer Night's Dream' and the Shaping Fantasies of Elizabethan Culture: Gender, Power, Form', in New Historicism and Renaissance Drama, ed. by Richard Wilson and Richard Dutton (London: Longman, 1992), (pp. 109-30) pp. 125, 127. Herbert, p. 39.

<sup>50</sup> Hare, p. 94.

<sup>51</sup> Scot, pp. 280, 274. Dream, II.i.33.

<sup>52</sup> Babb, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Burton, I, 180, 186, seems to infer the existence of supernatural beings, including fairies. By contrast, *ibid*, I, 386, suggests that the supernatural can be a figment of the imagination. Although Burton's references to fairies and other supernatural beings, and also to demonic illusions, might not intended to be taken entirely seriously, his work is consistent on these points with other contemporary authorities also referred to in this chapter.

<sup>54</sup> King James, Daemonologie, p. 74.

<sup>55</sup> cf. Wiles, 'Carnavalesque', p. 79, who characterizes the play's festive mood as inclusive, rather than socially subversive. Cf. Patterson's political interpretation of the inclusive nature of the play: 'If laughter is necessary to mediate social tensions, Shakespeare's festive theory seems to argue, then let it be a laughter as far removed as possible from the red-hot iron of social condescension' (p.70). See also Paul Yachtin, 'The Politics of Theatrical Mirth: "A Midsummer Night's Dream", "A Mad World, My Masters", and "Measure for Measure"', Shakespeare Quarterly, 43 (1992), 51-66.

<sup>56</sup> For example, Purkiss, Troublesome Things, p. 85, describes the accounts of fairies from Scottish witch-trials as 'fantasies of the dispossessed'.

<sup>57</sup> Romeo and Juliet, ed. by Brian Gibbons, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1980), l.iv. First published in a 'bad' quarto dated 1597, Gibbons, pp. 26 – 31, notes the arguments for the composition of Romeo and Juliet between 1594 and 1596, during the same probable period as the Dream.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, 'Oberons Feast' and 'Oberons Palace' in The Poems of Robert Herrick, ed. by L. C. Martin, The Oxford Standard Authors (London: Oxford, 1965), pp. 119-20, 165-8. Purkiss, Troublesome Things, pp. 173, 181-5.

<sup>59</sup> Purkiss, Troublesome Things, p. 169.

<sup>60</sup> The Merry Wives of Windsor, ed. by H. J. Oliver, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1971). First published in a 'bad' quarto in 1602, Oliver, pp. xlv-xlvii, favours 1597 for the first performance. Ibid, pp. xlv-xlvii, considers the Garter references and notes the election in 1597 of the patron of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Lord Hunsdon, to the Order.

<sup>61</sup> Purkiss, Troublesome Things, p. 86.

## Chapter Seven

### 'I Entertained You Ever as a Dog, Not as a Devil': Tragicomic Witchcraft in "The Witch" and "The Witch of Edmonton"'<sup>1</sup>

#### I. Introduction: witchcraft and tragicomedy

The manipulation of supernatural forces by female characters is occasionally a concern of early modern comedy, although the detailed comic representation of female characters perpetrating actions which would conform to any early modern conception of witchcraft, as discussed in Chapter Two, is unusual.<sup>2</sup> In the case of Heywood's Wise Woman of Hogsdon (1638), for example, the accusations of witchcraft made against the title character are unfounded. Although she professes to undertake a range of activities associated with cunning folk, including fortune-telling and 'recovering things lost', like her predecessor in Lyly's Mother Bombie (1594), Heywood's character uses only human skills and intelligence to bring the events of the play to a propitious conclusion.<sup>3</sup>

By contrast, the portrayal of Dipsas in Lyly's Endimion shows clear debts to the enchantress of medieval romance, and is recognizable, at least in part, as a female variant of Peele's malevolent Sacrapant. Some other aspects of her portrayal also find parallels elsewhere in this study. These include the conflict between her malicious supernatural actions and the providential forces that lead to the comic outcome of the play, the staging of supernatural spectacle within the play, and the renunciation by Dipsas of her magical powers. In a play which seems to operate on several allegorical levels, Dipsas symbolizes not only a real kind of supernatural threat, but also the aspects of courtly and worldly disorder.<sup>4</sup>

However, the relevance for an early modern audience of two Jacobean representations of witchcraft, The Witch and The Witch of Edmonton, merits particular consideration. In spite of the fluid nature of genre and generic signification in the English theatre of this period, the generic identification of each as tragicomedy means that their selection as part of a study of comic representation merits some further discussion.<sup>5</sup>

Given the inclusive approach to the definition of the comic adopted by this study, some features of these plays clearly merit comparison with plays already considered. These include a

common movement in their conclusions away from events of a tragic nature towards reconciliation. Recent co-editors of both plays, Corbin and Sedge, have also noted how surprise and withheld information are particularly important elements throughout the dramaturgy of The Witch.<sup>6</sup> This aspect of the tragicomic mode of The Witch has some apparent affinities with early modern theories of drama like those of Madius, who argued that from 'unexpectedness [...] springs admiration, "which necessarily moves laughter"'.<sup>7</sup> There is a black humour, at least in parts of the play, which stems from the presentation of the unexpected and the remarkable to the audience. Indeed it has been argued that this effect is so heightened in the play that it may be taken, at least in part, as a deliberate parody of the conventions of other contemporary tragicomic drama.<sup>8</sup> Also concerned with revealing the unusual, The Witch of Edmonton is more directly related in structure to the tradition of comic subplots in early modern English theatre. It interweaves two serious 'tragic' plots with a more clearly comic plot concerning the adventures of the clown Cuddy Banks. Like Sidney's 'mongrel tragi-comedy', which achieves 'neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness', the play mixes together the equivalents of 'hornpipes and funerals'.<sup>9</sup>

Both plays, therefore, demonstrate an approach to the tragicomic which is distinct and which presents interpretative challenges. The particular problem presented by The Witch is understanding its overall integration of the comic, the spectacular and the horrific. The challenge of The Witch of Edmonton is to understand its dramatic method for the interpolation of comic and tragic elements. It will be necessary, therefore, to explore not only the extent to which the representation of the supernatural in each play exhibits a continuity of comic form with other plays considered by this study, but also ways in which these plays may be distinctive in their tragicomic portrayal of the supernatural.

## II. The Witch

Middleton's The Witch has been dated on stylistic grounds to the period 1613-16, although Anne Lancashire has argued that possible contemporary allusions in the play would not preclude a date as early as 1610.<sup>10</sup>

The play has two main plots. The first concerns Sebastian's attempt, upon his return to Ravenna, to foil Antonio's planned marriage to Isabella, the lady formerly contracted to be Sebastian's wife. To this end, Sebastian visits a group of witches, led by Hecate, in order to obtain a charm to 'starve up generation' in Antonio (I.ii.152). A series of plots and surprise revelations culminate in Sebastian, who has adopted a disguise, being reunited with Isabella. In the second plot, the Duchess attempts to revenge herself upon the Duke, her husband, for insisting that she drink toasts from the skull of her own father. This plot becomes intertwined with a subsidiary plot when the ribbon which Almachildes, a gentleman, has secured from the witches as a love charm to win Amoretta, the Duchess's woman, is picked up by the Duchess (II.ii.81). Believing that she has persuaded Almachildes to murder the Duke, the Duchess later goes to the witches to have him also murdered, the love charm having apparently expired (V.ii.1). In the final passage of the play, it is revealed that Almachildes had not, in fact, killed the Duke, who has instead been simulating his own death (V.iii.127). The witches undertake to kill Almachildes, but this has not happened by the end of the play. In general, the witches, led by Hecate, the witch of the title, operate in a purely reactive manner within the play: they do not become involved with the other characters as a result of their own plots, but as a consequence of the requests of those who visit them.

The representation of witchcraft in The Witch must be understood in the context of the earlier portrayal of witches in the Masque of Queens (1609).<sup>11</sup> In the Masque of Queens, Jonson opposed the procession of twelve virtuous queens to the court of the Heroic Virtue with an antimasque which presented twelve witches and drew heavily upon demonological sources. Glynne Wickham has argued that a complex relationship exists between Jonson's masque and two plays known to have been performed by The King's Men, The Witch and Shakespeare's Macbeth. He suggests that the success of Macbeth, which he argues was first performed in 1606, may have suggested the idea for the Masque of Queens to Jonson and Inigo Jones. In turn, The Witch was inspired by the success of Jonson's entertainment and both alludes to it and transfers some of its formal conventions to the public stage. In particular, Middleton surpasses the design of Jonson by presenting Hecate to the audience. Hecate had failed to appear in the Masque of Queens.<sup>12</sup> Later, songs and a dance ('The Witches' Dance') from The Witch came to be included in Macbeth.<sup>13</sup> This 'Witches' Dance' may be inspired by the dance in the Masque of Queens. Although there is little

evidence to suggest that the Masque of Queens was performed at court by The King's Men, Wickham speculates that there may also have been some continuity between the casts that performed the three works.<sup>14</sup>

Aside from the question of textual borrowings and precedence, recognition of this relationship between the Masque of Queens, The Witch and Macbeth helps to elucidate the dramatic values and, in particular, some of the formal structures which underlie the comic treatment of the supernatural of The Witch. Stuart Clark has argued that Masque of Queens should be located within a wider tradition in the representation of witchcraft:

Nevertheless it is clear that audiences and readers were able and expected to make sense of their activities in a number of conventional ways, anchoring the meaning of witchcraft in terms of styles of thinking and writing about the world upside-down.<sup>15</sup>

Clark argues that to present witchcraft as one of the 'manifestations of misrule' was utterly appropriate for an early modern audience and reflected a shared 'formal principle' of inversion between demonology and misrule.<sup>16</sup> In the context of Clark's argument, the distinction between witchcraft as a concept and other kinds of supernatural activity considered elsewhere in this study needs to be remembered. To interpret an act as witchcraft was to place it in opposition to God's natural order within early modern culture. As such, witchcraft might be excluded in some ways from some of the moral or interpretative ambiguity to be found in the portrayal of other kinds of supernatural activity in comic modes. It will, however, be argued that the influence of some of the formal characteristics of the masque on the tragicomic mode of The Witch contributes to other kinds of ambiguity in the play.

Diane Purkiss has subsequently taken this argument further and suggested ways in which the representation of witchcraft on the stage should be seen as ideological as well as formal:

Stories about witches and tropes of witchcraft are often part of an attempt to bring to the stage some of the spectacle of popular print and perhaps oral culture, while also catering to the educated audience's fascinated dislike of these spectacles.<sup>17</sup>

Referring specifically to the Masque of Queens, Purkiss goes on to argue that its discourse is significantly élite and masculine. As such, she argues that it constitutes an attack on the legitimacy of the belief systems represented:

Learned Jacobean discourse is one of the first to figure women as the bearers of a subversive popular culture which challenges the high. Thus, as represented in the masque, Jonson's witches present the court with a spectacle of a popular culture the court has outgrown, an opportunity to look down on a set of beliefs no longer current.<sup>18</sup>

If the sort of arguments put forward by Purkiss, in particular, are also relevant to The Witch, this would clearly have considerable implications for our understanding of that play in the context of our wider study of the comic representation of the supernatural. It will be appropriate to turn first to a close examination of the formal features of the comic aspects of the play's dramatic mode before proceeding to a consideration of these issues of wider contemporary relevance.

The first scene in which the witches appear (I.ii) introduces them to the audience through a series of interviews. The chief witch, Hecate, converses successively with Stadlin (one of her witches), with Sebastian, with her clownish son Firestone, and with Almachildes. Spectacle is withheld until the close of the scene, when '[Malkin, a Spirit like] a Cat, playing on a fiddle, and Spirits with meat' enter to entertain and feast Almachildes (I.ii.228 [s. d.]). Despite the relative lack of spectacle in this scene, the comic mode of the witches is quite established. After her initial invocation and conversation with Stadlin, which implies the presence of the witches' cooking 'vessel' off-stage (I.ii.9), Hecate establishes the activities of the witches in a context of macabre merriment. Hecate describes the witches' adventures in festive terms:

## Whole provinces

Appear to our sight then even leek  
 A russet mole upon some lady's cheek,  
 When hundred leagues in air we feast and sing,  
 Dance, kiss and coll, use everything.

(I.ii.25-29)

The entrance of Firestone introduces a more direct form of foolish wordplay into the scene. Belonging to a fictional tradition of idiot sons of witches, Firestone's characterisation owes a considerable debt to the tradition of the fool, as exemplified by his argument, alluding to the Garden or Eden, that the Devil is 'a fruiterer',

for he's a fruiterer too, and has been from the beginning. The first apple that e'er was eaten came through his fingers. The costermonger's, then, I hold to be the ancientest trade, though some would have the tailor pricked down before him.<sup>19</sup>

Firestone's comments, many of them asides, on occasion introduce a bathetic element into the scene: in the context of Hecate's lair and gruesome preparations. For example, his aside regarding Almachildes making 'water before my mother anon' (l. 212) seems an irrelevancy. Firestone's request to use the Nightmare to travel away in order 'to overlay a fat parson's daughter' (ll. 94-5) likewise has a comic triviality about it.

Some of Hecate's dialogue also seems to have a humorous edge to it, as for example when she replies to Firestone's request about the Nightmare:

You're a kind son!  
 But 'tis the nature of you all, I see that.  
 You had rather hunt after strange women still  
 Than lie with your own mothers.

(I.ii.98-101)



The manner in which this passage constructs a notion of commonplace wisdom regarding the behaviour of sons in the context of what amounts to an abnormal and more properly shocking family situation gives it a comic quality. Almachildes' reaction to the entertainment which Hecate offers him adds a further dimension to the comic range of the scene and clearly illustrates the potential of the unexpected within the play to evoke a comic reaction ('The Cat and Fiddle? An excellent ordinary!').<sup>20</sup>

The second scene involving the witches makes greater use of stage spectacle. At its climax, an off-stage chorus accompanies Hecate as she sings while ascending with Malkin, the 'Spirit like a Cat' (III.iii.38-79). Once again, Firestone provides a commentary for the audience, although his comic tone is more subdued:

Well, mother, I thank your kindness. You must be gambolling i'th'air, and leave me to walk here like a fool and a mortal.

(III.iii.77-9)

The witches' third and final scene is prompted by the visit of the Duchess to procure Almachildes' murder. This nature of her mission, however, does not preclude a humorous aside by Firestone regarding Hecate's incantation:

I know as well as can be when my mother's mad and our great cat angry: for one spits French and th'other spits Latin.' (V.ii.30-32)

The scene concludes with a 'charm-song about a vessel' (l. 59 [s. d.]) and 'The Witches' Dance' (l. 84 [s. d.]).

There is, therefore, a comic edge to the portrayal of witches in the play, that operates in association with the spectacle of the staging of these scenes. A desire is apparent on the part of the playwright to present the surprising, the spectacular, and even the gruesome in a comic context. Alongside this, there is an identification of the witches with festivity, dancing and merriment which has some similarity to the comic portrayal of the supernatural in other plays. In effect, the portrayal

of the witches extends into a comic mode the general dramatic method employed throughout the play, which confronts its audience with a series of reversals of fortune and unexpected revelations. This aspect of The Witch is characterized by a persistent gruesome quality and malice unparalleled in other comic representations of the supernatural considered by this study. The specific qualities of this comic mode is also influenced by formal debts to the masque tradition.<sup>21</sup> The audience is given little sense of the place of the witches within a detailed social context and their only direct interaction with others is to act as agents to fulfil the wishes of their visitors. This is epitomised by the presence of Hecate, who is neither the classical goddess of her name, nor anything approximating to a portrayal of the witch in any broader social context.<sup>22</sup> By combining some of the contrasting formal characteristics of the masque tradition with those of the comic public stage, Middleton creates a particular, and in the context of this study, unique and difficult stylistic hybrid.

The contemporary relevance of a representation of witchcraft executed with this level of comic abstraction requires careful consideration. Certainly, the play can be seen to draw upon a considerable range of contemporary beliefs regarding witchcraft as, for example, when Hecate relates the refusal of charity that has led to the witches 'a-roasting' pictures of the farmer and his wife:

They denied me often flour, barm and milk,  
 Goose-grease and tar, when I ne'er hurt their charmings,  
 Their brew-locks, nor their batches, nor forspoke  
 Any of their breedings.

(I.ii.53-6)

The most significant and interesting printed source for the play is Scot's The Discoverie of Witchcraft. On first inspection, the contemporary relevance of Middleton's witches seems to be closely defined by his use of Scot. For example, Hecate's description of the witches' flight and festive sabbat, 'we feast and sing, / Dance, kiss and coll', directly reuses Scot's vocabulary:

They seeme to be carried in the aire, to feasting, singing, dansing, kissing, culling, and other acts of venerie, with such youthes as they love and desire most.<sup>23</sup>

In the same scene, Hecate's invocation addressed to a series of supernatural creatures also draws heavily upon a passage in Book VII of The Discoverie:

Urchins, Elves, Hags, Satyrs, Pans, Fawns,  
 Silens, Kit-with-the-candlestick, Tritons, Centaurs,  
 Dwarfs, Imps, the Spoom, the Mare, the Man-i'th'oak,  
 The Hellwain, the Fire-drake, the Puckle.

(I.ii.105-108)

[...] and they have so fraied us with bull beggers, spirits, witches, urchens, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes, sylens, kit with the cansticke, tritons, centaurs, dwarfes, giants, imps, calcars, conjurors, nymphes, changlings, Incubus, robin good-fellowe, the spoorne, the mare, the man in the oke, the hell waine, the fierdrake, the puckle, Tom thombe, hob goblin, Tom tumbler, boneles, and such other bugs [...] <sup>24</sup>

Scot's intention in The Discoverie is, of course, to demonstrate the unreality of such beliefs concerning the supernatural. In the case of the transvection of witches and their sabbats, for example, Scot's account is intended to demonstrate that 'M.[alleus] Mal.[eficarum] Bodin, and such other, as write so absolutelie in maintenance of witches transportations' are incorrect.<sup>25</sup> Such diabolical activities are only imagined, according to Scot, and his concluding comments ridicule those who believe accounts of witches' activities to be true:

It is marvell that such preparation is made for them [...] as well in noble mens houses, as in alehouses; and that they come in dreames, and eate up their meate; and the alewife specialle is not wearied with them for non-paiment of their score, or false paiment.

(Bk X, Chap 9, p. 106)

Similarly, the catalogue of ‘bugges’ in Book VII of The Discoverie, quoted above, is a list of those things that ‘in our childhood our mothers maids have so terrified us with’, with the result that ‘we are afraid of our owne shadowes’ (Bk VII, Chap. 15, p. 86).

Following Diane Purkiss’s argument, the extensive use of Scot as a source should be seen as evidence of a project of cultural colonization which is being undertaken in The Witch. Scot would be an ideal source for a work which is, itself, attempting to undermine the credibility of the very systems of belief in witchcraft, in particular those Purkiss sees as popular beliefs. However, the extent to which Middleton’s debt to Scot directly transfers his type of scepticism to The Witch warrants further investigation. By stripping the supernatural material from Scot’s sceptical apparatus for his stage portrayal of witches and adopting a complex tragicomic mode, Middleton produces a play that engages in more complex ways with early modern beliefs regarding witchcraft.

Some of the key points of contact between the representation of witchcraft in the play and wider beliefs concerning witchcraft should be re-examined in the light of Purkiss’s arguments. The credibility for an early modern audience drawn from a wide social base of many of the notions of the supernatural which underlie The Witch should not be too readily underestimated. In particular, two important aspects of the representation of witches within the play, the group meetings of the witches and the focus on sexual issues within those scenes, need not be seen as entirely distinct from some of the beliefs that elements of its audience might have held. Even though these elements are not prominent within accounts of English witchcraft accusations, they were probably not alien to more general early modern English attitudes concerning witchcraft.

While the transvection of witches is not a prominent issue in English early modern witchcraft lore, the congregation and revelry of witches at sabbats would have been plausible, at least in part, to elements of an English audience.<sup>26</sup> There is evidence that they might have encountered ideas regarding the congregation of witches from both folkloric traditions and the downward filtration of élite demonological theories. For example, Thomas Potts’s account of the celebrated 1612 Lancashire witchcraft trial returns on several occasions to the meeting of the witches on Good Friday. Indeed the evidence of James Device reported by Potts suggests that the meetings of the witches observed a ritual cycle:

And before their parting away, they all appointed to meete at the said Prestons wives house that day twelve-moneths; at which time the said the said Prestons wife promised to make them a great Feast.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, the identification of the witches with sexual issues in The Witch, both through the discussion of Hecate's own sexual appetite and her efforts to manipulate the sexual appetites of others, may have had contemporary relevance for its original audience. While Keith Thomas argued that 'the more blatant sexual aspects of witchcraft were a very uncommon feature of the trials', James Sharpe has suggested more recently that 'sexual intercourse' between a witch and the Devil 'was clearly not an alien concept' in early modern England. At its lowest level, the suckling of familiars could sometimes have sexual overtones in published accounts of witch trials.<sup>28</sup> Sharpe notes that Elizabeth Sawyer, the basis for The Witch of Edmonton, allowed her familiar to suck blood from a teat above her 'fundament'.<sup>29</sup> The account of the trials for witchcraft of Joan Flower and her daughters Margaret and Phillip contains similar details. Their pact with the Devil was allegedly 'ratified with abominable kisses'. Phillip Flower in particular confessed to 'a Spirit sucking on her in the forme of a white Rat, which keepeth her left breast'. She had given this familiar her soul, in exchange for it promising to make Thomas Simpson love her.<sup>30</sup> Such accounts may not be typical, but they are consistent with Keith Thomas's observation that the height of interest in witch beliefs coincided with 'a time when women were generally believed to be sexually more voracious than men'.<sup>31</sup> The importance of Hecate's sexual appetite in The Witch might not have frequent parallels in the evidence given at witch trials, but seems to be consistent both with evidence that could be given at witch trials and also a more general belief in the potentially dangerous sexual voracity of women. While the play blends Continental and English attitudes concerning witchcraft in a bold fashion, some salient and spectacular features of its representation of witches may have been comprehensible to its audience. Even aspects such as the witches' sabbat and sexual licence, which were not salient features of English witch trials, were not unheard of in England and were probably broadly compatible with the imaginative conception of witches held by elements of the population.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, some of the contextual historical evidence renders

problematic the relatively firm distinction between 'élite' (or 'high') and 'popular' (or 'low') culture made by Purkiss.

Moreover, while the statistical decline in legal accusations of witchcraft in early seventeenth-century England should not be ignored, the variability of King James's own views regarding witchcraft through the period of his reign in England needs to be appreciated. James was famous for his affirmation of the existence of witchcraft in Daemonologie and during his rule in England he continued to affirm the reality of witchcraft in some cases, in particular where the alleged witchcraft might threaten his divinely appointed monarchy. However, in many instances he took a lead in establishing that the grounds for accusations were insubstantial.<sup>33</sup>

Anne Lancashire has argued that The Witch specifically parallels events reported in connection with the infamous Essex divorce and, consequently, could have been composed at any time after the start of rumours concerning the marriage of the earl of Essex in 1610. This would give Hecate's interference with the natural course of human relationships in Ravenna a specific and immediate relevance for the play's original audience. Lancashire argues that the political sensitivity of the allusions in the play led to censorship, which would provide an explanation for the play's apparent neglect, as suggested by Middleton's reference to it as 'ignorantly ill-fated' in the dedicatory epistle.<sup>34</sup>

In 1613, a nullity commission had finally been assembled to consider the marriage of the earl of Essex and his wife Frances. The lawyers had argued that, as Aquinas allowed, witchcraft had caused the earl of Essex to be impotent only with his wife.<sup>35</sup> King James had taken an active interest in the case and, perhaps due to the proximity of the case to his person, he took steps to ensure that the commission upheld the argument of the lawyers that maleficium had occurred.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, at the later trials concerning the murder of the earl's former associate Sir Thomas Overbury, it was suggested that Frances had indeed been attempting to induce impotency in the earl and possibly encourage the love of Robert Carr, who became her second husband, using supernatural means. To this end she had apparently consorted with a network of supernatural practitioners, including Anne Turner and Simon Forman.<sup>37</sup>

There is, for example, a parallel between the events surrounding the Essex divorce and Sebastian's actions when he procures a charm to ensure that Antonio and Isabella's marriage

remains unconsummated, while Antonio continues to consort with his whore, Florida. Anne Lancashire argues that this fusion of contemporary events and fictional sources, such as Machiavelli's Florentine History, reflects the influence of the masque on the dramatic form of the play. In particular, she points to the way in which the play is harmoniously resolved in an unforeseen happy conclusion:

Middleton departs from his sources to introduce a series of surprising revelations and repentances that lead to audience recognition of many of the seemingly-corrupt characters as ultimately virtuous, and to happy endings for almost everyone.<sup>38</sup>

As a parallel to the Essex divorce, The Witch contrives to uphold James's opinions on that case, namely that the impotency had been caused by supernatural means. Furthermore, the play may be seen to go some way towards casting in a less negative light several of the characters whose activities have apparent parallels with contemporary events.<sup>39</sup>

More recently, David Lindley has suggested that it may be more appropriate to regard The Witch as 'a sign of the patterns of belief' which also shaped the accounts of the Essex divorce and Overbury trial, rather than as a 'specific commentary' on those events.<sup>40</sup> He examines what he describes as 'continuous interplay between the real and fictional worlds' in the events of Frances Howard's life. Certainly, it is not necessary to follow Lancashire's reading of the play as commentary on celebrated contemporary events to accept that the parallels between the events of the play and those of the actual case are of significance to our understanding of the contemporary context of the play. The possibility of using supernatural powers of controversial provenance to induce love or impotency was widely debated in the early modern period. The controversy raised by such experiments would have depended on the belief-system applied to it by the interpreter.<sup>41</sup> Diane Purkiss has taken Lindley's argument a stage further, suggesting that the play should not be 'read' as a direct allusion to the trial but 'as a reproduction of the same male anxieties that surface in the trial'.<sup>42</sup>

The portrayal of witchcraft in The Witch should be seen as engaging in a complex way with several contemporary systems of belief, informed by <sup>a</sup> famous and relatively recent event. Returning

to the question of the tragicomic mode of the play will help to elucidate the meaning of the play further for its contemporary audience. The tragicomedy of the play undeniably parallels some of the characteristics of the homiletic or moral comic modes encountered in other representations of the supernatural in the period. However entertaining they are for the audience, the play indicates that the actions of the witches must be condemned. There is no doubt that Hecate and the other witches derive their power from diabolical sources and are inspired by malicious intentions. Although we do not see her consort directly with the Devil, Hecate is not a magical practitioner in the mould of Friar Bacon or Prospero. Her power to manipulate the natural world or command supernatural forces seems to be an extension of her desire to create havoc and seek revenge. In no sense is she shown to command supernatural forces in the name of God, or to work for the benefit of others, except in so far as their wishes further her own interest in disorder. The Witch shows its supernatural practitioners in a wholly negative light, even though amatory spells were attempted by contemporary magical practitioners, who did not consider themselves, and were not considered by others, necessarily to be witches. Sebastian's ultimate success, through the aid of the charm to produce impotency, in winning back his rightful bride might hint that the ends of the witches' actions could justify their use by a client. However, the danger of his situation is apparent to Sebastian:

but such extremes

Of wrongs in love fight 'gainst religious knowledge.

(I.ii.110-11)

As the agents of characters in the main plot, the depravity and plotting of the witches is clearly intended, within the dramatic structure of the play, to prompt questions about the events at the court of Ravenna. Although the play concludes in a mood of reconciliation, Middleton's study of morality in the play focuses closely on the court of Ravenna and is clearly admonitory. The representation of the witches should be seen as just part of a larger theme within the play, the larger Protestant idea that witchcraft was part of a more general battle against evil in which each Christian man or woman had to participate. George Gifford, for example, argued that the Devil's plan extended beyond the apparent activities of his agents. By seeking the intervention of cunning folk in suspected cases of witchcraft, the populace was supporting the Devil's work:



the diuell hath bewitched your minde, with blindness and unbeleefe, to draw you from God, even to worship himselfe, by seeking help at the hand of deuils.<sup>43</sup>

Gifford also considered that accusations of witchcraft could hide individual sin, since the populace blamed witches for their own shortcomings,

as if they had no foule sinnes nor unbeleefe, or that there remayned not a iust reuenging God to punish.<sup>44</sup>

Looked at as part of the play's larger design, the presentation in the play of witchcraft carries an ambivalence regarding its supernatural subject-matter. Gifford's approach was to see those accused of witchcraft primarily as either innocent or deluded concerning their own powers. The Devil's most cunning and dangerous stratagem was not malefice, but rather his attempt to corrupt the 'hearts of men':

the power of deuils is in the hearts of men [...] and from the lustes and concupiscences which are in them, to inflame them unto wrath, malice, envy, and cruell murthers.<sup>45</sup>

The overall message of the play regarding the corrupting power of human desires is surely admonitory, in spite of the propitious reversals of the play's conclusion. Even Sebastian's 'justifiable' use of a charm to regain his rightful bride seems compromised by association with the requests made of the witches by other characters. It is indeed possible, therefore, that these aspects of the play, which seem to call upon the audience to question the credibility of its portrayal of witches, only serve to highlight the questionable morality of human actions within the play. If the witches are simply a theatrical device, malice must be seen to be all the more firmly rooted in human hearts and minds.

However, the belief that witchcraft was a human fantasy was not prevalent in the early seventeenth century. Indeed, Keith Thomas has argued that the Protestant refocus of the battle

against evil on the inner life of the individual, as opposed to the medieval focus on ecclesiastical protection, probably increased individual anxiety about witchcraft.<sup>46</sup> In spite of the apparent statistical decline in witchcraft accusations in the early seventeenth century, The Witch also leaves open the possibility that, for all the extravagance of their manifestation on the stage, the witches represent something real and menacing.

The patterns of inversion and identification of witchcraft with misrule discussed by Stuart Clark are indeed present in Middleton's representation of witches. However, this patterning does not contribute to a closed, simple, representation of witchcraft, but rather to a tragicomic portrayal which reflects wider tensions regarding the existence of witchcraft in the period. The adoption of some of the formal conventions of the masque in the portrayal of the witches, alongside more usual theatrical conventions, accentuates this tension. Irrespective of the many merits of Diane Purkiss's arguments regarding the cultural subjugation of popular witchcraft beliefs in Jacobean drama, a re-evaluation of both the wider cultural context and the tragicomic structure of the play suggests the presence of other possibilities.<sup>47</sup> The Witch should be read as a more ambivalent representation that reflects conflicting contemporary attitudes concerning witchcraft. It should not be seen as a presentation of conflict between the mentalities of 'high' and 'low' social groups, but is, rather, informed by attitudes regarding witchcraft that, although contradictory, might have circulated across a range of social groups. Like several of the comic representations of the supernatural already considered by this study, the tragicomic stage representation of the supernatural in The Witch engages with the strand of sceptical thought drawn from Scot, its major source of detail regarding witchcraft. However, this engagement with Scot leaves open other less sceptical interpretative possibilities.<sup>48</sup>

### III. The Witch of Edmonton

The Witch of Edmonton (1621), attributed in its first edition (1658) to William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, John Ford and unnamed others presents the audience with three interrelated plots.<sup>49</sup> One concerns Elizabeth Sawyer, the real-life witch of the title, and appears to draw much of its material from Henry Goodcole's account of her trial, The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch, in April 1621. Alongside this dramatisation of material from a recent case of

witchcraft, the play presents the wholly fictional domestic tragedy of Frank Thorney. The plots concerning Elizabeth Sawyer and Frank Thorney present subtly differing portrayals of the route to evil. While suggesting that repentance is possible on the part of both characters, there is a tragic sense in them that evil creates real and lasting disorder in the world.<sup>50</sup> Finally, the play's comic plot presents the adventures of Cuddy Banks. Structurally, the three plots are interrelated. Most obviously, the same manifestation of the devil, in the form of a dog, which lures Elizabeth Sawyer to murder by witchcraft, also acts as the catalyst, if not the instigator, of Frank Thorney's murder, of Susan Carter. The devil-dog also interferes with Cuddy Bank's morris group and ensures that Cuddy receives a soaking in his unsuccessful amorous pursuit of Kate Carter.

The comedy of the Cuddy Banks plot presents an immediate contrast with the serious representation of witchcraft and demonic activity in the rest of the play. The Witch of Edmonton examines witchcraft in what is ostensibly a more realistic mode than The Witch. Drawing upon Goodcole, it presents the witchcraft of Elizabeth Sawyer within a more complex and recognisably English social context, by contrast to the exoticism of Middleton's *Ravenna*. In Goodcole, furthermore, it employs a source with an explicit moral intention: to correct the 'diuersitie of opinions concerning things of this nature, and that not among the ignorant, but among some of the learned'.<sup>51</sup> Amongst the hearsay to which Goodcole objects, for example, are 'false Ballets' which included accounts of 'a Ferret and an Owle dayly sporting before' Elizabeth Sawyer and 'the Spirits attending in the Prison [...] all which I know to be fitter for an Ale-bench than form a relation of proceeding in a Court of Justice'.<sup>52</sup> As Purkiss has pointed out, Goodcole's account is not an attempt to present legal truth, but to reveal the moral truth about Elizabeth's witchcraft. This emphasis on discovery passes, in a modified form, into the play. In it, the truth being exposed is slightly refocused to bring the emphasis on damnation, not repentance. Another 'truth' is also presented in considerable detail from Elizabeth's perspective: the stages by which she becomes a witch.<sup>53</sup> The lesson Goodcole draws from the case is that everyone should avoid 'abhominable wordes, and wayes'.<sup>54</sup>

When she is first encountered, Elizabeth Sawyer gives a striking account of the social rifts that lay at the core of many such accusations:



Modern critics have interpreted the portrayal in the play of witchcraft in a detailed social context.<sup>58</sup> The play must be understood, however, as a ‘constructed’ truth, presented as the uncovering of the actual circumstances of the case: the truth about the entry into witchcraft, followed by the actions and eventual fate of the witch. Moreover, The Witch of Edmonton is, in one fundamental way, unlike any of the models proposed by social historians of witchcraft, because the play ostensibly presents witchcraft, and the action of demonic forces more generally, as a reality rather than as a human construct. The main plots of the play, therefore, present a similar version of the conventional demonological interpretation of witchcraft to that which has been traced as one aspect of the presentation of witchcraft in The Witch. It maintains the existence of actual witchcraft as one element within the wider struggle of the individual to reject the temptation of evil, a struggle which is itself ultimately part of God’s wider providential plan.

Given the particular characteristics of the presentation of witchcraft in the main plots of the play, the intention of the comic plot concerning Cuddy Banks can be difficult to understand for a modern audience. Corbin and Sedge, suggest that the comic subplot operates broadly within the traditions of homiletic comedy. As such it ‘defuses the devil’s terror and influence by demonstrating the pettiness of his stratagems and suggests that his success depends on human fallibility’.<sup>59</sup> More recently, Diane Purkiss has argued that the play explores more generally ‘the theatricality of witchcraft itself’. With specific reference to the Cuddy Banks plot, she cites the example of the discussion of ‘the witch as a role in the morris dancing’ as one manifestation of this tendency in the play.<sup>60</sup>

The comic representation of the supernatural in the Cuddy Banks plot is clearly complex. In it, witchcraft is represented both as a threat to wholesome mirth and as a source of comic assistance. In their initial encounter, Cuddy is one of the morris dancers who exit the stage in fear of Elizabeth Sawyer’s maleficent powers:

FIRST DANCER    The old Witch of Edmonton! If our mirth be not crossed-

(II.i.87-8)

Conversely, Cuddy subsequently wishes to include a witch among the characters of the morris, in the episode noted by Purkiss:

YOUNG BANKS    Have we e'er a witch in the morris? [...]

                  I'll have a witch. I love a witch.

FIRST DANCER    'Faith, witches themselves are so common now-a-days that counterfeit will not be regarded. They say we have three or four in Edmonton besides Mother Sawyer.

(III.i.7-8, 11-14)

Between these episodes, Cuddy also enlists Elizabeth Sawyer's aid, as if she were a local cunning woman, to win the love of Kate Carter ('witch or no witch, you are a motherly woman' (II.i.198-9)). However, when Cuddy goes to meet Kate Carter with Elizabeth Sawyer's familiar, the Dog, a 'Spirit in shape of Katherine, vizarded' (III.i.73-74 [s. d.]) tricks him into receiving a ducking. He then strikes up a conversation with the Dog, who offers to help him win Kate:

                  There's a gallant rival loves the maid,

                  And likely is to have her. Mark what a mischief,

                  Before the morris ends, shall light on him.

(III.i.143-5)

Psychologically, Cuddy's interaction with Elizabeth Sawyer may be considered unsatisfactory. His comments betray an awareness that Elizabeth Sawyer is accused of witchcraft, but he demonstrates no understanding of its implications for his actions. However, this varied, comic, representation of the supernatural does have a degree of coherence as an exemplary narrative. An important contrast is developed within the play between the comic values identified with Cuddy, on the one hand, and the Spirit and the Dog on the other. While Cuddy makes a joking reference to the earlier play The Merry Devil of Edmonton ('If ever there were an honest devil, 'twill be the

Devil of Edmonton' (III.i.148-9)), the demonic Dog explains his own actions in terms directly derived from the principles of homiletic comedy:

I'll not miss thee, and be merry with thee.  
 Those that are joys denied must take delight  
 In sins and mischiefs; 'tis the devils right.

(III.i.151-3)

In an earlier episode, Cuddy describes his passion for Kate Carter using the metaphor of bewitchment:

I saw a little devil fly out of her eye like a burbolt, which sticks at this hour up to the feathers in my heart. Now my request is to send one of thy what-d'ye-call-'ems, either to pluck that out, or stick another as fast in hers. Do, and here's my hand, I am thine for three lives.

(II.i.219-23)

Although a commonplace metaphor, it is particularly significant that it should be employed without guile in this play by the clownish Cuddy, who seeks supernatural assistance with his romantic affairs.

The contrast between Cuddy's interpretation of the comic and that of the Dog is also apparent at the performance of the morris (III.iv). The Dog, only visible to Cuddy in the scene, first silences the fiddle and then plays it himself. As promised, the scene, a rare piece of supernatural stage spectacle within the play, ends as a Constable and Officers enter to arrest Somerton, Cuddy's rival in love, and Warbeck for the murder of Susan Carter.<sup>61</sup> Cuddy recognises the significance of the events and the work of malicious forces:

[Aside] There's my rival taken up for hangman's meat. Tom told me he was about a piece of villainy [...] This news of murder has slain the morris.

(III.iv.63-4, 66)

The audience is also aware that the Dog has apparently incited Frank Thorney to murder Susan by rubbing against him, and then assisted in implicating Somerton and Warbeck with the murder by tying Frank to a tree (III.iii.14[s. d.], 71 [s. d.]). The innocent entertainment of the morris has been perverted by the Dog, whose apparently benign trick with the fiddle hides his far more serious acts of 'mischief'.

The contrast between Cuddy and the Dog's conceptions of the comic is continued into their final meeting. The serious tone which closed the morris dance in III.iv is maintained as Cuddy demonstrates an increased awareness of the Dog's maleficent nature ('he has had a claw amongst 'em' (V.i.86-7)). Cuddy reminds the Dog that he 'entertained' him 'ever as a dog, not as a devil' and the Dog informs him, in return, that he 'deluded' him 'for sport to laugh at':

YOUNG BANKS     This remember, I pray you, between you and I, I entertained you ever as a  
dog, not as a devil.

DOG                 True, and so I used thee doggedly, not devilishly. I have deluded thee for  
sport to laugh at. The wench thou seekst after thou never spakst with, but a  
spirit in her form, habit and likeness. Ha, ha!

(V.i.108-13)

A distinction is drawn in the play between two interwoven modes of comedy. There is the comic merriment identified with Cuddy Banks: his foolish humour, the participation in the morris, his naïve companionship with the Dog, his relative generosity towards Elizabeth Sawyer. Cuddy's reaction to the arrest of Somerton and Warbeck and eventual rejection of the Dog, indicate his separation from the second comic mode within the play, the diabolical 'delight / In sins and mischiefs' (III.i.152-3) of the Dog and Spirit. The spirit disguised as Kate Carter summarises the relationship between Cuddy's 'folly' and demonic activity:



We can meet his folly,  
 But from his virtues must be runaways.  
 We'll sport with him, but when we reckoning call,  
 We know where to receive. Th' witch pays for all.

(III.i.77-80)

The comic values embodied by Cuddy are distinguishable from the manipulation of the comic scenes by the Dog and the Spirit. On one level, these scenes present an additional narrative of the discovery of sin, on this occasion sins of a lower order presented in a dual comic mode. Cuddy's lusts and folly are a venal reflection of the mortal sins of Elizabeth and, in particular, of Frank. For example, Cuddy's essential innocence contrasts with Frank's duplicity, as illustrated by a comparison between Cuddy's foolish reworking of a popular ballad to woo Kate and Frank's attempt to assuage the abused Susan using the language of love poetry.<sup>62</sup> Cuddy's romantic interest in Kate Carter is, in the words of the Spirit, merely 'folly' (III.i.77): his interest may be licentious, but his crime is trivial by comparison to that of Frank. Recourse to Elizabeth Sawyer is a further sinful act, but Cuddy's punishment, a summary ducking, is proportionate to the crime. Considered in this way, The Witch of Edmonton is perhaps more straightforward in its use of comedy to present the supernatural than The Witch or most of the portrayals of magic and fairies already considered by this study. The Cuddy Banks subplot explores in moral comic mode the 'truth' regarding the operation of witchcraft, in a way which, in general intention, is not unlike the movement towards the discovery of the 'truth' in those sections of the play which employ a more serious dramatic mode.

In this context, Purkiss's study of The Witch of Edmonton is correct to suggest that the play cannot,

decide what should count as truth, or how truth, theatre and the supernatural can coexist best, whether truth lies in the slipperiness of language or the fakery of stage spectacle, whether the female tongue or the female body is the most obviously forked and frightening.<sup>63</sup>

While Purkiss sets these issues in a context that includes the tension between popular and élite modes of thought and early modern construction of gender, it is also relevant to consider the relationship between truth and spectacle in the play in the context of the wider themes of this study. In addition to the direct allusions of earlier drama, the comic supernatural spectacles familiar from other plays persist in the morris dance and Cuddy's ducking.<sup>64</sup> Goodcole had, of course, attacked the sensationalised errors that he notes appeared in the accounts of the Elizabeth Sawyer case produced by 'lewde Balletmongers' and the mistaken views regarding the case that circulated at all levels.<sup>65</sup> It might be argued that The Witch of Edmonton demonstrates elements of the very sensationalism, in particular in the spectacular episodes of its comic plot, that its source attacked.

However, the precedents for the comic representation of the supernatural already considered by this study offer another context for the interpretation of such spectacle, and for the comic subplot of the play more generally. Other representations of the supernatural suggest that comedy could be a legitimate vehicle for the presentation of ideas concerning the supernatural with wider contemporary relevance. Starting with Doctor Faustus, the relationship between the comic portrayal of the supernatural in drama and wider cultural beliefs and practices has been shown to be complex, and Purkiss's reading of The Witch of Edmonton may be seen to fall within that wider debate. Those elements within the play which condition the audience's response to its varied comic subplot by channelling the audience's reactions into specific directions demonstrate an anxiety that such subject-matter could be open to other forms of interpretation by its audience. This aspect of The Witch of Edmonton may therefore be considered an expression, in a tragicomic mode, of a more general tension that was a characteristic of the engagement between comic representation of the supernatural and wider cultural beliefs and practices in the early modern period.

#### **IV. Conclusion: the comic representation of witchcraft on the early modern English stage**

This study has argued throughout that the comic representation of the supernatural should be understood as a negotiation between form and context. It has been suggested that the relevance of several comic representations of the supernatural is shaped by particular kinds of relationship between the performance of the supernatural and the wider context of early modern thought. In a

series of plays concerned with different supernatural phenomena, it has been proposed that theatricality and truth were not purely antithetical notions in the early modern period. Comic drama was, rather, a site of uneasy synergies, as well as tensions, in the representation of the supernatural. Both The Witch and The Witch of Edmonton can be elucidated by consideration of parallels between them and other representations of the supernatural which have broadly comic generic characteristics. Diane Purkiss has argued that later Stuart discourses regarding witchcraft, including 'the most arrantly sensational plays' of that period,

tried to oppose their truth to the commercial exploitativeness and crudity of other and especially popular accounts of witchcraft; that is, truth came to seem the opposite of sensationalism governed by consumer demand.<sup>66</sup>

This study concurs that the relationship between 'truth' and 'consumer demand' is important in The Witch of Edmonton. However, it is illuminating to consider this issue in the context of broader issues raised by comic representations of the supernatural. Comic representation undoubtedly fulfilled an audience's desire to see the invisible and inherently spectacular crime of witchcraft performed. To this end, the tendency towards spectacle that is a regular feature of supernatural comic representation in the period is also apparent in the tragicomic mode of these plays, in which many spectacular supernatural episodes continue to be signified to the audience as humorous.

However, there are characteristics that distinguish these tragicomic representations of witchcraft from broadly comic representations of magicians or fairies. As a manifestation of early modern supernatural beliefs, witchcraft lacked the moral ambivalence that could be associated with magical experiments, for example. The figure of the witch invariably embodied the outsider, a source of malice who demonstrated signs of alterity. This underlying structure of beliefs clearly influences the tragicomic approach of both plays. In particular, the representation of witchcraft in both plays is concerned with the suppression of some kinds of interpretative possibility. While it is a feature of the comic representation of magic to remain morally ambivalent regarding its use, it is apparent that the tragicomic modes of both The Witch and The Witch of Edmonton attempt to suppress some kinds of moral ambivalence in the context of the subject of witchcraft.

In The Witch, a sustained broadly comic representation of witches is developed which is open to two interpretations. Both interpretations, however, fall within the sphere of 'authorised' approaches to the supernatural in the period. The first is a condemnatory approach that implies that the threat of witches is real. The second, the sceptical approach derived from Reginald Scot but also endorsed in some situations by King James, that considers the problematic nature of reported manifestations of witchcraft. The play is not simply a critique of popular superstitions. What is presented is not popular in any sense of the word that implies systems of belief determined by social stratification. Rather, the play contrives to explore conflicting fundamental approaches to witchcraft both of which might have circulated across a range of social strata, including among the social élite. The representation of witchcraft adopted in the play breathes life into Scot's accounts and undoubtedly appeals to a desire in the audience to see witchcraft revealed. At the same time, a degree of parody of form and the satirical inheritance from Scot undermines the veracity of the material presented. The Witch ostensibly assumes a willing suspension of disbelief regarding its portrayal of witchcraft, yet its portrayal is also informed, to some extent, by a competing notion of theatre as artifice and performance which casts doubt upon the credibility of the witchcraft presented. Although human comprehension and understanding of supernatural phenomena is questioned in other plays considered by this study, most notably James the Fourth, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and The Tempest, the manner in which tensions emerge implicitly in the presentation of witchcraft in The Witch is unusual to that play.

The Witch of Edmonton is particularly directed towards the revelation of witchcraft as a genuine manifestation of supernatural activity, to which end both comic and more serious ('tragic') modes of representation are put to work. It also attempts, therefore, to suppress the potential of its comic elements to be interpreted in 'unauthorised' ways. The features of its comic subplot, in particular the explication of kinds of comedy, are best understood in the context in particular of the moral ambivalence which is a common feature of other early modern comic representations of the supernatural. Rather than the suppression of 'sensationalism governed by consumer demand', it is more appropriate to consider this process as one of directing audience response toward a less ambiguous and more clearly moral interpretation of sensational comic episodes.

Returning to Purkiss's argument regarding truth and sensationalism in later Stuart discourses, this study would conclude that, throughout the period it covers, 'consumer demand' did not begin and end with triviality or sensation. The diverse examples of supernatural stage spectacle considered by this study suggest that the introduction of sensation and spectacle were not always conceived by early modern audiences as detracting from the extent to which comic representations of the supernatural could engage with contemporary supernatural issues. Rather, they offered a kind of fulfilment through dramatisation of possible 'truths' regarding the supernatural which could only remain hidden in real life. This principle is sustained through both the tragicomic representations of witchcraft considered in this chapter. Like several of the comic representations of the supernatural considered in earlier chapters, these plays are defined by the interaction of questions of consumer demand, sensation and 'real life' relevance for their audience, rather than a simple opposition between those forces.

Like modern audiences, early modern audiences were not uncritical consumers of theatrical performance, or unaware of the implicit contract negotiated between audience, players and playwright which establishes the terms on which a particular theatrical performance is received. Further evidence that audiences understood the varying contract between audience, players and playwright which drama requires also survives from a later account. In 1634, Nathaniel Tomkyns went to see a play, Thomas Heywood's The Late Lancashire Witches at the Globe, and commented,

though there be not in it (to my understanding) any poetically genius of art, or language, or judgement to state or tenet of witches (wch I expected) or application to virtue but full of ribaldry and of things improbable and impossible; yet in regard it consisteth from the beginning to the end of odd passages and fopperies to provoke laughter, and is mixed with diverse songs and dances, it passeth for a merry and excellent new play.<sup>67</sup>

The production of this late play clearly did not 'work' for Tomkyns, at least in so far as he could not establish in his reception of the play the link he sought between the comic modes employed and witchcraft as a subject. Tomkyns's disappointment, even as late as the 1630s, suggests that he had anticipated a different kind of theatrical experience, which did engage with wider issues. All he

experienced was a musical and comic extravaganza. An assessment of the artistic success or failure of The Late Lancashire Witches, and the emergence of a new tradition of comic stage portrayal of the supernatural in the Restoration lies beyond the scope of the present study.<sup>68</sup> However, the review of other early modern plays by this study suggests strongly that earlier playwrights did strive to create the theatre that Tomkyns wished to enjoy. At its most complex, the early modern theatre was essaying to present witchcraft in tragicomic modes which maintained significant engagements with a range of wider contemporary issues.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and others, The Witch of Edmonton: A Known True Story Composed into a Tragi-Comedy By Divers Well-Estimated Poets (London, 1658), in Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, ed. by Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, The Revels Plays Companion Library (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), V.i.108-109. The title page assigns authorship to 'William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, John Ford, &c.'. Further references will be to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Two, Section III, above.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Heywood, The Wise-Woman of Hogson: A Comedie, in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood, 6 vols (1874, repr. New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), I, 275-353 (pp. 310, 293-4); John Lyly, Mother Bombie, Malone Society Reprints ([n. p.]: Oxford University Press, 1948).

<sup>4</sup> David Bevington, Endimion, pp. 14-45, considers the allegorical structures of the play.

<sup>5</sup> The Witch of Edmonton is defined as a tragi-comedy on its titlepage. The earliest edition of The Witch in the British Library Catalogue is titled A Tragi-commodie, called the witch (1778).

<sup>6</sup> Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Herrick, Comic Theory, p. 46.

- <sup>8</sup> John F. McElroy, Parody and Burlesque in the Tragicomedies of Thomas Middleton, Salzburg Studies in English Literature 19 (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1972), pp. 155-215. Corbin and Sedge dispute the emphasis which McElroy places upon a concerted parodic strategy within the play. See Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, p. 18.
- <sup>9</sup> The Defence of Poesy, in Sir Philip Sidney, pp. 212-50 (ll. 1322, 1321, 1326-7).
- <sup>10</sup> Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, pp. 13-14. Anne Lancashire, 'The Witch: Stage Flop or Political Mistake?', in "Accompaning the players": Essays Celebrating Thomas Middleton, 1580-1980, ed. and introduction by Kenneth Friedenreich (New York: AMS, 1983), pp. 161-81 (p. 166).
- <sup>11</sup> The Masque of Queens, in Ben Jonson: Complete Masques, ed. by Stephen Orgel, The Yale Ben Jonson (New Haven and London: Yale, 1969), pp. 122-41. Orgel's text, principally derived from Jonson's first folio (1616) notes that the masque was 'performed at Whitehall, February 2, 1609' (p. 122).
- <sup>12</sup> See l. 209-10, where the Dame of Jonson's witches boasts 'You that have seen me ride when Hecatè / durst not take chariot'. Jonson also includes a marginal note on classical references to Hecate to accompany l. 222 ('thou three-formèd star').
- <sup>13</sup> It is indicated that songs from The Witch, III.iii, ll. 38 ff ('Come away, come away') and ll. 62 ff. ('Now I go, now I fly') are performed in Macbeth, III.v. 'The Witches' Dance' is referred to in The Witch, V.ii.85 [s. d.] and Macbeth IV.i.149 [s. d.]. References to Macbeth are to The Complete Works, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 975-99, which attempts to reconstruct the staging of III.v.
- <sup>14</sup> Glynne Wickham, "'To Fly or not to Fly?': The Problem of Hecate in Shakespeare's Macbeth", in Essays on Drama of Theatre: Liber Amicorum Benjamin Hunnigher (Amsterdam: Moussault, 1973), pp. 171-82. Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, p. 13. See also Diane Purkiss, Witch, pp. 202-15.
- <sup>15</sup> Stuart Clark, 'Inversion', p. 125. Clark develops these arguments further in Thinking with Demons, pp. 1-147
- <sup>16</sup> Stuart Clark, 'Inversion', pp. 125, 102.
- <sup>17</sup> Purkiss, Witch, p. 180.

- <sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 202. Purkiss, *ibid*, p. 206, ultimately sees the tensions arising from this project as unresolved.
- <sup>19</sup> I.ii.77-80. Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, pp. 219 (note regarding 'The Persons', l. 10) suggests a tradition of witches' 'loutish sons'.
- <sup>20</sup> I.ii.229. Corbin and Sedge, Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, p. 15, suggest that this is a reference to a Cat and Fiddle tavern, one of several London references in the play.
- <sup>21</sup> See Lancashire, p. 170-2, on the relationship between The Witch and the masque tradition.
- <sup>22</sup> Purkiss, Witch, p. 220: 'Hecate is emphatically not represented as a person, a social being with her own desires and interests'.
- <sup>23</sup> I.ii.28-9; Scot, p. 105. Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, pp. 219-32, lists the source passages in Scot for The Witch.
- <sup>24</sup> Scot, p. 86.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 105. 'Bodin' presumably refers to Jean Bodin, De La démonomancie des sorciers (Paris, 1580).
- <sup>26</sup> Cohn, pp. 162-180, argues convincingly that the idea of the flying night-witch existed in the classical and medieval periods, but there is little evidence that it was actually widely believed to be a significant practice of witches in early modern England; Thomas, Religion, p. 529; Macfarlane, pp. 214-15.
- <sup>27</sup> Thomas Potts, The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches (1612), in Early Modern Witches, pp. 173-265 (p. 212); see also Sharpe, Instruments, p. 77.
- <sup>28</sup> Sharpe, Instruments, pp. 73-4. Thomas, Religion, p. 679. Cf. Macfarlane, pp. 214-15.
- <sup>29</sup> Sharpe, Instruments, p. 74; Henry Goodcole, The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch (1621), in Gibson, Early Modern Witches, pp. 299-315 (p. 310).
- <sup>30</sup> The Wonderfull Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower (1619), in Gibson, Early Modern Witches, pp. 276-98 (pp. 287, 296).
- <sup>31</sup> Thomas, Religion, p. 679.
- <sup>32</sup> See Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, p. 15. Cf. Thomas, Religion, p. 679-80: 'undoubtedly there is still much about the fantasy side of witch beliefs which cries out for explanation. The



concept of witchcraft provided a way of looking at the world and an imaginative vocabulary for many individuals who were not themselves directly involved in witchcraft accusations’.

<sup>33</sup> Sharpe, Intruments, pp. 47-50. Purkiss, Witch, p. 201.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Epistle’, ll. 6-7; Lancashire, pp. 162, 166. See also Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, p. 14. Thomas, Religion, p. 278. For full-length studies of the Essex divorce and Overbury trials, see Beatrice White, Cast of Ravens: The Strange Case of Sir Thomas Overbury (London: John Murray, 1965) and Anne Somerset, Unnatural Murder: Poison at the Court of James I (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997; repr. London: Phoenix, 1998).

<sup>35</sup> Somerset, pp. 138-9.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p. 159.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 96-7, 324-27.

<sup>38</sup> Lancashire, pp. 170-1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 170, suggests that Middleton, as a moral playwright, aims ‘to show the inevitable self-destructiveness of evil and the triumph of goodness (original or repentant)’.

<sup>40</sup> David Lindley, The Trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James (London: Routledge, 1993), footnote 56 to p. 97.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas, Religion, p. 277-9. While he notes that impotence by maleficium was rarely alleged in England. Lindley, p. 98, records how ‘the prevalence of such practices in France fascinated Sir Charles Somerset on his travels in 1611-12’.

<sup>42</sup> Purkiss, Witch, p. 216. Purkiss’s reading draws particular parallels between the presentation of Hecate and the representation and self-fashioning of Anne Turner during the Overbury trials (pp. 216-25).

<sup>43</sup> Gifford, Dialogue, sig. B1<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, sig. D2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, sig. C2<sup>r</sup>:

<sup>46</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 588-98

<sup>47</sup> Purkiss, Witch, p. 217: ‘popular views of witchcraft are a subjugated knowledge in seventeenth century dramatic texts’.

<sup>48</sup> cf. Lindley, p. 98: 'whilst the witches are presented with a comic exaggeration which may signal a certain scepticism on Middleton's part, the efficacy of their charms suggests at the very least an underlying anxiety about their power'.

<sup>49</sup> Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, p. 20, dates the play with certainty to 1621.

<sup>50</sup> e.g., V.iii.168-9: 'Join, friends, in sorrow, make of all the best. / Harms past may be lamented, not redressed'. Purkiss, Witch, p. 243, notes a distinction between the play and Goodcole's account in this respect. On the theme of evil in the Frank Thorney and Elizabeth Sawyer plots, see Leonora Leet Brodwin, 'The Domestic Tragedy of Frank Thorney in "The Witch of Edmonton"', SEL, 7 (1967), 311-328, p. 319.

<sup>51</sup> Early Modern Witches, p. 302.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 303.

<sup>53</sup> Purkiss, Witch, pp. 231-7

<sup>54</sup> Early Modern Witches, p. 315

<sup>55</sup> II.i.121. Cf. Goodcole, in Early Modern Witches, p. 304. Thomas, Religion, p. 611, notes that, among demonologists and in prosecutions, 'successful cursing and banning was treated as a strong presumption of witchcraft'.

<sup>56</sup> IV.i.169-257, V.iii.32; cf. Goodcole, in Early Modern Witches, p. 305.

<sup>57</sup> V.iii.47-51; cf. Goodcole, in Early Modern Witches, p. 313, which seems to attribute a more passive confession to Elizabeth Sawyer.

<sup>58</sup> Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, p. 22; Purkiss, Witch, p. 232, notes parallels between the play and Alan Macfarlane's social model. See Macfarlane, pp. 147-77 and Thomas, Religion, pp. 599-680.

<sup>59</sup> Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, p. 27.

<sup>60</sup> III.i.11. Purkiss, Witch, pp. 246, 245. Purkiss does not mention that the dog, not the witch, eventually appears with the morris (III.i.11 [s. d.]).

<sup>61</sup> On the effectiveness of this scene in performance, see Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, p. 241 (note to III.iv.50 [s. d.]).

<sup>62</sup> III.i.89-94; II.ii.97-103. On Cuddy's modification of a popular ballad, see Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays, p. 239 (note to III.i.89-93).

<sup>63</sup> Purkiss, Witch, p. 246. Purkiss is referring both to The Witch of Edmonton and Thomas Heywood's later play The Late Lancashire Witches: A Well-Received Comedy Lately Acted at the Globe [...] (London, 1634).

<sup>64</sup> In addition to the references to The Merry Devil of Edmonton, noted above, Purkiss notes other allusions to earlier drama. See Purkiss, Witch, p. 246.

<sup>65</sup> Early Modern Witches, p. 303.

<sup>66</sup> Purkiss, Witch, p. 232.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted by Purkiss, Witch, p. 244.

<sup>68</sup> Purkiss, Witch, p. 245, concludes that even The Late Lancashire Witches 'wants to punish the scepticism that its own theatricality encourages'.

## Chapter Eight

### 'He Can Set Horoscopes but Trusts Not in [The]m': Satire and Parody in

#### "The Alchemist" and "The Devil is an Ass"

#### I. Jonson and the supernatural on the professional stage

The records of Ben Jonson's opinions regarding the supernatural, religion, and comic theatre provide a unique opportunity in the context of this study to consider the relationship between playwright and play.

Although it may not be considered a reliable source, Drummond's record of conversations with Ben Jonson provides a fascinating insight into his beliefs regarding the supernatural. The conversations suggest that Jonson held ambivalent views concerning certain supernatural beliefs and phenomena. For example, Jonson apparently revealed to Drummond a knowledge of astrology:

He can set Horoscopes, but trusts not in [the]m.

At the same time, however, his reception of an acquaintance while disguised as an astrologer reveals the side to his character more clearly represented in his drama: a taste for trickery equal to that of *Subtle* in daring, if not in avaricious intent.<sup>1</sup> More curious is Drummond's account of the meeting between Jonson and the ghost of his young son 'w[i]t[h] ye Mark of a bloodie crosse on his forehead, as if it had been cutted wt a su[u]ord'. Jonson claimed to have seen the vision before the message from his wife in London that their son had died of the plague reached him at Sir Robert Cotton's house.<sup>2</sup> Through these fragmentary comments, a picture emerges of Jonson as a man engaged in complex ways with important contemporary systems of belief regarding the operation of supernatural powers. As Anne Barton suggests, such anecdotes reveal a side to Jonson's interests which is relevant to a full understanding of his plays in their cultural context.<sup>3</sup>

Jonson's comic stage representation of the supernatural must also be considered in the context of his documented aesthetic and religious views, as well as wider cultural trends within and

outside the theatre considered by this study.

Jonson's religious views provide a context for his drama which, increasingly, attracts the interest of historicist critics.<sup>4</sup> In Conversations with Drummond, Jonson notes that he became a papist while in prison for killing the actor Gabriel Spenser in a duel in 1598. David Riggs considers the possibility that Jonson's conversation could be attributed to a desire for absolution while awaiting sentence. While Drummond records Jonson stating that he remained a Catholic for twelve years, by 1605 he was attempting to assist the Privy Council with its investigation into the Gunpowder Plot. In 1606 Jonson declared to the Consistory Court of London that he wished to return to the established Church and was given a choice of divines to act as instructor. Although by Jonson's own calculation he remained a Catholic until 1610, Riggs argues that this action marks the end of a sometimes turbulent relationship between Jonson and authorities, secular or sacred, and his movement into the mainstream of Jacobean court life. In any case, both Jonson's covert work for the Privy Council and his association with Father Thomas Wright suggest his identification with those English Catholics who sought to reconcile their religious beliefs with loyalty to their monarch.<sup>5</sup> Jonson's suggestion to Drummond that he was 'for any religion, being versed jn both' (l. 690) and his attendance of Anglican services after conversion to Catholicism, suggest a pragmatic dimension to Jonson's religious views, at least in certain periods of his life. This, in turn, would provide an important context for his comic portrayal of the supernatural.

The influence of literary and theatrical contexts is also apparent on Jonson's representation of the supernatural. In so far as they associate the supernatural with human fraud, Jonson's works belong to an ancient tradition which includes the Mostellaria of Plautus, Chaucer's 'Canon's Yeoman's Tale' and two of the Colloquies of Erasmus.<sup>6</sup> Although belief in man's ability to work magic was undoubtedly prevalent throughout the classical, medieval and early modern periods, the fraudulent imitation of the supernatural in fictional and non-fictional works has a long history. Aside from Jonson's plays, a number of pamphlets and a play, The Puritain (?1607), which constitutes the single most important Jacobean analogue for the tone and subject-matter of The Alchemist, attest to the continuing popularity of the subject in the period.<sup>7</sup>

However, other dramatic contexts for Jonson's portrayal of the supernatural must also be considered. In the main, Jonson attacks the stage for its breaches of proper decorum, its failure to mirror nature in the correct way and its propensity towards spectacle and shallow entertainment.<sup>8</sup> In The Alchemist, for example, he laments that, in contemporary plays, 'the Concupiscence of Daunces, and Antickes so raigneth, as to runne away from Nature'.<sup>9</sup> Jonson's criticisms of contemporary theatre extended to its portrayal of the supernatural. He emerges as opposed to the traditional combination of humour and the supernatural that seems to have existed on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. Folly and stage devils are combined for criticism by Jonson. In the 'Epistle' to Volpone (1605) Jonson criticizes the popularity of 'fooles, and deuils', even though he views them as less appalling than some other trends in contemporary drama. In the Second Intermeane of The Staple of News (1625), Tattle reminisces concerning her husband's enjoyment of such stage entertainment:

My husband, (Timothy Tattle, God rest his poore soule) was wont to say, there was no Play without a Foole, and a Diuell in't.<sup>10</sup>

These attacks must be seen as general criticism of a living theatrical tradition in the opening decades of the seventeenth century. The Merry Devil of Edmonton was performed at Court in 1613, 1618 and 1638. Furthermore, the publications of The Merry Devil in 1608 and of nine editions of Doctor Faustus by 1631 suggest a continued demand for such works in print.<sup>11</sup> Although, as Dessen suggests, The Devil is an Ass attacks 'outmoded forms of iniquity and deviltry', there is little evidence to suggest that Jonson was exploiting a general decline in the popularity of such performances.<sup>12</sup> Although stage devils may have reached the point of being a legitimate target for a progressive and critical playwright, Doctor Faustus drew crowds up to, and even after, the Restoration at the Fortune and Red Bull playhouses, the latter having particular strong associations with stage devils.<sup>13</sup> On another occasion, Jonson seems to criticize a specific play. In 'The Induction on the Stage' which introduces Bartholomew Fair (1614), the reference to the exclusion



Moreover, the play draws figuratively on other branches of the language of the supernatural. The use of the term 'multiply' in the context of the acquisition of gold, Volpone's use of alchemical discourses in his development of the role of the mountebank 'Scoto', and the references to magical conjuring in sexual contexts each prefigure certain aspects of the The Alchemist.<sup>18</sup> The supernatural imagery extends into the subplot. Lady Politic, for example, believing Peregrine to be a prostitute disguised as a man, describes him as 'a female deuell, in a male out-side' (IV.ii.56).

However, the key to Volpone's use of supernatural language, which is either figurative or in the case of Scoto or Voltore's 'possession' scene associated with impersonation and fraud, is that it reveals a world driven by human vice and self-interest, in which the genuinely supernatural has no part. As Jonathan Goldberg has suggested, the exploration of human vice starts with the setting for the play, which 'penetrates the myth of Venice and aims at the subversion of the republic', which is shown to be oligarchic and fundamentally shaped by human vice and self-interest.<sup>19</sup> Jonson's reference to the supernatural in Volpone does not ultimately preclude the existence of alchemy or possession. However, Volpone demonstrates a trend in Jonson's plays towards diminishing the credibility of some kinds of belief regarding the supernatural. This point is particularly clear in Voltore's 'possession' scene. Although the symptoms of Voltore's possession exhibit some similarities with accounts by John Darrel and others that defended the veracity of possession, it is ultimately the similarities of detail with Samuel Harsnett's account of one of Darrell's most famous subjects of possession, Will Somers, which are significant. Harsnett's aim was to expose Somers as a fraud, whose symptoms were simulated.<sup>20</sup>

## II. The Alchemist

In more extensive form than in Volpone, both The Alchemist and The Devil is an Ass show Jonson's contemporaries as excessively gullible in their supernatural beliefs, and suggest that such gullibility is stimulated by deeper human failings, such as greed, lust and ambition. Both plays also explore in greater detail some of the conventions employed by other early modern theatrical



portrayals of the supernatural.

Of the two plays, The Alchemist (1610) is the more wide-ranging in its account of the supernatural beliefs held by Jonson's contemporaries. The place of alchemy within early modern supernatural beliefs has already been considered in Chapter Two.<sup>21</sup> Much valuable criticism has uncovered the depth of Jonson's technical, as well as fictional, understanding of alchemy.<sup>22</sup> Jonson is generally assumed to have been familiar with the alchemical thought of Paracelsus. His notion that the philosopher's stone, or elixir, possessed mystical recuperative properties clearly influenced the characterization of Sir Epicure Mammon, who anticipates that the Stone will have such powers.<sup>23</sup> Expanding the figurative processes at work in Volpone, the procedures and terminology of alchemy also form an important imaginative resource for Jonson in the play. The initial argument between Subtle and Face sees Subtle using the language of alchemy as a metaphor for the improvement in their fortunes for which each claims responsibility. Subtle enquires whether it is he who has,

Sublim'd thee, and exalted thee, and fix'd thee

I' the third region, call'd our state of grace?

Wrought thee to spirit, to quintessence, with paines

Would twise have won me the philosophers worke?

(I.i.68-71)

Alchemy, moreover, is a fitting technical subject for a play primarily concerned, as Anne Barton suggests, with a human desire for self-transformation.<sup>24</sup> Unlike Volpone, however, The Alchemist also engages with contemporary beliefs regarding alchemy on a thematic level.

However, it would be easy to overemphasize the relevance of élite intellectual forms of belief or investigation, when considering the play's treatment of alchemy, astrology, spirit summoning or conjuration. John Mebane's assertion that the play is primarily concerned with the élite intellectual interests of 'occult philosophers' and 'Hermetic alchemy', the hermetic-cabalistic-neoplatonic tradition considered in Chapter Two, effectively requires the interpretation of the play as

an allegory. The forced nature of Mebane's reading is most clearly demonstrated by his analysis of the deception of Dapper:

The suggestion that the ridiculous Dapper is the nephew of the Queen of Faeries is an absurd parody of Hermes Trismegistus' teaching that humankind is "akin to the race of daemons".<sup>25</sup>

While the erudition demonstrated by Jonson in the play reflects an attention to detail characteristic of his satiric method, and the reference to such esoteric doctrines is consistent with Subtle's bombastic charlatanry, the play's general focus lies in a different direction.<sup>26</sup> Mebane's approach fails to appreciate fully the manner in which Jonson portrays not so much charlatans aping elite intellectual investigation of the supernatural, but rather charlatans aping the more widely-disseminated magical practices of contemporary cunning men and women.<sup>27</sup>

Subtle's charlatanry is established, from the outset, as imitating a number of forms of supernatural activity, most of them more generally current in the period than the elite sources on which Mebane concentrates. The play's 'Argument' establishes that Subtle and his confederates deal in horoscopes, as well as alchemy. Moreover, during the initial quarrel between Subtle and Face, Face elaborates upon Subtle's activities, listing two which, although they have no further bearing on the play, help to establish Subtle's areas of operation:

Searching for things lost, with a siue and sheeres,

Erecting figures in your rowes of houses,

And taking in of shaddowes, with a glasse,

Told in red letters.<sup>28</sup>

While astral sympathies feature in the actual business of the play, as when Subtle discourses on chiromancy (I.iii.50-57), the use of sieve and shears and of a crystal ball to summon spirits do not. The sieve and shears, by which the movement of a sieve pierced by a pair of scissors was used to reveal the identity of a thief, in particular, associates Subtle with a common early modern practice.<sup>29</sup>

The main body of the play concentrates upon four major forms of supernatural activity: the preparation of a familiar spirit for Dapper; Dapper's introduction to his aunt, the 'queene of Faerie' (I.ii.126); the preparation of a talisman to aid Drugger's shop through the operation of sympathetic magic; and the creation of the Philosopher's Stone both for Sir Epicure Mammon and for Tribulation Wholesome and Ananias, the Anabaptists. Each has parallels in early modern culture which suggest that belief in the existence of the forces Subtle pretends to control still circulated in early modern culture.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps the most implausible episode in the play is the one in which Dapper is introduced to Dol when she is disguised as the 'queene of Faerie'. Both the scale of the deception worked upon Dapper and the audacious timing of his meeting with Dol, at a point so late in Act Five that Lovewit is already actually inside the house, make this the climactic peak of the confederates' success. Similarities between this episode and at least three notorious cases in the same period, two of which predate The Alchemist, suggest that Dapper is hardly more credulous than some of Jonson's contemporaries. Moreover, in the context of popular beliefs concerning the supernatural more generally, Dapper's credulity still perhaps seems less than exceptional. As Anne Barton notes, 'even Dapper's credulity with respect to his aunt the Fairy Queen begins to look almost normal in the light of the evidence assembled by Keith Thomas'.<sup>31</sup>

Also of particular interest is Subtle's relatively direct borrowing from the Heptameron, seu Elementa Magica of Peter of Abano when discussing the favourable plan for Drugger's new shop.

One particular passage draws heavily on this source:

And, on the east-side of your shop, aloft,  
Write Mathlai, Tarmiel, and Baraborat;  
Vpon the north-part, Rael, Veiel, Thiel.  
They are the names of those Mercurial spirits,  
That do fright flyes from boxes.

(I.iii.64-8)

The corresponding passage in the Heptameron refers to,

the angels ruling the favourable stars on the day of Mercury, which should be called up from the four quarters of the world. To the East [...] To the North [...] <sup>32</sup>

As noted in the context of Doctor Faustus, like the apocryphal Fourth Book of Agrippa's Occult Philosophy, Peter of Abano's Heptameron was a work appended to Agrippa's notorious work in order to provide it with greater practical value.<sup>33</sup> Subtle's choice of source is not, therefore, the magic of Agrippa or Dee in a form recognizable as belonging to the hermetic tradition described by Frances Yates, but something far more in line with the practical objectives of more populist magical traditions.

Even many aspects of the portrayal of alchemy in The Alchemist, the branch of esoteric activity in the play concerning which Jonson most significantly demonstrates a depth of technical reading, need not be seen to stem from detailed scrutiny of élite intellectual authorities such as Paracelsus. For example, Chaucer's account of medieval alchemy does not, obviously, make reference to the developments which Paracelsus was to initiate in that field, but it does set a major precedent for the humorous treatment of the subject in The Alchemist. The second part of 'The Canon's Yeoman's Tale' exposes many of the tricks also practised by Subtle.<sup>34</sup> The first part clearly provides a precedent for Subtle's ostentatious use of alchemical terminology:

Ther is also ful many another thyng  
 That is unto oure craft appertenyng.  
 Though I by ordre hem nat reherce kan,  
 By cause that I am a lewed man,  
 Yet wol I tell hem as they come to mynde,  
 Thogh I ne kan ne sette hem in hir kynde:  
 As boole amonyak, verdegrees, boras,  
 And sondry vessels maad of erthe and glas,

Oure urynales and oure descensories,  
 Violes, crosletz, and sublimatories,  
 Curcibites and alambikes eek.<sup>35</sup>

Chaucer's Yeoman, moreover, makes mention of 'Hermes', as 'philosophres fader' (VIII.1434). This medieval reference to Hermes Trismegistus, which predates his emergence as the shadowy inspiration of Renaissance hermeticists, suggests how the same classical sources and same principles of natural philosophy could underlie both widely-held beliefs and more restricted, élite, forms of supernatural enquiry in the late medieval and early modern periods. By following the work of historians like Yates, critics like Mebane run the risk of interpreting the drama of the period, including The Alchemist, within an inappropriately narrow conception of early modern thought regarding magic. The play draws on general philosophical principles that had underpinned alchemy since the late medieval period. It seems probable that this common underpinning, as with other supernatural beliefs and practices, facilitated a fluid circulation of ideas between practitioners from different social groups with different levels of education who sought different goals from their alchemical investigations.

Moreover, Jonson's allusions to Paracelsan alchemy are intended to satirize those who misunderstand such erudite material. In particular, Sir Epicure's intellectual interest in alchemy, exemplified by his allegorical interpretation of classical myth (II.i.88-104), distinguishes him from the other deceived characters and extends Jonson's satire of credulity to include an attack upon those whose fantasies of power and wealth are fuelled by such intellectual sources. The amateur erudition of Sir Epicure portrays the adaptation of more elitist, intellectual, alchemy into a form consistent with the practical method and material temptations which motivated much popular magic and which are directly satirized in the supernatural assistance offered to Dapper and Drugger.

References to two of the most famous English occultists, Kelley who had died in 1595 and Dee, who had died as recently as 1608, illustrate further that the play's focus is on the broad sweep of alchemical thought, rather than the enquiries of particular notable figures. Sir Epicure's reference to Subtle as 'a man, the Emp'rour / Has courted, aboue KELLEY' (IV.i.89-90), merely reinforces a

sense of Sir Epicure's gullibility and self-delusion by equating Subtle with high profile contemporary figures. Subtle's instructions to Drugger concerning his sign include a veiled reference to Dee as part of a crude rendering of Drugger's name into a symbolic form:

He first shall haue a bell, that's ABEL:

And by it, standing one, whose name is DEE,

In a rugg gowne; there's D. and Rug, that's DRVG:

And, right anenst him, a Dog snarling Er;

There's DRVGGER, ABEL DRVGGER. That's his signe.

And here's now mysterie, and hieroglyphick!

(II.vi.19-24)

The overall impact of this is laughable as the audience wonders at Drugger's gullibility. Subtle is simply trading on the general reputation of Dee, who had died in 1608 or 1609, before the first performance of The Alchemist.<sup>36</sup> There is nothing to suggest that Subtle is aware of the intellectual links between Dee's own experiments and erudite Continental philosophy uncovered by historians like Frances Yates and a distinction is not made between the investigations of Dee and other, more popularist, approaches to magic which Subtle's art encompasses. However, this passage does show Subtle attempting to harness the notoriety of Dee and Kelly to bolster his authority in front of credulous clients. The extravagant play on Dee's name illustrates Subtle's unscrupulous combination of sources particularly well, in a context where Subtle is already conflating the contemporary use of street signs with the talismans associated with many forms of contemporary magic.<sup>37</sup>

Jonson's broad objective in The Alchemist, therefore, is to draw both upon accounts of supernatural fraud and a range of contemporary beliefs regarding the supernatural on which the deceptions of the fraudsters are founded. His aim is to satirize a succession of characters whose credulity concerning the efficacy of practices founded on such beliefs is a consequence of their

ignorance and lack of perception. In their different ways, only Surly and Lovewit show the ability to uncover the fraud of Subtle, Face and Dol.

The fraud of Subtle and his colleagues, moreover, relies to a considerable extent upon their ability to create their own inner drama by assuming other identities and also simulating events that do not actually happen. For example, in accordance with Jonson's dislike for such action, the spectacle of Subtle's alchemical laboratory is banished offstage for the duration of the play. Ultimately, it is shown to be illusory, even within the fiction of the play:

LOVEWIT

Here, I find

The emptie walls, worse than I left 'hem, smok'd,

A few crack'd pots, and glasses, and a fornace.

(V.v.38-40)

In spite of the apparent explosion of the apparatus which is heard offstage (IV.v.55 [s. d.]), it is finally made clear that Subtle's laboratory never existed.

Such episodes belong to a deeper pattern within the play. Jonson's desire to expose illusion betrays a preoccupation with the potentially deceptive power of his own dramatic medium also to be found in Volpone and The Devil in an Ass. The reference to Drugger as the 'fool' and then the instruction which he is given to wear 'HIERONYMO's old cloake, ruffe, and hat' (IV.vii.71), alludes to the central character in Thomas Kyd's spectacular Spanish Tragedy and also reminds the audience that the actor is the famous stage fool and author Robert Armin.<sup>38</sup>

In a play like Friar Bacon the audience is required to suspend its disbelief and enjoy the stage trickery as a representation with some relevance to its conceptions of the operation of magic. By contrast, in the solidly natural, everyday world of The Alchemist the illusion of the supernatural created by Subtle, Face and Dol displays its inherent theatricality to the audience, although not to their clients. Dol's performance as the 'queene of Faerie' seems specifically to criticize the improbable stage conventions accepted by contemporary audiences. The fairy costume worn by Dol would undoubtedly be recognizable as such to an audience familiar with stage fairies of the sort to

be found in Greene and Shakespeare. Indeed, continuity between the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the performers of A Midsummer Night's Dream, and the later King's Men, the performers of The Alchemist, suggests that Dol's appearance as the 'queene of Faerie' might exploit an old costume, in the same way as the Hieronimo episode.<sup>39</sup>

In The Alchemist, the suspension of disbelief which is central to the audience's acceptance of stage fairies, devils and magic in other plays is explored. In the play's representation of the supernatural, Jonson's aim is quite distinct from that of Greene in James the Fourth or Shakespeare in A Midsummer Night's Dream, for example. While A Midsummer Night's Dream, in particular, explores the existence and nature of fairies, The Alchemist more fundamentally ridicules the suppositions that underlie such dramatizations of the supernatural. The audience is always fully aware that Dol is merely playing the part of the 'queene of Faerie' and that Dapper is unbelievably credulous not to see the prostitute behind Dol's disguises, as Surly does.<sup>40</sup> For example, Subtle's comment that 'Shee has a stately presence' (V.iv.22) performs the crucial function of conditioning Dapper's response to Dol and luring him into believing the impersonation. For the audience, however, the comment merely accentuates the scale of the fraud.

A principle satiric target of The Alchemist is, therefore, the credulity of contemporary popular opinion concerning the supernatural. A conclusion of his portrayal of Face and Suble is the propensity of the ignorant to be deceived because they believe in practices which, like Drugger's sign, Subtle's alchemical apparatus or Dol's 'queene of Faerie', are intended solely to fuel the fantasies of the clients. Desire to control supernatural power is, moreover, ultimately shown to be a manifestation of a range of more ubiquitous human desires, including not only the desire for wealth, but also a desire for sexual fulfillment. Tellingly, when Face entices Mammon with Dol's 'mad' persona, he turns to the language of alchemy for a sexual metaphor:

shee'll mount you vp, like quick-siluer,

ouer the helme; and circulate, like oyle,

A very vegetall.

(II.iii.254-6)



The bathetic comic mode of the play, moreover, in particular the presentation of Dol as the 'queene of Faerie', undermines a second, related, form of popular credulity: the early modern audience's taste for comedies that present supernatural subject-matter without self-consciousness or irony.

### III. The Devil is an Ass

In The Devil is an Ass (1616), Jonson returned after an interval of six years to the supernatural as a satiric and parodic target. This time, the principal contemporary beliefs held up to ridicule are the summoning of devils and demonic possession.<sup>41</sup> The dramatic convention under parodic examination is that of the stage devil.

The Devil is an Ass is intended to recall the conventions of the morality play and, in particular, engages with the branch of that tradition which represents stage devils. The idea of 'ye divel so overcome w[ith] ye wickednes of this age that <he> thought himself ane ass' is derived from a tradition in which a devil or devils arrive on earth only to find their capacity for evil challenged by the depth of the sins of men themselves.<sup>42</sup> This plot appears in a broadly festive form in a play already considered by this study, Grim the Collier of Croydon. Peter Happé and others have argued that The Devil is an Ass has particular debts to Thomas Dekker's If This Be Not a Good Play, The Devil is in It (1611), a contemporary play that owes strong debts to the earlier morality tradition. Dekker's play employs the plot device of the visit of devils from Hell to Naples to provide a bitter satire of the Jacobean court.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, the stage devils of the morality tradition also have important similarities to those associated with the stage magician in plays like Friar Bacon. Indeed, Jonson's Prologue makes an immediate reference to The Merry Devil of Edmonton and appeals for this play to be treated as favourably by the audience as that one had been.<sup>44</sup> As well as engaging with the conventions of the morality drama, The Devil is an Ass questions the way in which the same broad tradition of stage

devils was employed in comic plays which were of more direct contemporary relevance in their portrayal of the supernatural.

In the initial discussion between Satan, Pug and the Vice Iniquity in hell, Jonson's use of the stage devil borders on the parodic. Satan's clumsy opening line, for example, may be seen to take to excess the stock laughter of both devil and vice:

Hoh, hoh, hoh, hoh, hoh, hoh, hoh, hoh, &c.

(I.i.1)

Perhaps even more strikingly, Iniquity begins to speak not in the blank verse of Satan and Pug, but in long, rambling, and end-rhymed couplets typically of thirteen or fourteen syllables, in emulation of the old-fashioned meters of earlier drama:

What is he, calls vpon me, and would seeme to lack a Vice?

Ere his words be halfe spoken, I am with him in a trice.

(I.i.44-5)

Satan's ridicule of the details of Pug's plan also parodies the more harmlessly comic activities of devils in other kinds of contemporary drama. Although some of the typical demonic activities, such as having the 'good Ribibe' hanged 'Because shee will not let you play round Robbin' suggest the more serious side to the activities of devils, Jonson dwells also on the triviality of less serious infernal schemes:

SATAN

You haue some plot, now,

Vpon a tonning of Ale, to stale the yest,

Or keepe the churne so, that the butter come not;

Spight o' the housewiues cord, or her hot spit?<sup>45</sup>

The effect of this scene is to suggest distance between the present of Jonson's Stuart London and the earlier Tudor world in which the dramatic tradition employed originated. This distance suggests that vice has increased over the intervening period, a trend which can be measured by the extent to which the stage conventions associated with morality drama now appear outmoded. As Satan notes, in 1560:

Had it been but fiue hundred, though some sixty  
 Aboue; that's fifty yeeres agone, and six,  
 (When euey great man had his Vice stand by him,  
 In his long coat, shaking his wooden dagger).<sup>46</sup>

Pug's subsequent adventures in London conclusively demonstrate that Satan is correct in his assessment that mankind now has a 'stud' of vices to 'put downe' those of Hell who held sway in the past (I.i.108-109). At every turn, Pug fails in his attempts to further the course of evil, often so spectacularly that he in fact unintentionally aids the cause of the more enlightened characters, Mrs Fitz-dottrel, Wittipol and Manly. Unintentionally, Pug acts as a messenger between Mrs Fitz-dottrel and Wittipol, hastening the improvement in her situation by the end of the play. Pug's minor stratagems, such as his attempt to entice Mrs Fitz-dottrel into corruption (II.ii.102-29), are continually contrasted with the complex plotting and cynicism that typify human affairs in the play. Even Mrs Fitz-dottrel suspects Pug's advances are a plot of her husband's (II.iii.1-5). Pug finds himself repeatedly in the position of the victim: he is beaten by Fitz-dottrel, loses the ring he has to deliver, is renamed De-vile by the fashion-conscious Mrs Tailbush and eventually imprisoned for stealing Ambler's clothes.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, The Devil is an Ass juxtaposes this engagement with pre-existing stage tradition by means of a thematic treatment of some contemporary supernatural beliefs. Both Meere-craft and Fitz-dottrel are closely associated with magic and the supernatural. Meere-craft's occupation of 'Proiecter' (I.vii.5, 9) recalls the language of alchemical transformation. The belief of Engine, the Broker, that Meere-craft can 'coniure' (I.vii.14) is not born out literally by the play. However, this

reference reflects the manner in which the modern scheming of Meere-craft represents a genuine and dangerous influence on contemporary life, unlike the genuine supernatural, which is manifested in the play by the implausible and ineffective stage devil, Pug. In its suggestion that mankind's scheming now outstrips the supernatural powers of Hell, it also looks forward to Fitz-dottrel's faked possession.<sup>48</sup>

The representation of Fitz-dottrel's supernatural interests develops most fully Jonson's ideas regarding the complex relationship between a range of contemporary beliefs regarding the supernatural, the extent of the human capacity for vice, and existing traditions of supernatural representation. Fitz-dottrel's first speech sees him complaining that not even famous contemporary magicians have yet been able to 'shew a man the Diuell, in true sort' (I.ii.5). Nevertheless, Fitz-dottrel believes that the existence of 'Coniurers' (I.ii.21) and the legal prohibition of magic prove that devils do exist. He has employed 'artists' (presumably those skilled in the magical art) to raise a devil (I.ii.22). Abandoning magic for witchcraft, he also calls on a devil to come, per accidens (I.ii.30-3). Jonson's satirical treatment of Fitz-dottrel's interest in magic and witchcraft is notably topical. References to Gresham, Foreman, Franklin and Savory all connect Fitz-dottrel's interest in magic to the contemporary interest in magic fuelled primarily by the Overbury murder.<sup>49</sup>

However, even the flawed and foolish Fitz-dottrel is perceptive enough to suspect that the supernatural does not conform to the principles that he rehearses. Specifically, no magician has managed to summon up a devil 'out of picture': a devil that follows the established iconography (I.ii.12). Although Pug's appearance in hell would presumably be generally recognizable to Fitz-dottrel as 'out of picture', Pug's entry in the third scene does nothing to allay Fitz-dottrel's annoyance since Pug has been forced by Satan to take on the body of a hanged man. Possible correspondences between the events of the play and Fitz-dottrel's beliefs concerning the supernatural are pointedly avoided. Pug does not look like a devil, and Fitz-dottrel's belief that devils have a cloven hoof is, anyway, declared by Pug to be 'a popular error'.<sup>50</sup> Pug's arrival on earth is at the right moment to be, but certainly is not, the result of Fitz-dottrel's summons. The audience knows that he has arrived on earth for the reasons explained in the previous scene. Pug's contact with Fitz-dottrel, therefore, further undermines the credibility of those contemporary beliefs concerning the

supernatural which Fitz-dottrel expounds, and so provides a further point of contact between the stage devil tradition and satire of contemporary interest in the supernatural.

This process of undermining both the form of some contemporary beliefs, and some aspects of the supernatural stage tradition, through their juxtaposition is also apparent in the close of the play. When Fitz-dottrel needs to simulate being possessed, Pug's offer of what would be genuine supernatural aid is turned down because Fitz-dottrel does not believe his claim that he is a devil:

FITZ-DOTTREL

Out you Rogue!

You most infernall counterfeit wretch! Auaunt!

Do you thinke to gull me with your AEsop's Fables?

(V.v.28-30)

In the ensuing episode, Fitz-dottrel instead fakes possession in order to regain control of his estate. Once again Jonson satirizes contemporary interest in the supernatural, although this time his target is specifically, as it had been in Act V, Scene xii of Volpone, public credulity concerning demonic possession, rather than the ineffectiveness of demonic magic. In an earlier scene, The Devil is an Ass alludes to the recent case of John Smith of Husbands Bosworth, the demoniac 'Boy o' thirteene yeere old' referred to by Meerecraft.<sup>51</sup> Nine local women were convicted of witchcraft as a result of Smith's fits and executed in July 1616. Subsequently James I exposed the boy's possession as fraudulent. The events of the case have two main points of relevance to the possession scene in the play. The sudden exposure of Fitz-dottrel's fit as simulated reflects King James' own opinions concerning a recent case. As discussed in Chapter Seven, during his reign in England James frequently demonstrated his expertise regarding the supernatural, including possession, by taking a sceptical line concerning the veracity of accounts.<sup>52</sup> The portrait of the corrupt and gullible judge Sir Paul Eitherside, who believes Fitz-dottrel's trickery, is plausibly at least in part an attack on the officials at the Leicester trial, Sir Humphrey Winch and Sergeant Randal Crew. Both were close associates of Lord Chief Justice Coke, a noted prosecutor of witches. In 1616, Coke had also been suspended for insubordination concerning disputes of jurisdiction by James.

To these recent contemporary parallels must be added some additional similarities between the detail of Fitz-dottrel's 'possession' and the details of Samuel Harsnett's exposure of fraudulent demoniac cases. Although the famous publication battle between the Harsnett and Darrel camps had raged around the turn of the seventeenth century, more than a decade before the first performance of The Devil is an Ass, Fitz-dottrel's 'possession', like that of Voltore in Volpone, not only replicates some of the details available to Jonson through those accounts of possession, but also rehearses on stage Harsnett's exposure of those symptoms as feigned.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, Fitz-dottrel's use of end-rhyming doggerel couplets perhaps recalls the affected delivery of demoniacs such as Thomas Darling:

Shee comes with a needle, and thrusts it in,  
Shee pulls out that, and shee puts in a pinne.<sup>54</sup>

For Harsnett, the expression of the spiritual struggle with the Devil by demoniacs, which seems to have drawn on a variety of folk-narrative and other non-literary forms, was an aspect of the performance of episodes of possession by alleged demoniacs like Darling which showed the transparency of their fraud. This is apparent, for example, in Harsnett's ironic account of one of the Devil's speeches through Darling, which seems to resemble the subject-matter of a folk play as much as any other provenance:

It is to be maruelled (by such as delight in wonders) how the Deuill was afflicted: as appeareth by his wordes (forsooth) but deliuered by the boy [...] Rodolphus, Belzebub can doe no good, his head is stricken off with a word.<sup>55</sup>

The satire in Fitz-dottrel's 'possession' episode, therefore, seems to have two interrelated targets. Incompetent officials greedy for personal authority, like Coke himself, are criticized through the portrait of Eitherside. More generally, Eitherside also holds up to ridicule officials and others who

are too ready to accept cases of possession, through the allusions to recent, and less recent, cases of fraudulent possession which inform Fitz-dottrel's performance.<sup>56</sup>

Without challenging the credibility of supernatural powers *per se*, The Devil is an Ass, therefore, satirizes the credulity of some contemporaries regarding some kinds of supernatural phenomena. Not only does the play suggest that magic is ineffective, but possession is also shown to be a potentially suspect phenomenon. In the context of the general belief of the other characters in Fitz-dottrel's possession and the disbelief voiced in the play concerning Pug's supernatural status, Guilthead's reaction to Fitz-dottrel's performance is highly ironic:

How the Diuel can act!

(V.viii.77)

More directly than The Alchemist, The Devil is an Ass demands that its readers take personal note of its satirical commentary on their own lives. Not only does it allude to specific recent events, it directly holds a mirror up to its own audience in the figure of Fitz-dottrel. As the events of the play keep him from his original intention of watching The Devil is an Ass, on the day on which the play is set (I.iv.21), the audience is encouraged to see Fitz-dottrel as one of their own. On a moral level, the play shows the triumph of honourable and responsible behaviour over human greed and deception. However, disaster is only averted, at the last, by a chance event. The forces of greed and deception are sufficiently powerful in the play not only almost to triumph, but also to make the Devil's agent, a stage devil, seem an ass by comparison. The unfortunate Pug actually foils the plans of the representatives of human folly and greed, Fitz-dottrel, Meere-craft and Everill, who had aimed to seize the disputed Fitz-dottrel estate from the hands of the more responsible and benign faction consisting of Mrs Fitz-dottrel, Wittipol and Manly. Although the play shows the triumph of social order and exposes the weakness of a poor judge, royal power is never directly manifested and the absence of such authority as part of the restoration of order is disconcerting.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, to a greater extent than in The Alchemist, the emphasis in The Devil is an Ass is on the errors and vices of mankind, rather than how they might be corrected.

One of the human errors explored by the play is the credulity with which men accept conventional wisdom concerning the supernatural. Fitz-dottrel's popularist interest in demonic activity is shown to be misguided. The traditional motif of the devil upstaged by the degree of vice now exhibited by mankind further successfully contributes to this broader theme. The 'genuine' devil Pug is marginalized by misguided human beliefs, and ultimately by fraudulent impersonation of the supernatural, fuelled by Fitz-dottrel's self-interest.

The suggestion in the play that the stage devil convention is an outmoded form with no credibility as a portrayal of the supernatural contributes to this overall argument. Although the final report concerning Pug's disappearance asserts his status as a genuine manifestation of the supernatural, the play has undermined throughout the credibility of the stage devil. The comic premise of Hell upstaged by human vice leads to the suggestion, inferred in the opening scene, that the clumsy mechanics of the stage devil are no more credible a representation of the supernatural than Fitz-dottrel's faked possession. To accept the credibility of such performances is to demonstrate a human weakness not unlike Fitz-dottrel's yearning to see a devil. Moreover, Fitz-dottrel's simulated possession shows the audience a different kind of comedy. The expectation that the audience will accept as plausible, and of wider relevance, the stage spectacle of the supernatural with which it is presented is prevalent in much of the drama considered by this study. In The Devil is an Ass, these conventions of the form are challenged by the expression of an alternative conception of supernatural comic drama. The play associates the theatricality of stage performance with a wider, more sceptical, tradition in the interpretation of contemporary supernatural phenomena. Furthermore, where The Tempest explored, in a comic mode, the problems of interpreting and understanding supernatural phenomena, The Devil is an Ass prompts its audience to question more fundamentally the implications of the association of the supernatural with theatrical performance.

To this extent, Jonson follows Samuel Harsnett in promoting, not only in The Devil is an Ass, but also in The Alchemist and Volpone, a concept of supernatural stage representation that derives comic energy from laying open its own status as imitation. For Harsnett, the celebrated cases of possession that he reviews are a kind of theatre ('deuil-play'), enacted by the demoniacs, which furthered the wider seditious, or otherwise undesirable, purposes of those who sought to exorcize or



dispossess them. Episodes of possession appear tragic if taken at face value, but can be seen as comic by virtue of the fact that their status as performance is revealed. Harsnett himself makes this explicit by establishing an analogy between the performances of the demoniacs exorcized by Catholic missionaries with the Amphitryo of Plautus:

The end of Comedie is a plaudite to the Authour, and Actors; the one for his inuention, the other for his good action: of a Tragaedie, the end is mouing of affection, and passion in the spectators. Our Daemonopoiia, or deuil-fiction, is Tragico-comaedia, a mixture of both, as Amphitryo in Plautus is: and did by the good inuention, and cariage, obtaine both these ends. First it had a plaudite often! O Catholicam fidem! and O that all the Protestans in England did see the power of the Catholick Church: and it mooued affection with expression of teares. Marwood [a demoniac servant of Anthony Babington] did tumble, foame, and rage so liuely, when hee was touched with Campions girdle, as the gulld spectators did weepe to see the iugling knaue, in such a supposed plight. But our Romaine Authors, Edmunds, and his holy crue (his twelue holy disciples) the plotters of this deuil-play, had a farther and deeper end, which by this impious deuse they had atchieued pretie well, and that was the gaining of soules for his Holines, and for Hell, the bewitching of the poore people, with an admirations of the power of theyr Romish Church, and priesthood, by these cody miracles, and wonders.<sup>58</sup>

#### IV. Jonson's comedy of the supernatural in context

Criticism of the extent of contemporary credulity regarding the supernatural and also of traditions of comic supernatural portrayal, such as the stage devil, emerge as significant themes in The Alchemist and The Devil is an Ass. To understand more clearly the context for Jonson's treatment of this material it is useful to return to the question of Jonson's personal beliefs regarding religion and the supernatural, and also to the question of his representation of the supernatural in the masque tradition.

The most influential interpretation of the intertextual relationships between Harsnett and the early modern stage is provided by Stephen Greenblatt in his account of Edgar's madness in Shakespeare's King Lear. Greenblatt seeks to include Jonson within his conceptualization of the theatre as 'a fraudulent institution that never pretends to be anything but fraudulent, an institution that calls forth what is not, that signifies absence, that transforms the literal into metaphorical'.<sup>59</sup> In an earlier version of this account, Greenblatt argues:

Characteristically, in Jonson, this secular exorcism is comic, and its demonic object is theatricality itself, so that the author of The Devil is an Ass seems at war with his own medium. The problem in this late play is that the antitheatrical Jonson has all too clearly won the war; in consequence, the exorcized theatrical performance seems dead.<sup>60</sup>

Gary Taylor has recently critiqued the limitations of Greenblatt's approach. Notably for this study, Taylor surfaces an important distinction between the demonic and the divine in early modern thought which is less well articulated by Greenblatt. Furthermore, Taylor argues that Greenblatt's 'fraudulent institution' should be complemented by an appreciation of how the theatre could also present 'proximity to presence'. In the case of Jonson's Sejanus, Taylor identifies this 'almost presence' as creating 'a moment of reverent (Catholic) affect'.<sup>61</sup>

Given that both Volpone and The Alchemist were first performed in a period in which Jonson professed to be returning to the Anglican Church, but which his comments to Drummond would still place within his twelve years of his Catholic recusancy, any arguments regarding the relationship between Jonson's religious convictions and these works must be advanced with caution. Indeed, we may infer from the evidence that, as he professed to be a loyal subject even when he was a Catholic, Jonson's views were complex throughout this period. Yet, it is possible to accommodate Jonson's comic representations of the supernatural within a framework of loyal Catholicism, even though they demonstrate the characteristics of Greenblatt's theatre of demystification, rather than Taylor's 'proximity to presence'.

The kind of scepticism regarding the credulity of the populace which is manifest in Jonson's earlier comedies, as well as in The Devil is an Ass which was written after Jonson's professed return to the Anglican Church, was not solely the preserve of Protestants like Scot and Harsnett. Even among Catholics, care was always taken to determine whether the apparent symptoms of possession might have a natural cause. Across Europe popular magic and superstition were denounced by Catholic, as well as Protestant writers.<sup>62</sup> However, by the early seventeenth century, the interpretation of alleged cases of possession in England as fraudulent had become politically charged. The exorcisms carried out by Catholic priests were argued by Harsnett to form one part of a larger treasonous Catholic threat to the monarchy which also involved securing 'masses of gold, silver and treasure'. For Protestant polemicists like Harsnett, the 'tragedie', as he describes the episodes of exorcism staged by Catholic priests in England, led the 'besotted people [...] to renounce theyr duty, loue, and alleageance to theyr naturall Soueraigne'.<sup>63</sup> Although all Catholic priests could exorcize, Harsnett's account in his Declaration of the exorcisms led by the Jesuit Weston in the 1580s, first published in 1603, carried additional political significance. By that point, a split between the Jesuits and a loyalist faction in the English Catholic priesthood had occurred and the loyal faction had begun negotiations with Bishop Bancroft, Harsnett's patron.<sup>64</sup>

Jonson's representation of possession in Volpone could be seen as an attempt to convey solid political loyalty, in a period when his religious beliefs may have placed him under suspicion, without gainsaying Catholic doctrine, which itself placed an emphasis on determining the veracity of alleged cases of possession. By the time he returned to the question of possession in The Devil is an Ass Jonson was, according to his own evidence, no longer a practising Catholic. However, the recent case of John Smith had continued to demonstrate how the exposure of fraudulent possession could be used to make manifest and confirm the authority of the monarch. Jonson's possession scenes are, therefore, not only aligned with Harsnett's interpretation of ostensibly serious events as comic. They are also aligned both with the political agenda of Harsnett's works and the identification in several high profile cases of James's authority as monarch with the disclosure of cases of possession as fraudulent. In this way, we can see Jonson's plays as unusual in the context of this study. In a more overt way than in the other plays considered, Jonson's comedies bring

together issues of demonological interpretation, monarchical authority and also the politics of religion. James's intervention in cases of demonology has already been noted as a context for the representation of witchcraft in The Witch, and overtones of pro-Protestant ideology have been suggested in plays as different as Doctor Faustus and A Midsummer Night's Dream. It is in Jonson's work for the stage, however, that discourses relating to the supernatural, contemporary political authority and religion are brought together in a coherent comic representation.

Jonson's comic representation of the supernatural is, moreover, expressly distanced from the approach to the subject adopted in several prominent plays, and many minor plays, of the period. The Alchemist, The Devil is an Ass and Voltore's 'possession' in Volpone are not only examples of Greenblatt's theatre of demystification with its explicit theatricality. They also parody the contrasting approach to supernatural theatre that informs the majority of the plays that have been considered by this study. In plays as diverse as Doctor Faustus, The Tempest and The Two Merry Milkmaids, the relevance of the play to the audience was shaped fundamentally by that audience's acceptance of a notion of theatrical performance which does not exhibit the same tendency towards demystification in its representation of the supernatural. Rather, their generally constructive alignment of performance and subject-matter are better thought of as a variant of Taylor's notion of 'proximity to presence'. Jonson's critique of that kind of theatre in his own comedies challenges, in particular, the potential of performance in that mode to act as a meaningful signifier for manifestations of supernatural phenomena in the real world.

On the surface, Jonson's comic theatre of demystification stands in stark contrast to his masques. Representations of witches, fairies and alchemy each figure prominently in masques Jonson worked on in this period. The witches in The Masque of Queens (1609) have already received some consideration in the previous chapter. Oberon the Fairy Prince (1611), a masque for Prince Henry, presents an Arthurian scenario which culminates in the masquing of 'fays' and 'princely Oberon'. The antimasque of Love Restored (1612) concerns the entry to the masque of 'the honest plain country spirit and harmless, Robin Goodfellow' (ll. 52-3), a character who sustains some comparisons with Scot's mischievous fairies, with Shakespeare's Puck, and with other comic

supernatural servants in earlier drama. Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court (1616) presents Mercury emerging from the furnace of Vulcan and the 'Cyclope':

MERCURY            O the variety of torment that I have endured in the reign of the  
                               Cylops...The whole household of'em are become alchemists [...]  
                               Howsoever they may pretend under the specious names of Geber, Arnold,  
                               Lully, Bombast of Hohenheim to commit miracles in art and treason again'  
                               nature [...] You that are both the Sol and Jupiter of this sphere, Mercury  
                               invokes your majesty against the sooty tribe here; for in your favor only I  
                               grow recovered and warm.<sup>65</sup>

Whatever the similarities of subject-matter between these masques and the comic representation of the supernatural on the early modern stage, the representation of the supernatural in the masques is fundamentally determined by different ideological objectives. In each case, the portrayal of the supernatural, whether benign or malicious in intent, whether closely allied to contemporary authority which alleged the existence of the supernatural (as in the case of The Masque of Queens) or satirizing attempts at alchemy (as in Mercury Vindicated), contributes ultimately to an account of royal authority as a manifestation of higher, cosmic, notions of order. In the masques, the representation of the supernatural is directed towards the illustration of that royal presence, which, in a circular argument, legitimates and gives meaning to those representations.<sup>66</sup> While affinities between these portrayals and Taylor's theatre of 'proximity to presence' are noticeable, there is a significant difference as cultural institutions between the theatre of the professional companies and the performance of the masques which fundamentally influences their dramatic modes. Whether offered for court or public performance, Jonson's comedies belong to a theatre which, ultimately determined by the economics of consumption, had freedom under license to engage with the wider currents in its own culture and also to interrogate and explore its own modes of performance. The masque, while providing some opportunity for criticism, is formally dedicated to articulating the

presence of royal authority. This fundamentally shapes the nature of its engagement with the wider contemporary culture.<sup>67</sup>

Through the consideration of Jonson's comic representation of the supernatural, therefore, a profile emerges of an individual playwright engaging in complex ways with the artistic and ideological currents of his age. On the one hand, there is Taylor's promulgator of 'reverent (Catholic) affect' in *Sejanus*, and the poet of the masques. At the same time, Jonson creates comic representations of the supernatural for the professional stage which exploit notions of the demystification of theatre which run contrary to Taylor's notion of 'proximity to presence' or 'almost presence'. To some extent, these contrasts across Jonson's work can be reconciled if Jonson is considered to be pursuing, through different mediums, the deeper aesthetic aim of the exposure of moral truth. In his *Discoveries*, Jonson notes:

If I see any thing that toucheth mee, shall I come forth a betrayer of my selfe, presently? No, if I be wise, I'le dissemble it; if honest, I'le avoid it: lest I publish that on my owne forehead, which I saw there noted without a title.<sup>68</sup>

The masques clearly work towards the expression, albeit sometimes qualified, of higher truths regarding royal authority. Jonson expects the audience to accept his representation of the supernatural in the masques because that representation is not legitimated by its engagement with external notions of credibility regarding the supernatural. Rather, it exists to sustain, and to be sustained by, a higher truth regarding royal, and ultimately cosmic, order.

By contrast, his comic stage representations of the supernatural demonstrate other, equally valid, truths. Prominent among these is the credulity of his contemporaries in the face of fraud, scheming and real human weakness, a subject which, in the case of demonic possession, Jonson is able to reconcile both with loyalty to his monarch and, we may conjecture, with his own religious views. In his efforts to demystify the representation of the supernatural in his own comic plays, Jonson illustrates his dissatisfaction with some other contemporary stage representations of the supernatural. A particular concern that emerges in his comedies is the potential in the period for a

different kind of engagement between comic representation and wider beliefs regarding the supernatural. This other kind of engagement, which has been illustrated throughout this study, relied upon the audience to accept, on some level, a connection between the performed supernatural and wider beliefs regarding the existence of supernatural forces. For Jonson, such connections are implausible and ignorant. By contrast, Jonson's comic portrayal of devils, alchemy and the other manifestations of the supernatural in his plays demystify their own theatricality. Ultimately, however, the extent of this criticism is limited. Although they target a range of contemporary beliefs and characteristics of stage performance, the scepticism of Jonson's comedies does not penetrate to the heart of the credibility of the supernatural forces presented. It allows for the co-existence, within an integrated individual world-view, of the personal encounters with the supernatural that Jonson reported to Drummond.

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Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Conversations with Drummond, in Ben Jonson, ed. by C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, 11 vols, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925-52), I, 128-78, II, 306-11. The contractions retained in this edition have been expanded within square brackets. Unless otherwise specified, references to all of Jonson's works will be to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, II, 261-72.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Barton, Ben Jonson, Dramatist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 7-8, 223.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Gary Taylor, 'Divine [ ]sences', Shakespeare Survey, 54 (2001), 13-30; William W E Slights, Ben Jonson and the Art of Secrecy (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1994)

<sup>5</sup> II, 246-51. David Riggs, Ben Jonson: A Life (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 51-2, 126-30, 141-2.

<sup>6</sup> Titus Maccius Plautus, The Ghost (Mostellaria), in The Rope and Other Plays, trans. by E. F. Watling (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 21-84. Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Canon's Yeoman's Tale' in The Riverside Chaucer, pp.270-81 (VIII.554-1481). 'The Conjuraton, or Phastasm' and 'The Art of Alchymy' in Desiderius Erasmus, The Colloquies, or Familiar Discourses, trans. by 'H. M. Gent.' (London, 1671), pp. 250-7 and 258-65.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, The Bridling, Sadling and Ryding, of a Rich Churle in Hampshire, By the Subtill Practise of one Judeth Philips (1595) in Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618, pp. 213-18; W. S., The Puritan: or The Widow of Watling Street, ed. by John S. Farmer ([London?]: Tudor Facsimile Texts, 1911). The Puritan was entered in the Stationer's Register for 6.9.1607, was printed in the same year and appears in the third and fourth folios of Shakespeare. See W. David Kay, Ben Jonson: A Literary Life (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 111.

<sup>8</sup> Significant studies of Jonson's comic objectives and dramatic technique include Alan C. Dessen, Jonson's Moral Comedy ([n.p.]: Northwestern University Press, 1971; Jonas A. Barish, 'Jonson and the Loathed Stage', in A Celebration of Ben Jonson: Papers Presented at the University of Toronto in October 1972, ed. by William Blisset and others (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), pp.27-53); Anne Barton, Ben Jonson, Dramatist. Comparative studies of the dramatic techniques of Jonson and Shakespeare include Robert Ornstein, 'Shakespearian and Jonsonian Comedy', Shakespeare Survey, 22 (1969), 43-6, and Harry Levin, 'Two Magician Comedies: "The Tempest" and "The Alchemist"', Shakespeare Survey 22 (1969), 47-58.

<sup>9</sup> 'To the Reader', ll.6-7 (original in italics), in The Alchemist, in Ben Jonson, V, 273-407. The Alchemist was first published in quarto in 1612 and the 1616 Folio dates its first performance to 1610. See Ben Jonson, V, 275, 408.

<sup>10</sup> Volpone, in Ben Jonson, V, 1-147, 'Epistle' l. 79. The title-page in the 1616 Folio dates the first performance to 1605. See Ben Jonson, V, 15; The Staple of News, in Ben Jonson, VI, 271-382, '1st Intermeane' ll. 34-6 (original italicization reversed). The title-page in the 1631 Folio dates the first performance to 1625. See Ben Jonson, VI, 277.



- <sup>11</sup> Kay, p. 149; Leah S. Marcus, The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Pastimes (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 94. The Devil is an Ass, ed. by Peter Happé, The Revels Plays (Manchester and New York, Manchester, 1994), 'The Prologue' l. 22 (footnote); Doctor Faustus, p. 50.
- <sup>12</sup> Dessen, Jonson, p. 229.
- <sup>13</sup> Gerald Eades Bentley, The Jacobean and Caroline Stage: Dramatic Companies and Players, 7 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941-68), VI, 152, 173, 242-3.
- <sup>14</sup> cf. The Tempest, III.ii.3, 4, 7. Bartholomew Fair, in Ben Jonson, VI, 1-141, 'The Induction on the Stage' l. 127. Jonson later makes reference to 'Tales, Tempests, and such like Drolleries', *ibid.*, l. 130. See Kay, p. 113; Harry Levin, 'Two Magician Comedies', pp. 47-8. The title-page in the 1631 Folio dates the first performance of the play to 1614. See Ben Jonson, VI, 9.
- <sup>15</sup> The Staple of News, '1st Intermeane' ll. 48-52 (original italicization reversed). Doctor Lamb was a notable contemporary astrologer, who was also suspected of, and charged with, practising magic. See Ben Jonson, X, 267-8. See also Chapter Two, Section I, above, and Conclusion, below.
- <sup>16</sup> Volpone: Or the Fox, ed. by Brian Parker, The Revels Plays (Manchester and New York; Manchester University press, 1983; revised 1999), pp. 30-1. For an example of reference to apparently inexplicable human behaviour as possession in Classical comedy, see Titus Maccius Plautus, Amphitryo, in The Rope and Other Plays, trans. by E. F. Watling, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), pp. 221-84 (p. 261).
- <sup>17</sup> V.xii.24-8. Corvino has already described Voltore as possessed or obsessed at V.x, ll. 10, 49-50, and V.xii.9-10. Earlier, the legacy hunters are all described by Mosca as 'possest' (V.ii.24).
- <sup>18</sup> On 'multiply', see I.iv, ll. 2 and 118; for alchemical references associated with Scoto, see II.ii.117, 130-2; for references to conjuring in sexual contexts, see II.v.54-6 and II.vi.65. Elsewhere, the reference to Volpone as 'the great impostor' (IV.vi.24), is reminiscent of the kind of linguistic formations which could be associated with the Devil. See Clark, Thinking with Demons, pp. 80-93.
- <sup>19</sup> Jonathan Goldberg, James I and the Politics of Literature (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1983), pp. 74-80.

- <sup>20</sup> Volpone, ed. by Brian Parker, footnote to V.xii.24-31. Possession and obsession in early modern England is considered in Chapter Two, Section III, above.
- <sup>21</sup> The place of alchemy within early modern culture is considered in Chapter Two, Section II, above.
- <sup>22</sup> See Edgar Hill Duncan, 'Jonson's "Alchemist" and the Literature of Alchemy', PMLA, 61 (1946), 699-710. For an introduction to alchemy, see 'Appendix I: Jonson's Use of Alchemy and a Glossary of Alchemical Terms', in The Alchemist, ed. by Alvin B. Kernan, The Yale Ben Jonson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 227-39.
- <sup>23</sup> The Alchemist, II.i.46-61; Thomas, Religion, p. 271. The reference in the play to 'dead HOLLAND, liuing ISAAC' (I.ii.109) further connects the play with Paracelsus. John and John Isaac Holland are believed to have lived in the early fifteenth century and were associated intellectually with him by Paracelsans. Paracelsus made use of their works in manuscript form and some were later published. In his translation of one of Paracelsus' medical works, John Hester (fl.1576-93) included a preface by 'Johann Isaacus Hollandus'. See Ben Jonson, X, p. 63, and Paul H. Kocher, 'John Hester, Paracelsan', in Joseph Quincey Adams: Memorial Studies, ed. by James G. McManaway and others (Washington D.C.: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948), pp. 621-38.
- <sup>24</sup> Barton, pp. 137-8.
- <sup>25</sup> Mebane, pp. 137, 139, 145.
- <sup>26</sup> Harry Levin, 'Magician', p. 55, notes this side to Jonson's satire, commenting that 'each of Jonson's plays reveals, so to speak, the tricks of another trade'.
- <sup>27</sup> Dapper refers to Subtle as 'the cunning-man' at I.ii.8.
- <sup>28</sup> 'The Argument', ll. 10-11. I.i.95-8.
- <sup>29</sup> Thomas, Religion, pp. 253-4.
- <sup>30</sup> For the creation of amulets and the provision of familiars as an aid for gambling, see Thomas, Religion, p. 275. Subtle's fraudulent use of alchemy, fairy magic and talismans is discussed in greater detail below.

<sup>31</sup> Barton, p. 145. On the published accounts of the cases of Judith Philips (1595) and John and Alice West (1613), see Gamini Salgado, The Elizabethan Underworld, pp. 94-6, 93. On the Rogers case, see C. J. Sisson, 'A Topical Reference in "The Alchemist"', in Joseph Quincey Adams: Memorial Studies, ed. by James G. McManaway and others (Washington D.C.: Folger Institute Library, 1948), pp. 739-41, and Ben Jonson, X, 47-8. The place of fairies within early modern English culture has already been considered generally in Chapter Two, Section IV, and the incidence of fairies in literature and drama in Chapter Six, Section I, above.

<sup>32</sup> Heptameron, seu Elementa Magica Pietri de Abano Philosophi, appended to Cornelius Agrippa's De Occulta Philosophia (?1576). The translation is from The Alchemist, ed. by F. H. Mares, The Revels Plays (London: Methuen, 1967), p. 39.

<sup>33</sup> Butler, Ritual Magic, pp.156-7.

<sup>34</sup> For example, the trick with a hollow piece of coal is referred to in both The Alchemist (I.i.90) and 'The Canons Yeoman's Tale' (VIII.1160-5). It seems probable that both reflect more widely-disseminated stories and actual contemporary practices.

<sup>35</sup> 'The Canon's Yeoman's Tale', VIII.784-94.

<sup>36</sup> See Woolley, p. 322

<sup>37</sup> Ben Jonson, X, p. 90, notes the common use of such rebuses in early modern London. For a conjectural account of the shadowy career of Kelley, see Robert Turner, Elizabethan Magic: The Art and the Magus (Shaftesbury: Element Books, 1989), pp. 153-4.

<sup>38</sup> The Alchemist, ed. by Elizabeth Cook, pp. 127-8. Jonson was probably very familiar with The Spanish Tragedy, having been paid to write additions to the play by Henslowe, although Jonson's authorship of the extant additions is contested. See Kyd, Spanish Tragedy, ed. by J. R. Mulryne, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv. Barish, p. 49 et passim, discusses Jonson's more general suspicion of theatricality.

<sup>39</sup> See Andrew Gurr, The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642, 2nd edn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 46, 222, 226.

<sup>40</sup> II.iii.226, 247-8.

<sup>41</sup> The Divell is an Asse, in Ben Jonson, VI, 143-270. The Devil is an Ass was first printed in the

1631 Folio, in which its title-page dates the first performance to 1616. See *ibid*, VI, 145, 155; Robert C. Evans, 'Contemporary Contexts of Jonson's "The Devil is an Ass"', Comparative Drama, 26 (1992), 140-76 (pp.140-1).

<sup>42</sup> Conversations with Drummond, ll. 412-3.

<sup>43</sup> The Devil is an Ass, ed. by Happé, 'Introduction', pp. 29-31; Marcus, Politics, p. 98; Kay, p. 149; Dessen, Jonson, p. 225; Barton, p. 222.

<sup>44</sup> 'Prologue', ll. 19-22. See Barton, p. 222, although she does not distinguish this group from the previous one. Dessen, Jonson, pp. 223-4. See also Marcus, Politics, pp. 94-5.

<sup>45</sup> I.i.16, 18 and 12-15. Ben Jonson, X, 220, suggests that to 'play round Robbin' here means 'virtually to play the incubus'.

<sup>46</sup> I.i.81-5, The Devil is an Ass, ed. by Happé, footnote to I.i.81, notes that Satan's chronology starts in A.D. 1000, when he was loosed from Hell.

<sup>47</sup> II.iii.20-7, III.vi.15-33, IV.iv.186-90, V.v.1-32.

<sup>48</sup> Dessen, Jonson, pp. 230-1.

<sup>49</sup> I.ii.2-3. See Ben Jonson, X, 226-7. On the Overbury murder, see Thomas, Religion, p. 278 and above, pp. 242-3. Jonson had been a close friend of Overbury, whose murder may, therefore, have augmented Jonson's rage concerning court politics and corruption. See Marcus, Politics, p. 103.

<sup>50</sup> I.iii.30. Cf. Shakespeare's Othello, in The Complete Works, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 819-53 (V.ii.292): 'I look down towards his feet, but that's a fable'.

<sup>51</sup> V.v.50. G. L. Kittredge, 'King James I and "The Devil is an Ass"', Modern Philology, 9 (1911-12), 195-209 (pp. 197-209); Marcus, Politics, pp. 91-4.

<sup>52</sup> See above, Chapter Seven, p. 242.

<sup>53</sup> Devil is an Ass, ed. by Happé, footnotes to V.viii.35-144, notes parallels between the symptoms enacted by Fitz-dottrel and the vocabulary used in the scene and Harsnett's A Discovery of the Fravdlent Practises of Iohn Darrel.

<sup>54</sup> V.viii.49-50, original in italics.

- <sup>55</sup> Harsnett, Discovery, p. 48.
- <sup>56</sup> Marcus, Politics, pp. 91-3; Evans, pp. 158-65.
- <sup>57</sup> See Marcus, Politics, pp. 99-105. Evans, pp. 158-65, sees the play as a slightly less compromised reflection of royal policy and authority. Barton, p. 234, views the play's conclusion as conveying 'a relativistic and tolerant view of the world'.
- <sup>58</sup> Harsnett, Declaration, pp. 150-1. 'Edmunds' was an alias of the Jesuit William Weston.
- <sup>59</sup> Greenblatt, 'Shakespeare and the Exorcists', p. 127.
- <sup>60</sup> Greenblatt, 'Loudun and London', p. 340. Although insightful, Greenblatt's article implies that the processes at work in The Devil is an Ass are central to early modern drama. By contrast his study contests that the representation of the supernatural was not fundamentally defined by antitheatricity.
- <sup>61</sup> Gary Taylor, 'Divine [ ]sences', pp. 30, 23.
- <sup>62</sup> Clark, Thinking with Demons, pp. 468-71; Walker, Unclean Spirits, p. 10.
- <sup>63</sup> Harsnett, Declaration, pp. 13, 151. Walker, pp. 28-42, gives accounts of sixteenth-century French cases which further illustrate the complex interaction of interpretations of possession and confessional politics in the period.
- <sup>64</sup> Walker, Unclean Spirits, p. 45.
- <sup>65</sup> Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court, in The Complete Masques, ed. by Orgel, pp. 213-23 (ll. 34-6, 40-2, 96-8); Love Restored, *ibid*, pp. 186-197 (ll. 52-3); The Masque of Queens, *ibid*, pp. 122-141; Oberon the Fairy Prince, *ibid*, pp. 159-73 (l. 282). Dates are those of Orgel for first performances.
- <sup>66</sup> For a detailed study of Love Restored and royal authority, see Marcus, Politics, pp. 27-36,
- <sup>67</sup> Contrasting views regarding consumption and the early modern stage are provided by Greenblatt, 'Shakespeare and the Exorcists', p. 126-8, and Gary Taylor, 'Feeling Bodies', in Shakespeare and the Twentieth Century: the Selected Proceedings of the International Shakespeare Association World Congress, Los Angeles, ed. by Jonathan Bate, Jill L. Levenson and Dieter Mehl (Newark and London: University of Delaware Press and Associated University Presses, 1996),

pp. 258-79. Chapter Seven, above, has already considered an example of the tensions that may emerge when the aesthetics of the masque and the stage are brought together.

<sup>68</sup> Timber, or Discoveries, in Ben Jonson, VIII, 555-649 (ll. 2325-9). Quoted in Marcus, Politics, p. 27.

### Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to consider the relevance of comic representations of the supernatural for early modern audiences. A complex relationship has been established between the comic representation of the supernatural and currents of thought in the period regarding the advisability, the morality, the practicality and the simple possibility of human traffic with the supernatural.

In bringing comic representation of the supernatural to the stage, it is clear that playwrights could draw on a range of comic resources. A pattern of comic, including tragicomic, representation of the supernatural has emerged which is often characterized by particular formal elements. Most notably these include the association of the supernatural with particular kinds of staged entertainment or spectacle and with the production of surprising reversals of fortune, especially when this is associated with a movement towards a play's comic catastrophe. The tradition of stage devilry and apparent associations between fairies and folly were also resources at the disposal of the playwrights, as was a broad stereotype for the stage magician. A series of parallels has also been explored between plays and wide-ranging evidence of early modern beliefs and practices relating to the supernatural. A cultural context has been established for each of the plays considered. Where appropriate, this embraces not only strains of thought accessible to élite intellectual groups in the period, but also modes of thought which circulated more widely.

This study has attempted in particular to explore ways in which formal and culturally contextual approaches might be brought together to shed further light on the relevance of plays for their audiences. Accordingly, plays have been considered as fictional spaces which neither simplistically document the wider culture to which they belong, nor exist in an aesthetic vacuum divorced from that wider context. In doing this, the dichotomy between broadly moral, and broadly festive theories of comedy established by a proportion of modern critical thinking has been substantially broken down. First, the nature of this engagement between comic stage representation and wider beliefs regarding the supernatural has been refined by a review of early modern notions of the boundaries between fact and fiction relating to the supernatural. Secondly, extant texts have been considered as evidence of stage performances of the supernatural, and so as our most

substantial record of a commodity which must have aimed to fulfil a range of audience demands. The potential attraction to audiences of witnessing the enactment of supernatural phenomena, malicious or benign, which would not have found such open treatment in other contemporary contexts, has been explored. This attraction has been considered in the context of contrasting ideas regarding the contract between performance and audience associated with comic representation, as presented by Greenblatt and Taylor. To this complex of ideas has been added an awareness of the more general place of the supernatural in meeting individual and collective desires and needs in the early modern period, and the potential influence of that trend on the drama.

Several famous examples attest to the potential of the stage supernatural to be identified directly with the actual presence in the theatre of the supernatural.<sup>1</sup> Overall, however, a picture more generally emerges of early modern audiences with a sophisticated understanding of the difference between stage performance and reality, who attended plays that engaged in a variety of ways (and undoubtedly to varying degrees of commercial and artistic success) with currents of thought regarding the supernatural. Consideration of a series of plays has suggested how the presentation of the supernatural could be underpinned by the use of comic, or partly comic, modes.

Recognition that contrasting notions of performance inform the plays considered by this study is crucial to an understanding of their relevance for an early modern audience. Greenblatt's theatre of 'demystification', as manifested particularly in the plays of Jonson considered by this study, is the more easily understood from a modern perspective. It attests to the ability of early modern audiences to understand the implications of the status of theatre as performance for the representation of the supernatural. However, this study has also argued for the significant influence throughout this period of another conception of theatre. In this, comic modes allowed a different kind of expression to supernatural subject-matter even where that material might in other contexts have remained hidden or forbidden. The relevance for an early modern audience of many episodes of supernatural comic spectacle, and of Jonson's critique of that kind of theatre, is only intelligible once it is appreciated that the audience was not expected to consider the illusion of such plays as 'fraudulent' or 'emptied out'.<sup>2</sup> Where the theatre of demystification was characterized by a metatheatrical exploration of the impact on meaning of the artifice of theatrical performance itself, this other kind of theatre allowed for other values to be ascribed to the signifier of performance. By



comprehending a more constructive response to the medium of acting which was not based upon an exploration of the inherent fraudulence of theatrical performance, this dimension of early modern theatre developed a different set of relationships between performance as signifier and the signified supernatural. Such representations could, in their own way, reflect uncertainty in early modern thought regarding the manifestation of supernatural phenomena, as well as appreciating the possibility of the presence of the supernatural in the real world.<sup>3</sup> As such, this aspect of early modern theatre forms part of a wider pattern of supernatural portrayal in the early modern period, which is characterized by multiple interpretative possibilities and by the complex fusion of more and less credible material. It is ultimately in the context of this conception of theatrical performance, rather than Greenblatt's theatre of demystification, that the comic supernatural in a series of plays which includes Doctor Faustus, The Tempest and A Midsummer Night's Dream should be considered. The 'proximity to presence' which informed such stage representations is, in its conception of performance as signifier, closely related to the notion of 'Catholic affect' in the theatre proposed by Gary Taylor. However, comic representation of the supernatural of this sort need not be associated with the distinctively Catholic ideological position proposed by Taylor, in the same way that this study has argued that Jonson's use of the comedy of demystification should not be seen as inconsistent with his conversion to Catholicism.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, this study does not propose a simple correlation between different approaches to the comic representation of the supernatural and the interests of particular social or educational groups. In general, the circulation of ideas between groups with differing educational or social backgrounds appears to have been fluid. From Doctor Faustus through to The Witch, it has been argued that plays were influenced by particular approaches to natural philosophy or by the opinions of particular individual or groups. Some aspects of the content of plays might not have been accessible or relevant to a proportion of its audience. However, it seems probable that most, if not all, of the comic representations of the supernatural considered by this study were developed in a way which would have had some wider relevance for a considerable proportion of the theatre-going population. Considered in its cultural context, the comic representation of the supernatural does not support either social or educational stratification as defining characteristics of early modern thought regarding the supernatural. Rather, the comic representations which have been considered are best

seen as the product of a culture in which the beliefs of individuals regarding the supernatural were frequently heterodox and contradictory.

In a period when views on the supernatural were varied and probably, in the cases of many individuals, wavering or inconsistent it is notable how many of the plays considered present conflicting ideas regarding the supernatural. This conflict can, for example in some of the magician plays considered in Chapter Four, take a form that is largely implicit. Other plays include more substantial and thematic explorations of conflicting ideas regarding magic. Implicit or explicit, such conflicts of ideas should be seen in the wider early modern context of official secular or religious attempts to circumscribe other viewpoints regarding the supernatural. In Doctor Faustus, both comic and tragic modes contribute to a play in which orthodox condemnation of traffic with supernatural forces is undercut in uncompromising fashion by an exploration of the attraction of the supernatural. Other plays, including Friar Bacon, The Birth of Merlin, The Tempest and A Midsummer Night's Dream negotiate a series of tensions between the threat posed by traffic with the supernatural and the attractions of the subject. In The Tempest and A Midsummer Night's Dream, moreover, these tensions are compounded by more complex explorations of human perception of the supernatural. Thematically, The Witch and The Witch of Edmonton explore in very different ways the moral danger of contact with witchcraft, although in both plays the ostensive message of the play is challenged by other interpretative possibilities. A similar tendency towards ambivalence is also present in the treatment of the supernatural in the comedies of Ben Jonson. However, in Jonson's portrayals of the supernatural the matter at issue is grounded firmly in human nature rather than in man's interaction with the supernatural. While the plays considered by this study are clearly intended to meet a broad set of audience requirements, a taste for controversy, debate and ambiguity in the treatment of supernatural material with contemporary relevance can be seen to be particularly widespread.

Although thematic in organisation, this study has also revealed certain kinds of thematic and formal development through the period. The apparent influence, in terms of comic form and subject-matter, of the Faustian and Baconic tradition in later sixteenth-century prose and drama has been noted on a range of plays throughout the period of this study. More generally, the impact of new interests may have had an effect on some Jacobean plays. The focus in many Elizabethan

comic representations has been shown to be the attractions offered by, and the perils associated with, traffic with supernatural forces and this theme continues into Jacobean comedy. However, other issues assume greater prominence in plays developed in the reign of James I. While they draw upon existing ideas of comic form, the proximity to contemporary events of The Witch and The Witch of Edmonton does not have a sustained parallel among the comic stage witches or magicians of Elizabethan plays. In particular, the kinds of allusion to, or ostensibly truthful reporting of, contemporary events in these plays adds a dimension not found in Elizabethan comic representation of the supernatural. Underpinning this, there is also a case to be made for formal developments in the Jacobean period. In its emphasis on spectacles of inversion, The Witch may be seen to draw unusually fully on the aesthetics of the masque, rather than the dramatic stage. Its tragicomic mode also looks forward, again to an unusual extent, to the more narrowly developed comedy of inversion that characterises later seventeenth-century comic portrayals of witchcraft. The particular kinds of engagement with supernatural issues which have been discussed in the context of Jonson's Volpone, The Alchemist and The Devil is an Ass, do not have a sustained precedent in Elizabethan drama. They might be considered examples of thematic and formal evolution in the Jacobean period, although their approach to supernatural themes is clearly not novel in so far as it revives the spirit of classical comedy. The Tempest has been shown to be an evolution, in terms of form and content, of earlier Baconic magician plays. Overall, these Jacobean plays each bring to new prominence anxieties about the truth of man's understanding of supernatural phenomena which influence the strategies used for the comic, including tragicomic, stage portrayal of the supernatural. It has been suggested in some instances that this trend may be linked more directly with the interest of King James in adjudicating famous cases of witchcraft and possession.

This distinction between the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods should not be overemphasized, however. Some Elizabethan plays, most notably the fairy plays James the Fourth and A Midsummer Night's Dream, do explore ideas relating to the existence of, and human perception of, the supernatural. An awareness of dramatic form is demonstrated in passing in The Old Wives Tale, which pre-emptly examines the nature of the audience's contract with theatrical performance at the heart of Jonson's treatment of the supernatural. Moreover, the essentially old-fashioned magician comedy of The Two Merry Milkmaids apparently belongs to the

Jacobean period, and the Elizabethan Doctor Faustus was certainly revived and printed in the early decades of the seventeenth century. While this study has supported the idea that The Devil is an Ass and The Witch, alongside The Witch of Edmonton, engage directly with specific contemporary events, the majority of plays considered by this study are notable for not so doing. Indeed, with a few exceptions, a lack of direct engagement in these plays with issues of religious, rather than demonological, controversy is also apparent. Although it differs in others, in this way the comic representation of the supernatural to a considerable extent bears out Greenblatt's conception of the professional theatre as an institution which is not controlled by prevailing political authority in its representation of its parent culture.

Another approach to trends within these plays may be to consider audience taste. Andrew Gurr and others have explored the relationship between companies of players, particular audience tastes and social groupings.<sup>5</sup> In the context of this study, a case can be made for the association of the Chamberlain's (and King's) Men with a series of plays which were relatively restrained in their spectacular representation of the supernatural and sustained in their exploration of the question of the existence and power of the supernatural.<sup>6</sup> This would differentiate the Chamberlain's (and King's) Men from a more spectacular, thematically superficial, comic supernatural theatre spanning from the Queen's Men (Friar Bacon and The Old Wives Tale) through to plays like The Witch of Edmonton at the Cockpit and revivals of Doctor Faustus at the Fortune early in the seventeenth century. However, this difference again should not be overstated. It masks the actual diversity of the material associated with the Chamberlain's (and King's) Men over a long period, as explored in this study. It also neglects the issue, noted by Gurr, of the migration of audiences between playhouses and the commissioning of players to perform at court and other occasions. It would be inappropriate to assume that a simple relationship existed between the thematic treatment of matters like the credulity of particular social groups regarding the supernatural and either the target audience for a particular play or the level of credulity that the audience might actually have demonstrated. Nevertheless, dividing the plays under consideration in this way does offer some additional insight into trends in audience tastes that might have played a part in the evolution of repertoire over the period of this study.

It must be acknowledged that, in pursuing the comic relevance of the supernatural for an early modern audience, this study has attempted a task made vexed by historical distance, and the limitations of the extant evidence. In a field of study of this kind, which is significantly concerned with the questions of prevailing thought regarding supernatural subjects and of audience response to theatre, much must remain speculative and unknown. To return to Dr Lambe's death, discussed at the start of Chapter Two, we shall never know for sure the relevance that performances of plays, comic or otherwise, about witches or magicians might have had for the theatre audience which attacked him while he attended a play at the Fortune Theatre. However, the apparent sequel to this event reinforces some sense of the commercial value that could be placed on the contemporary allusions in plays of the period, a theme explored already in the context of The Witch and The Witch of Edmonton. It is apparent that Dr Lambe became the subject of a play himself as an existing play on the subject of 'Doctor Lambe and the Witches' was revived in 1634 at Salisbury Court. This became a cause of concern to the King's Men, who petitioned the Lord Chamberlain that this prejudiced the popularity of their new play about the most recent witchcraft scandal, Heywood's The Late Lancashire Witches. We should not attribute Dr Lambe's death to the influence of stage representation of the supernatural, comic or otherwise: the Fortune had something of a reputation and had already been the location for a 'daungerous and great ryott' in 1626.<sup>7</sup>

Dr Lambe's portrayal on the stage provides evidence of a very direct kind of interaction between contemporary and commercial theatrical representation in the period. In this study it has been argued that the comic portrayal of the supernatural is engaged in a range of direct, and less direct, ways with a wide range of contemporary issues concerning the supernatural. As fictional works, plays can be about many things, and, as has already been acknowledged, plays with supernatural subject-matter can to a greater or lesser extent be about things other than the supernatural. However, the meaning of a series of plays has been elucidated by an attempt to bring together, in a sustained argument, the study of early modern thought regarding the supernatural and the study of early modern notions of comic drama. It has offered significant opportunities for the reappraisal of their relevance to the wider cultural context for an early modern audience. The detailed review of the plays in their wider cultural context has suggested new ways in which we, as modern readers or audiences, can better appreciate their historical distance from our own

conceptions of the comic and the supernatural, and so better understand their relevance for their original audience.

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Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> For examples of the confusion of theatre and the supernatural see Prynne's famous account of the 'visible apparition of the devil on the stage at the Belsavage playhouse', Doctor Faustus, p. 2. Yates, Theatre of the World, pp. 31-2, and Woolley, pp. 14-16, recount the alarm and concern caused by the flight of Dee's Scarabaeus (a stage machine in the form of a giant dungbeetle capable of lifting a man) in a production of the Pax of Aristophanes at Trinity College Cambridge in 1547.
- <sup>2</sup> Greenblatt, 'Shakespeare and the Exorcists', p. 127.
- <sup>3</sup> On the questions of transparency, signifiers and plurality of meaning, see Taylor, 'Divine [ ] sences', p. 26.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp. 24 and 30. Taylor, *ibid*, p. 21, notes that Greenblatt's account of King Lear in 'Shakespeare and the Exorcists' is 'devoted, not to the divine, but to the demonic'.
- <sup>5</sup> Gurr, Playgoing, pp. 51-118.
- <sup>6</sup> For example, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merry Wives of Windsor, and The Merry Devil of Edmonton are all associated with the Chamberlain's Men or King's Men at the Globe, and The Witch, The Alchemist and The Devil is an Ass with the King's Men at the Blackfriars. An anomaly to this pattern would seem to be The Late Lancashire Witches, associated with the King's Men at the Globe. See Gurr, Shakespearean Stage, Appendix; and Playgoing, pp. 149-50.
- <sup>7</sup> Bentley, Jacobean and Caroline Stage, I, 40-4; V, 1455; VI, 160-2.

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