

WITCHCRAFT AND THE WESTERN IMAGINATION*

By Lyndal Roper

READ 28 JANUARY 2005

ABSTRACT. This essay proposes a new view of demonology, arguing that it was not just a set of theological and legal writings but could also form part of a literature of entertainment. Demonologists frequently used literary techniques such as the dialogue form, hyperbolic set-piece descriptions of the dance or the Sabbath, told stories to pique the reader's interest, and employed humour, salaciousness and horror. Their work intersected with that of artists, influenced by classical images of witches, who began to produce elaborate panoramas of the Sabbath. The cultural legacy of demonology was immense. Through the *Faustbuch* of 1587, which borrowed from demonological treatises, demonology influenced drama and even figured in the development of the early novel.

I

Jan Ziarnko's image of the Witches' Sabbath accompanies one of the strangest works to be inspired by the European witch-hunt, the *Tableau d'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons* (1612), by Pierre de Lancre (Figure 1). At the heart of the book, where de Lancre describes the Sabbath, the reader can fold out Ziarnko's extraordinary detailed poster-size image, the visual counterpart of de Lancre's literary evocation of the sights, sounds and smells of the Sabbath. We read of the ritual meal where witches eat bread made of black flour, ground from the bones of unbaptised children, or they stew 'unbaptised baby hearts, the flesh of the hanged, and other horrible decaying carcasses'. Piling on the metaphors in sentences that barely pause for breath, de Lancre describes a Sabbath which resembles a giant marketplace of rotten, stinking organs and liquids in a literary tour de force which seems to have little to do with conventional demonology.¹ Ziarnko's tableau, produced for the second edition of the work in 1613,

* This essay is dedicated to the memory of Gareth Roberts. I am grateful to Robin Briggs, Stuart Clark, Jonathan Durrant, Ruth Harris, Clive Holmes, Erik Midelfort, David Parrott, Amy Wygant, the various audiences who heard and commented on earlier drafts, and especially to Nick Stargardt for their help in writing this essay.

¹ 'On y voit de grandes chaudieres pleines de crapaux et impres, coeurs d'infants non baptizez, chair de pendus, & autres horribles charognes, & des eaux puantes, pots de graisse et de poison, qui se preste & se debite a cette foire, comme estant las plus precieuse & commune marchandise qui s'y trouve.' Ziarnko's image faces 118, Pierre de Lancre, *Tableau*



Figure 1 Jan Ziarnko, 'Description et figure du sabbat', in Pierre de Lancre, *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1613) [British Library 719.i.11], facing p. 118. By permission of the British Library.

maps each chilling detail, and there is even an alphabetic key so that the viewer can locate every horror. Word and image join in a single assault

de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons, 2nd edn (Paris, 1613); and for a brilliant discussion of the text see Margaret M. McGowan, 'Pierre de Lancre's *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons*: The Sabbat Sensationalised', in *The Damned Art. Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, ed. Sidney Anglo (1977).

on readers' senses as they confront the nightmare world of the demonic gathering. The description of the Sabbath forms the climax of de Lancre's work, and it brings together the themes that fascinated him throughout his literary career. He had been involved in hunting witches in the border region of Labourd, and the idea of illusion, the changeability of all things and the limits of belief obsessed him in all his writings.²

With De Lancre's description of the Sabbath, demonology was hijacked for literary effect. Yet extravagant as his creations appear to be, they exploit a possibility that had always lain at the core of writings about witches and the Devil from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries. Demonology is often regarded as a science of evil, a corpus of publications that systematised belief about witches, providing the intellectual underpinning of the witch-hunt. Stuart Clark, who has done more to illuminate this body of writings than any scholar, has pointed out that demonology was never a genre with defined boundaries, but derived its cultural authority from its capacity to infiltrate differing kinds of writing.³ In this essay I shall take Clark's argument a step further, proposing that demonology did not limit itself to mapping the witch-hunter's intellectual belief-structure, but contributed to a new literature of entertainment. The cultural legacy of demonology reaches through the *Faust* of 1587 and beyond, to the origins of the German novel.

Commonly viewed as a branch of theology, philosophy and metaphysics, historians tend to regard demonology as a set of arguments that provided the intellectual framework for witchcraft belief, and which presented the world as a set of binary opposites, of good opposed to evil, white to black and male to female. But demonology was also a Pandora's box, an imaginative resource which inspired drama, art, literature and other cultural forms, occasionally in directions which led to moral ambiguity and doubt. One reason why it has been so difficult for historians to appreciate the role of entertainment, creativity and humour in the literature of demonology has been the knowledge that beliefs about witches that were formalised in works like these led to the deaths of hundreds of individuals. It is hard to see such works as anything other than dangerous and pathological.

² Pierre de Lancre, *Tableau de l'inconstance et instabilité de toutes choses* (Paris, 1607; 2nd edn Paris, 1610); *idem*, *L'incréduité et mescreance du sortilege plainement conuaincue* (Paris, 1622). The confessions on the other side of the Spanish border in the same panic were also very elaborate: see Gustav Henningsen, *The Salazar Documents. Inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frias and Others on the Basque Witch Persecution* (Leiden, 2004); Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate. Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition (1609–1614)* (Reno, 1980); Julio Caro Baroja, *The World of the Witches*, trans. Nigel Glendinning (1964).

³ Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons. The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997).

Such an approach to writings about witches would be misconceived, however. Beliefs trigger aggression only when they fit with other anxieties and conditions; often, they lie dormant in the mind, the contents of which are very far from being a set of coherent arguments. This is one reason why witch-hunting was characteristically episodic, striking particular areas at moments of crisis, and leaving others untouched. From the outset, demonology teased the imagination. Its intellectual problematic, too, circled around the issue of the nature of the imaginative faculty, the realm of illusion and the power of the senses, all questions central to the nature of art itself. Not for nothing did the most famous fifteenth-century work of demonology, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, embark on a long disquisition on sensory illusion, how perception works, changeability and fantasy in its opening pages:

For fancy or imagination is as it were the treasury of ideas received through the senses. And through this it happens that devils so stir up the inner perceptions, that is the power of conserving images, that they appear to be a new impression at that moment received from exterior things.⁴

II

The close connection between literature and demonology is evident in the fact that Jean Bodin's treatise on witchcraft was translated just a year after its appearance in the original French by the German poet and literary genius Johannes Fischart of Strasbourg. Fischart had already translated Rabelais's masterpiece *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, extending and elaborating the original to produce a German prose epic in its own right, twice the size.⁵ Bodin's original had been composed in French rather than Latin, and it and *The Six Books of the Commonwealth* were his only works composed in the vernacular: clearly, *Démonomanie des sorciers* aimed at a wide market. It has an appendix designed to demolish the arguments of the witch-sceptic Johannes Weyer, but intellectual ambition often seems little more than a

⁴ Early on in the work, he considers why it is that a man can walk along a narrow beam when it is stretched across the street, but cannot do so if it were suspended over deep water: 'because his imagination would most strongly impress upon his mind the idea of falling': Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. and ed. Rev. Montague Summers (1928; New York, 1971) [hereafter cited as *Malleus*], 13 (pt 1 qu. 2). There is a long passage on fascination, the gaze and perception. The discussion of the imagination is on 50 (pt 1 qu. 7).

⁵ Jean Bodin, *Vom Außgelaffnen Wütigen Teuffels heer Allerhand Zaubern/ Hexen und Hexenmeistern/ Vnholden/ Teuffelsbeschwerern/ Warsagern...*, trans. Johann Fischart (Strasbourg, 1581) (other editions are known from 1586 and 1591); the French original appeared at Paris in 1580 as *De la Démonomanie des sorciers*. Francois Rabelais, *Affentewliche und Ungeheuerliche Geschichtschrift von... Herrn Grandgusier, Gargantua und Pantagruel*, trans. Johann Fischart (Strasbourg, 1575). See Stefan Janson, *Jean Bodin, Johann Fischart: De la démonomanie des sorciers (1580), Vom außgelaffnen wütigen Teuffelsheer (1581) und ihre Fallberichte* (Frankfurt am Main, 1980) (= Europäische Hochschulschriften 352).

fig-leaf to conceal Bodin's desire to titillate, to explore the exotic and to reveal the intimate workings of the imagination. Bodin relates the dreams of his 'friend', almost certainly the author himself, which featured red and white horses; and the 'friend' was visited nightly by a good spirit advising him how to act in daily life.⁶ We hear what Bodin discovered about the art of 'tying the codpiece knot' so as to cause impotence, when he was lodging at the house of a French noblewoman whose name he piquantly refuses to disclose. We read of witches in Africa, and lycanthropy in Europe. And we discover how Bodin had been a guest at another household during travelling assizes when a visiting beggar, in reality a witch, had cursed the entire household, him included.⁷ This book is far more than an intellectual treatise, and Bodin by turns fascinates us with his candour about his own experience, dreams and emotional dilemmas; sweeps us away with a flood of anecdotes and uncanny stories; and dazzles us with a welter of brilliant demolitions of sceptical arguments. Nor is he above the crudely salacious. So we are told how

In a convent there was a dog people said was a demon, which lifted up the dresses of the nuns to abuse them. It was not a demon, in my opinion, but a normal dog. At Toulouse there was a woman who indulged in this abuse, and the dog tried to violate her in front of everyone.⁸

Writing like this is pornographic, drawing on staple anti-monastic, misogynist fable with little relevance to Bodin's ostensible argument. But it was just the kind of thing that would appeal to Fischart, the author of a poem in which the author imagines himself a flea, crawling around women's private parts.⁹

Yet Bodin also stands four-square in the tradition of demonology. His chosen four-part structure, with a final book devoted – broadly – to the trial and punishment of witches, was loosely modelled on the design of the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum* of 1486, by then a classic a century old. The *Hammer of Witches*, written by the infamous Dominican Heinrich Kramer, has been credited by some with having caused the witch craze, though

⁶ Jean Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, trans. and abridged Randy Scott (Toronto 1995), 59–62, bk 1 ch. 2. See, on this passage, Robin Briggs, 'Dubious Messengers: Bodin's Daemon, the Spirit World, and the Sadducees', in *Angels in the Early Modern World*, ed. Peter Marshall and Alex Walsham (Cambridge, forthcoming).

⁷ Bodin, *Démonomanie*, fos. 7r–14 v; Bodin, *Vom Außgelafßen*, 61–82, bk 1 ch. 2 (dreams); Bodin, *Démonomanie*, fos. 58r–9v (codpiece); Bodin, *Démonomanie*, fos. 94v–104r; Bodin, *Vom Außgelafßen*, 343–64, bk 2 ch. 6 (lycanthropy); Bodin, *Démonomanie*, fos. 123v–127v; Bodin, *Vom Außgelafßen*, 426–30, bk 3 ch. 1 (alms).

⁸ Bodin, *Démonomanie*, fo. 162r–v; Bodin, *Vom Außgelafßen*, 537–8; translation from Bodin, *On the Demon-Mania of Witches*, 169, bk 3 ch. 6: Bodin continues to elaborate on this theme; some of his material comes from Weyer. Boguet recycles these stories about dogs, though in brief: Henry Boguet [*sic*], *An Examen of Witches* (French 1590), trans. E. A. Ashwin, ed. Rev. Montague Summers (1929).

⁹ Johann Fischart, *Flöh Hatz, Weiber Trazt*, ed. Alois Haas (Stuttgart, 1967; 1982).

it appeared in Latin a hundred years before the major European witch-hunts. It was certainly well known and widely available. Ostensibly an intellectual treatise designed around a series of questions, objections and responses, its appeal has little to do with the force of its arguments. These, as many readers have pointed out, are self-contradictory, illogical and frequently just get dropped as something else captures Kramer's interest.¹⁰ The technique of larding demonology with anecdote was exploited by the *Malleus*, and though it lacks Bodin's flashes of introspection, it also bears the stamp of personal experience. Written in the wake of a failed witchcraft persecution, Kramer was coming to terms with defeat. He responded by magnifying the threat posed to Christian society by witchcraft; and when he referred to what he had seen with his own eyes, he underlined the role of clerics like himself in the ongoing struggle. So he writes about the witch in a place called 'N' who stole a Host and buried it in a pot, and whose crime was discovered when a child's crying was heard. Kramer concludes by advising his fellow priests that women should only receive communion with their tongues well out, and their garments well clear, so that they cannot misuse the sacrament.¹¹

The *Malleus* has a picaresque quality that foreshadowed later writings. The rekindling of interest in witchcraft that took place after 1560, when a new and larger wave of persecution began, helped the genre take off, as a clutch of writers like del Rio, Boguet, Daneau, Binsfeld and Rémy developed its potential. Their works are heterogeneous in style – Bodin's rhetorical brilliance has little in common with del Rio's exhaustive categorisation of all the different kinds of magic, or with Guazzo's plodding compilation – and yet they form a recognisable body of work, partly because they are all parasitic on one another. Boguet deals with trials in Franche-Comté but he plunders Rémy's account of Lorraine for all the stories he can find; Bodin borrows liberally from Weyer, whose work he is supposedly attacking, and Guazzo sews stories from Bodin, Rémy and the others into a seamless whole. Some of the borrowings even run counter to confessional belonging. Nearly everyone, Protestant

¹⁰ See, for example, Sydney Anglo, 'Evident Authority and Authoritative Evidence: The *Malleus Maleficarum*', in *The Damned Art*, ed. Anglo (1977).

¹¹ *Malleus*, 116–17, pt II qu. 1 ch. 6. On Kramer, and on his role as sole author, see, in particular, the indispensable introduction, text and notes of *Der Hexenhammer*, ed. Wolfgang Behringer and Günter Jerouschek, trans. Wolfgang Behringer, Günter Jerouschek and Werner Tschacher (Munich, 2000), which is superior to the unreliable translation of Summers; Eric Wilson, 'Insitoris at Innsbruck: Heinrich Institoris, the *Summis Desiderantes* and the Brixen Witch-Trial of 1485', in *Popular Religion in Germany and Central Europe, 1400–1800*, ed. Bob Scribner and Trevor Johnson (Houndmills, Basingstoke and London, 1996); Anglo, 'Evident Authority and Authoritative Evidence'; P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Witchcraft in Europe and the New World, 1400–1800* (2001); Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers. Witchcraft, Sex and the Crisis of Belief* (2002); Hans Peter Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft. Theology and Popular Belief* (Manchester, 2003).

or Catholic, cited the Dominican *Malleus*. Bodin draws on the Protestant Daneau; while the Jesuit Martin del Rio makes understandably heavy weather of a story he has drawn from Luther about a 'heretic woman' who gave birth to a baby 'vested and tonsured like an ecclesiastic'.¹² They found a ready market across Europe, especially in German-speaking areas: just about every major work of demonology from these decades was published in German or found a German publisher for a local Latin edition.¹³

Not only were the stories predictable; so too were the topics to which the demonologists turned. Practically every demonologist felt compelled to consider the question of whether demons could sire children, and whether changelings were demonic.¹⁴ The outlines of the witchcraft story had become standardised too, with seduction, pact, dance, baptism and Sabbath forming so recognisable a sequence that by the time Guazzo penned his *Compendium*, it was possible to offer an illustrated guide to

¹² Euan Cameron, 'For Reasoned Faith or Embattled Creed? Religion for the People in Early Modern Europe', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 8 (1998), 165–84; plagiarism of Lutheran Gödelmann's attack on Paracelsus by Del Rio, 170, in bk 6. Evidently, Del Rio also knew the demonology of the Calvinist Daneau well enough to set him and Gödelman right on points of detail: Martin del Rio, *Investigations into Magic*, ed. and trans. P. G. Maxwell-Stuart (Manchester, 2000), 135, 213; example taken from Luther, 44.

¹³ The market for the *Malleus* was partly among those who had enjoyed a classical education and who read for pleasure – the *Malleus* itself was not translated into German. It was aimed at the upper end of the popular vernacular market, often published in large format. The other classics of demonology were mostly translated into German and went through several editions, as their printing histories show: Lambert Daneau's *De Veneficiis* was published in Cologne in 1575 and 1597 with a German version appearing in Frankfurt and Cologne in 1576 (VD16: D77–80); Grillando's *De Sortilegiis* appeared in Latin in 1592 in Frankfurt (VD16: G3344); Jean Bodin's was printed in a Latin translation at Basel in 1581, with Fischart's German translation printed in Strasbourg in 1581, 1586 and 1591; and 1592 in Frankfurt (*Verzeichnis der im deutschen Sprachbereich erschienenen Drucke des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (25 vols., Stuttgart, 1983–2000) (VD16: B6266–72); Rémy's *Demonolatriy* was published in Lyon in 1595 in Latin and issued in the following year at Cologne and Frankfurt; a German translation appeared in Frankfurt in 1598 as *Daemonolatria. Das ist Von Unholden und Zaubergeistern . . .* (VD16: R1090, R1091, R1092, R1093) and was extremely influential in the Holy Roman Empire, possibly even more so than the *Malleus*: Schulte, *Hexenmeister*, 141–3; Peter Binsfeld's *Tractat Von Bekantnuß der Zauberer und Hexen* appeared in German in 1590 (VD16, nos. B5531, B5532); Johannes Georg Gödelmann's Latin work of 1591 appeared in German as *Von Zaubern Hexen und Unholden* translated by Georg Nigrinus at Frankfurt in 1592 (VD16, nos. G2486, G2488); James IV's *Daemonologia* was published in Latin in Hanau in 1604; Martin Del Rio's *Disquisitionum Magicarum Libri Sex* was reprinted in numerous editions in Cologne and Mainz; Pierre de Lancre's work appeared in German in 1630 as *Wunderbahrliche Geheimnußen der Zauberey . . .* (s.l.) (VD17 12:640907L; there was another edition of the same year, VD17 23: 238328W). Boguet's *Discours des sorciers* was published in at least three editions at Lyons; I have found no records of a German publication of it or of Guazzo's *Compendium* (though copies of Boguet's *Discours des sorciers* and of his *Discours execrable des sorciers*, Rouen, 1603 exist in German libraries); Guazzo's treatise was published in 1608 in Milan and republished there in an extended edition in 1626.

¹⁴ See Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze. Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (2004), 98–104.



Figure 2 Cutting up bodies of criminals, Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium maleficarum* (Milan, 1626) [British Library 719.h.8], 149. By permission of the British Library.

witchcraft: his text is adorned with a series of woodcuts of witches in all the familiar lurid scenes, the witches tricked out in contemporary fashionable clothing with Devils to match. These images linger on the repellent: we see children butchered by well-dressed matrons, or pious-looking burghers spitting on the cross. Some owners even had these cheap woodcut images hand-tinted to enhance their appearance (Figures 2 and 3).¹⁵

Like the images, the stories seem to revel in the gory. Kramer tells us of the midwife of Dann in the diocese of Basel who killed more than forty young children by sticking needles into their skulls as they came out of the womb, or relates a story he heard from ‘the Inquisitor of Como’ about ‘a certain man’ who found a congress of women killing his child, drinking its blood and devouring it.¹⁶ Later demonologists readily exploited this kind of writing. Nicolas Rémy describes how two witches disinterred the bodies of two infants, cutting off the right arm, so that ‘the finger-tips of

¹⁵ Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum* (Milan, 1608), 106 man and woman roast child; 149 cutting up bodies of criminals. Many of the woodcuts are re-used, some several times: see for example 26, 43; 107, 109.

¹⁶ *Malleus*, 140, pt II qu. 1 ch. 13; 66, pt I qu. 12.



Figure 3 Spitting on the cross, Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium maleficarum* (Milan, 1626) [British Library 719.h.8], 34. By permission of the British Library.

that dismembered limb used to burn with a blue sulphurous flame until they had entirely completed the business which they had in hand; and when the flame was extinguished the fingers would be just as whole and unimpaired as if they had not been providing the tinder for a light' – a ghoulishly vivid description of the so-called Hand of Glory.¹⁷ He goes on to describe children being ripped from the bodies of pregnant women, and the cooking of infant flesh, concluding with a hint of embarrassment, 'But this is perhaps more than enough about a particularly unpleasant subject.'¹⁸ Such writing is certainly designed to shock and appal, and the savouring of vivid details suggests it is also part of the text's attraction, like the horror film and hard-core pornography, which continue to draw on images of violence and dismemberment as entertainment. Then, as now, the subject-matter of witchcraft offers fertile possibilities for such forms

¹⁷ Nicolas Rémy, *Demonolatriy*, ed. and trans. Montague Summers (1930) 100 (bk II ch. iii); on the hand of glory, see, e.g., A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close* (2005) 41–2: hands of executed criminals were used as candles by thieves to ensure that the household slept while they engaged in robbery.

¹⁸ Rémy, *Demonolatriy*, 103 (bk II ch. iii).

of pleasure; what gave it an especial frisson to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century audiences was the possibility that it might be true.

The demonological treatises make infuriating reading because they mix authority of very different kinds. Personal experience, jurists, theologians, the Bible and classical authors are all cited alongside one another as if they offered equivalent proof of the reality of witchcraft. The *Malleus* adopted this technique, and it is to be found in most other demonological writers. Classical references were of course part of a general tendency of this period to recuperate the heritage of antiquity; but the possibilities this literature opened up for witchcraft writings were electrifying. For where the Bible offered meagre pickings to those interested in witches – Saul and the Witch of Endor, the injunction in Exodus ‘Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live’ – the classical tradition featured sorceresses, enchantresses and witches, from Circe to Medea, whose cultural resonances were far broader. Though the *Malleus* carefully distinguishes between classical ‘myth’ and writers it regards as historians, classical literature provided a treasure-trove of exotic stories about witches that could be mentioned in the same breath as trials in which Kramer had himself participated. So, in one typical passage, Kramer piled up material on witches who could unbewitch from Aquinas and St Bonaventure, adding a story about an unnamed bishop and love magic from the time of Pope Nicholas, going on to mention his own experience in Reichshofen where such crowds flocked to a particular witch that it was worth the local count’s while to set up a toll-booth to collect money from the travellers, before embarking on a long story about a ‘certain market merchant’ of Speyer who was bewitched.¹⁹ These stories in turn became part of demonological tradition, and can be found in Bodin, Guazzo, Boguet and del Rio, where, by the time they were writing, classical references were a badge of learning accepted across Europe. But the result of the mixture of classical references with contemporary cases was disturbing, for it linked the humdrum, poor witch of the time to the much more ambiguous figure of classical literature, snake-haired goddesses or glamorous creatures like Circe. These were sorceresses who resembled alchemists, able to shapeshift or transform one substance into another.²⁰

The range of metamorphoses the classical figure of the witch could undergo is evident in a host of images and literary inventions, and in a wide range of contexts, including court masques and *ballets de cour*.²¹ One of the most interesting is the remarkable cycle of nearly thirty epic

¹⁹ *Malleus*, pt II qu. 2, 155–64.

²⁰ Gareth Roberts, *The Languages of Alchemy* (1997).

²¹ See Margaret M. McGowan, *L'art du ballet de cour en France (1581–1643)* (Paris, 1963): classical witches, such as Circe or Medea, featured; and Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque* (Cambridge, MA, 1965), esp. 130–47.

paintings commissioned by Marie de Medici from Rubens and completed between 1626 and 1631, just over a decade after Jan Ziarnko's etching. Unlike a memorial to a male which might be arranged around a series of battles, this cycle is primarily structured around the female life cycle: Marie's marriage, the birth of her son Louis XIII and her maturity and widowhood on the death of Henri IV. The political conflicts of her life and regency are subsumed within the life-cycle narrative. Marie's political significance was centrally determined by her status as wife and mother, and Rubens's bravura modelling of female flesh makes this an extraordinary combination of monumentalism and voluptuousness.²²

Yet tucked away in this hymn to feminine power are at least three images of witch-like figures. In the Council of the Gods, a fleeing witch-figure with snake-hair can be found on the extreme right, a lighted torch visible through her leg. Near the middle of the cycle, the Felicity of the Regency is crammed with images of fertility and fecundity; three bound figures representing Ignorance, Calumny and Envy are sprawled in the foreground, Envy with the wasted body of the old witch. And in the Conclusion of the Peace, there is a viper at the very centre held by a blind-folded male Fury, while Fraud and Envy cluster alongside, Envy in the form of an old woman with sagging breasts, while on the right, another vice in the shape of an old hag clutches a snake. These are not real witches, but allegorical representations of the dangers faced by the queen.²³ They have a particular pointedness in a cycle that is dedicated to the feminine. They also allow Rubens to make painterly allusions, for the iconography of the nude witch had been made instantly recognisable by the work of artists such as Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien. In imagery like this, the witch-figure can allude to the Furies of Greek Myth, the snake-headed Gorgon of legend, or the emblematic convention of representing Envy as an old hag. The very flexibility of the imagery can even hint at the subterranean connection between snake-headed goddesses and fertility: in sixteenth-century Augsburg, local humanists interested in the town's pre-Roman past unearthed a goddess with snake-hair called Cisa which they identified both as a Medusa and as a goddess of fertility.²⁴ The witch may be the emissary of Satan, but her significance in paintings or relics like this extends far beyond the clichés of demonology.

²² See *Rubens' Life of Marie de Medici*, ed. Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, trans. Robert Erich Wolf (New York, 1967), esp. 85–6, 88–9ff; and see plates.

²³ Though the witches may not only have been allegorical: there were rumours that an astrologer who controlled a Devil had predicted Henri IV's death; see McGowan, 'Pierre de Lancre's *Tableau*', 182. On the cycle, see Ronald Forsyth Millen and Robert Erich Wolf, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures. A New Reading of Rubens's Life of Marie de Medici* (Princeton, 1989); Svetlana Alpers, *The Making of Rubens* (New Haven and London, 1995).

²⁴ See Lyndal Roper, 'The Gorgon of Augsburg', in *Women's Communities*, ed. Susan Broomhall and Stephanie Tarbin (forthcoming).

The figure of the witch was beginning to take on a life of her own. Like the proud owners who had their woodcuts colour-brushed, turning cheap print into collector's item, the demonologists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries began to embellish their works with self-consciously writerly techniques. They invented lively dialogue, and tested their literary skills on set-piece descriptions, in particular, of flight, the dance and the Sabbath. These were also the subjects which had established themselves as artistic genre scenes. Sometimes, as in Jan Ziarnko's image of the Sabbath that accompanied de Lancre's text, the point was to clarify the didactic message. But just as de Lancre's writing is bursting with extravagant hyperbole, so too the Sabbath, flight and dance scenes became an opportunity for the artist to show off his skill, presenting half-nude bodies falling from different perspectives, using the etching techniques to cram in as much detail as possible, and structuring a complex pictorial panorama where each appalling incident vies for the viewer's attention. Matthaeus Heer's vast etching of Walpurgis Eve (c. 1620) packs every kind of depravity into one broadsheet, aiming at as encyclopaedic an effect as the literary demonologists. Others, like Jacques de Gheyn, strove to recreate the grisly mood of the Sabbath, featuring remote, wild landscapes. These visions, like the literary descriptions, were designed to tease the imagination and stick in the mind.

De Lancre was certainly not the first to exploit the literary potential of the Sabbath. The *Malleus* does not feature a Sabbath, and Kramer does not dwell on the sensation of flight; but Bodin penned an extended passage on the hideous music played at the diabolic dance in his work of 1580. By the time we get to Rémy (1595) we have extensive descriptions of the dreadful sound of the fiddle and bagpipes to be heard at Sabbaths. Descriptions of dancing, which were at first little more than references to the dance, soon expatiated on how Devils danced back to back, condemning the 'whirling dance' of the witches, which made 'people wild and raging, and women to miscarry', or castigating those witches who 'run masked about the streets in their Carnivals of pleasure' (Figure 4)²⁵ Like other moral campaigners, including the authors of the Devil-books, demonologists often titillated as much as they condemned.²⁶

III

The most significant German artistic production of the era of the witch-hunt was the printed story of Faust, which appeared in Frankfurt in 1587 and was based on a popular story about the real Dr Faustus, an

²⁵ Bodin, *Démonomanie*, fo. 88v; Bodin, *Vom Außgelaffnen*, 308; Rémy, *Demonolatriy*, 63.

²⁶ On the genre of the Devil-books and moralism, see Lyndal Roper, 'Drinking, Whoring and Gorging', in *Oedipus and the Devil* (1984).



Figure 4 Sabbath Dance (H), detail, Jan Ziarnko, 'Description et figure du sabbat', in Pierre de Lancre, *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons*, 2nd edn (Paris, 1613) [British Library 719.i.11], facing p. 118. By permission of the British Library.

intellectual who reputedly sold his soul to the Devil. It soon became a classic. The year before, another Frankfurt publisher had produced a bumper *Theatre of Witches*, packing seventeen treatises by different authors into a single volume. This publishing venture was evidently modelled on a *Theatre of Devils*, published by another Frankfurt house in 1569 and containing a series of moral tracts laced with humour. Each sin is given its own Devil, from the He-Man Devil to the Trousers Devil, which had lampooned the new fashion for Turkish-style trousers. Hoping to cash in on the vogue for witchcraft-tales, the publisher, Nicolas Basse, and the editor, Abraham Saur, plumped for a motley bunch of demonologists. Some were known sceptics, like Johannes Weyer; some, like Johannes Gödelmann, were sceptical about some aspects of the witch-hunt; others, like Lambert Daneau, were believers. Broadly Protestant, it ranged from Ulrich Molitor's old fifteenth-century treatise on witches through the ghost stories of Lavater to the strange meditations of Paulus Frisius on the

Devil and illusion.²⁷ But Basse was surely counting on the entertainment value of these works to sell them too.²⁸

Again, we find a stream of stories buried in the treatises, even Tannhäuser making an appearance.²⁹ August Lercheimer writes of how

I myself heard from a sorcerer of how he together with others from 'N' in Saxony flew on a coat for more than a hundred miles to Paris for a wedding uninvited; but how, when a murmur went up about who these uninvited guests were and where they had come from, they quickly made off.³⁰

He was not the only person to be gripped by this fantastic version of the flying carpet story. The passage was lifted almost verbatim the next year by the author of the Faust book, where it forms part of the fabulous anti-Catholic tour the Devil gives Faust. The duo travel to the wedding in Paris on their magic coat, but the Faust-book goes one better, describing all the cities of Germany over which they pass. When they get to Rome, Faust cannot contain himself, exclaiming 'Pfuy! Why didn't the Devil make me a Pope too?' because he saw

all his equals, that is conceit, pride, arrogance, immoderation, gorging, drinking, whoredom, adultery and all the godless being of the papacy and his tools, so that he was moved to say afterwards 'I thought I was a pig or sow of the Devil, but he must keep me for longer. These pigs of Rome are fattened, and all ready to roast and cook.'³¹

This is not a witch's flight, but the passage owes a good deal to the idea of flight elaborated in demonology, as well as to anti-papist propaganda, moralistic Devil-books, and even to the tradition of travel-book descriptions of cities which goes back to one of the first classics

²⁷ Abraham Saur, *Theatrum de veneficis* (Frankfurt am Main, 1586), Nicolaus Basse, *Theatrum diabolorum* (Frankfurt, 1569), Sigmund Feyerabend (VD16: F904); and on the publishing history of these books and the allegations of piracy which surrounded them, Frank Baron, *Faustus on Trial. The Origins of Johann Spies's 'Historia' in an Age of Witch Hunting* (Tübingen, 1992), esp. 69ff. The title page and foreword of *Theatrum de veneficis* have it both ways: Basse's carefully judged preface opens with a conventional attack on *Zauberer* and is no call to take up arms against the persecution of witches (fos. iir–iiiv); but there is a prominent motto at the start, 'Richtet recht ihr Menschen Kinder' from Psalm 57 which is, in context, a barely coded warning to judges that many executions for witchcraft were unjust.

²⁸ Basse clearly had developed a niche market in printing works of demonology, for he had published a German version of Daneaus's treatise on witchcraft, together with Molitor's work, (which also stresses the role of illusion in witchcraft), in 1576 (VD16: D80); the German translation of Bodin in 1592 (VD16: B6272); a selection of witchcraft treatises in Latin including the *Malleus* in 1580 (VD16: M8383); and would publish Johannes Georg Gödelmann's *Von Zauberern Hexen und Unholden* in 1592 (VD16: G2488).

²⁹ Abraham Saur, 'Eine kurtze/ trewe Warnung. . .', in Saur, *Theatrum*, 209–10.

³⁰ Lercheimer, 'Ein Christlich Bedencken', in Saur, *Theatrum*, 279. Lercheimer's passage on the magic coat is in a section which is mixed up with stories about Faust, so the borrowing was suggested by the context.

³¹ *Historia von D. Johann Fausten. Text des Druckes von 1587. Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Stephan Füssel and Hans Joachim Kreutzer (Stuttgart, 1988), 60–70.

of print, Hartmann Schedel's *Chronicle of the World*.³² A work like the Faust-book could directly plagiarise demonology, opening up its imaginative possibilities and expanding the writer's subjects. The teasing scepticism evident in Basse's selection fostered this use of its material, but demonology's own potential to stimulate the imagination fuelled a distinct baroque sensibility.

The fascination with language, stories and the imagination was not the only feature that gave demonology such potential as entertainment. Demonology also allowed authors to experiment with character types. Bodin exploited this to the full, referring throughout his book to the case of the accused witch Jeanne Harvillier to provide a kind of narrative thread binding the work together; Boguet copied the technique, opening with a leaden version of the story of the possessed girl Loyse Maillat in an attempt to enliven his text with human interest. There were, of course, certain kinds of individual whose cases particularly attracted literary attention of this kind: Jeanne Harvillier and Loyse Maillat were young girls, not the old women who in fact formed the majority of victims of the witch-hunt.³³

The records of witches' trials could themselves become literature. Nicolas Rémy packs his text with countless individuals culled from the trial records that had 'beaten at his brain' for expression – in his work, demonology comes close to paraphrase of criminal trial records as he summarises scores of individual cases. De Lancre also includes trial material from the Labourd region; and August Lercheimer, from whose tract the flying coat story was taken, concludes with criminal protocols of six widows. He includes them to show how women could make confessions which were untrue and impossible, but, as the title page of the whole volume shows, advertising the 'confessions, examinations, test, trial records and punishment of some executed witches', they were also thought to appeal to buyers.³⁴ Popular presses produced cheap broadsheet accounts of witch trials to accompany executions. Typically, these were set out as a narrative of an individual's seduction and fall into the clutches of the Devil, and illustrated, cartoon-style, by woodcuts depicting each scene. The blocks were standard, often re-used to illustrate another execution with only the names changed. Such a focus on the individual, and her fate, also posed the question of what kind of person could sink so low. It was the very attractiveness of these young women as character types, their dreadful descent into sin and their terrible subsequent history that suggested dramatic possibilities.

³² *Ibid.*, 60, and see 197.

³³ Boguet, *An Examen of Witches* (1929), 34; Bodin, *Démonomanie*.

³⁴ The tract by Reinhard Lutz in the volume also contain lengthy descriptions of witches burnt at Schlettstadt, together with trial material (1–11); so also does Abraham Saur's treatise.

The most remarkable example of the cross-over from demonology to drama is Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* of 1588, written a year after the Faust-book was published in German. In one sense, it is perhaps a short step from printing a trial record (as the *Theatre of Witches* did), which is itself a dialogue, to transposing stories about witches and demons into dialogue form. Works of demonology, like many polemics, occasionally experimented with the use of the dialogue as a didactic device: Lambert Daneau, the Calvinist demonologist, had produced a dialogue on witches which was translated into English and German the year after its publication, while George Gifford later employed the same technique to lambast cunning folk and satirise popular credulity about witchcraft.³⁵ Drama, however, also stretched the limits of belief. Demonology from its inception was obsessed with the boundaries between illusion and reality; and the very same issues were raised by the spectacle of the theatre.

The uneasy relationship between theatre and reality occasionally produced confused reactions in the audience. In Exeter, a performance of Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* ended in pandemonium when it was discovered that 'there was one devell too many amongst them, and so after a little pause desired the people to pardon them, they could go no further with this matter, the peple also understanding the thing as it was, every man hastened to be first out of dores'. Theatrical experience was so powerful that it became real.³⁶ By contrast, in 1661 in Augsburg, the fifteen-year-old chimney sweep Johann Lutzenberger confessed, like Faust, to making a pact with the Devil. He said a man dressed in black had given him and his companions nuts, pears and handfuls of coin. Lutzenberger was certain his benefactor was the Evil One. But when his companions were interrogated, they said they thought the strange man had come from the *Comedi*, a carnival character: they were sure this was theatre, not witchcraft.³⁷

Drama offered a host of ambivalent ways of presenting the witch that drew not only on demonology and pamphlets but on classical culture. Marston's *The Tragedy of Sophonisba*, 1604–6, offers us a classical witch,

³⁵ Lambert Daneau, *A Dialogue of Witches*, trans. attributed to T. Twyne ([London], printed by [T. East? for] R. W[atkins], 1575); for German editions see VD16: D77–80; George Gifford, *A Dialogue concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (1593).

³⁶ E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (4 vols., Oxford 1923), III, 424, undated report. I am grateful to David Harley for this reference. See also Jonathan Barry, 'Hell upon Earth or the Language of the Playhouse', in *Languages of Witchcraft. Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Stuart Clark (Basingstoke, 2001), for the Rev. Arthur Bedford's attempt to rid the theatre of reference to devils: he clearly believed such mentions were dangerous, though his campaign and indefatigable recording of such instances also proves they were common currency.

³⁷ Stadtarchiv Augsburg, Urgichten, Johann Mattheus Lutzenberger 1661; Strafbuch des Rats 1654–99, 136, 22 Mar. 1661.

a truly terrifying old yellow hag who tricks the villain into satisfying her repulsive lust. By contrast, the *Witch of Edmonton*, first performed in 1621, presents an ordinary seventeenth-century English witch, Elizabeth Sawyer, whose case also featured in a pamphlet by Henry Goodcole. She is an old woman with one eye and the drama features a Devil Dog. The play is unusual because it is sympathetic to her as a figure who is unjustly accused. Middleton's *The Witch* borrows wholesale from the witchcraft sceptic Scot, filching its lists of demons and cauldron ingredients from *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*.³⁸ As Anna Bayman has recently argued, London's print market was volatile, and metropolitan audiences were tiring of credulous witch pamphlets:³⁹ one reason may have been their saturation in the far more thrilling versions of witchcraft offered in the plays of Shakespeare, or the gory dramas of Webster. Here witchcraft has avowedly moved into the sphere of imagination, and many of these works presumed a knowing agnosticism amongst their London audience.

IV

In its exploitation of terror and titillation, of belief and scepticism, demonology often also depended on humour. Here writers drew on a medieval tradition of laughing at the Devil. The *Malleus* contains the unforgettable passage about male members which 'eat oats and corn', going on to describe how

a certain man tells that, when he had lost his member, he approached a known witch to ask her to restore it to him. She told the afflicted man to climb a certain tree, and that he might take which he liked out of a nest in which there were several members. And when he tried to take a big one, the witch said: You must not take that one; adding, because it belonged to a parish priest.⁴⁰

This is clearly Dominican propaganda, a knowing, sexy *fabliau* directed against their competitors, the parish clergy. The story is meant to be funny, not to be understood as the literal 'truth'.

Humour and the demonic go together in a joke from Schwäbisch-Hall recounted in a prose work by Georg Widmann. One night, the Devil spies a salt-maker with a cauldron full of hot boiling water; and putting his large nose through a slit in the salt house, he says 'How about this for a nose?' The salt-steamer promptly tips the cauldron of hot salty water over the Devil's nose, saying 'How about this for a flow?' For answer, the Devil picks up the salt-maker and throws him over the river and the cauldron

³⁸ *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays*, ed. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (Manchester, 1986).

³⁹ Anna Bayman, "'Large Hands, Wide Eares, and Piercing Sights": The "Discoveries" of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Witch Pamphlets', *Literature and History* (forthcoming).

⁴⁰ *Malleus*, 121 (pt II qu. I ch. 7).

over the Gensbühl hill, retorting ‘How about this for a throw?’⁴¹ The nose is a penis, and the competition is over who can ejaculate furthest: the Devil seems to be getting the worst of it until the cheeky salt-steamer meets his come-uppance.

Comic stories about the Devil had a venerable lineage, going back to oral tradition; and tales about peasants and trickery that even surpasses the Devil were classics of print.⁴² These elements found their way into the published Faust of 1587. For example, Faust meets a peasant one night in town with a cart laden with animal feed, and gets into mock negotiation with him, asking what price he will accept to let him eat his fill. The peasant, playing along with the whim of the drunken, well-heeled townsman, agrees a figure – only to gape with astonishment when Faust opens his mouth and consumes half the load. Or Faust sells a pair of fine horses to a horse-dealer, warning the new owner never to ride them through water. The curious horse-dealer cannot resist trying this at the first opportunity – and finds himself sitting on two bales of straw. Furious, he rushes off to complain. Finding Faust sleeping, he takes him by the leg, and, to his horror, the limb comes off in his hand. Faust cries ‘Murder!’ and the terrified horse dealer flees the scene. Here, tradition is turned on its head: the trickster is an urban educated sophisticate, and his dupes are peasants and that canniest of swindlers, the horse-dealer.⁴³

Humour did not exclude tragedy, and the full ambiguity of the Faust figure and of evil emerges as it slides imperceptibly from the burlesque to the tragic mode. In Faust, the Devil is at first a conjuror with a sense of humour; and finally a terrifying force that literally destroys Faust, leaving his blood and brains spattered about the room. Faust himself is at once the debauched drunkard, the sophisticated intellectual, the solicitous visitor who gives his pregnant hostess miraculous Italian grapes, and the fraudster. But he is also the man who, terrified of his own end, begs his beloved student companions to eat and drink with him one last time, and

⁴¹ *Deutsche Schwänke*, ed. Leander Petzoldt (Stuttgart, 1979), 190, from *Georg Widmanns Chronica*, ed. Christian Kolb (*Geschichtsquellen der Stadt Hall*, 2) (Stuttgart, 1904), 91.

⁴² Collections of stories featuring fools and peasants had long been popular – there were *Dil Ullenspiegel* (1515), *Claus Narr* (1572), *Das Lalebuch* (1597). In Wolfgang Büttner’s *Sechs hundert/neben vnd zwentzig Historien/Von Claus Narren* (Eisleben, 1572), someone tries to match-make Claus with a rich, ugly old woman. Claus retorts that if she is ugly, the Devil should have her, for when he is sick of her he will surely find another poor devil to pass her off onto (fo. L3r–v): apart from this misogynist tale, the Devil features little. There were also the Alsatian Martin Montanus’s many collections, including such classics as his *Gartengesellschaft* of 1559 (Martin Montanus, *Schwankbücher*, ed. Johannes Bolte (Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins Stuttgart 217) (Stuttgart, 1899). In one of these, a widow marries a man who promises her he will keep her well and she will have no need to work; but this dream lover turns out to be an over-sexed devil, who ‘rides her to death’ (ch. 85). Some of the motifs of Montanus’s stories echo fairytales, but on the whole, witchcraft does not feature much.

⁴³ *Historia von D. Fausten*, 86–7.

then sends them off to bed, knowing he must face the Devil alone.⁴⁴ He stands for all of us. This is what makes him such a compelling figure for Marlowe's drama.

V

The aesthetic of the German baroque is distinguished by its virtuoso shifting from one mode to another, from tragedy to comedy to theology. In demonology, jokes, drama and prose, we find this characteristically promiscuous mixture of sexual titillation, interest in character, fascination with the bizarre and humour of a wonderfully explosive, bodily kind. All these elements contributed to the next metamorphosis of the literature of the diabolic, as the early German novel that took shape in the second half of the seventeenth century.

The growth of a reading public had created a market for printed stories, and by 1650, with witch-hunting in decline, tales of witchcraft featured amongst the anthologies that canny authors compiled to turn a penny. The *Hundstägige Erquickstunden* of 1650 – stories for those dog days – included many stories about witches, drawn from the works of demonologists, classical sources, and others. It was self-consciously designed to amuse, 'to drive away melancholy', and its twelfth chapter dealt with witchcraft at length, moving straight on to discuss hermaphroditism.⁴⁵ In 1668, Johann Praetorius built on its success when he published his *Blockes-Berges Verrichtung*, a collection of fabulous tales about witchcraft and the uncanny.⁴⁶ Here we read about lesbian witches in Africa who lure the respectable wives who take their fancy; of Lilith and the Jewish spirits that grow on menstrual blood, enjoy sex with young men and stalk the chambers of women in childbirth. Praetorius also furnishes

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 118–24.

⁴⁵ *Hundstägige Erquickstund. Das ist/Schöne/Lustige Moralishe und Historische Discuß vnd Abbildungen* (Frankfurt, Joh. Gottfried Schönwetter, 1650): the title page makes it explicit that the aim of the collection is to drive away 'Das schwäre Gemüht der Menschen zuerfrischen/die Melancoleyen zu vertreiben' – a nice irony, since it was widely held by those who took witchcraft seriously that melancholy might lead one to fall into the clutches of the Devil and incline one to witchcraft. The twelfth chapter (427–574) has an extensive section on witches which eventually moves on to hermaphrodites.

⁴⁶ Johann Praetorius (= Hans Schultze), *Blockes-Berges Verrichtung* (Leipzig and Frankfurt, Johann Scheiben (Leipzig), Friedrich Arnst (Frankfurt), 1668): see 291ff on Africa, 313–71, for the famous passage on flight and the Sabbath from which Faust drew. The first edition does not include the frontispiece. This was included in the second edition. See the modern reprint, *Blockes-Berges Verrichtung*, intro. Hans Henning (Leipzig, 1968). Praetorius also makes great use of the Devil-books, as well as Bodin, Meder, Gödelman, Rémy, Binsfeld and Grillando. The book is also sprinkled with games and anagrams, many sections spelling out BLOCKESBERG and so on. Praetorius made his living through writing and was very prolific. Much of his books consist in reprinting the works of others; the *Blockes-Berges Verrichtung* is a miscellany which even contains a treatise in Latin.

vivid and gruesome descriptions of the witches' Sabbath, material which Goethe later drew on for his own *Faust*. All this owes a great deal to works of demonology written fifty years or more before at the height of the witch craze. We meet old friends, like the journeyman who watches his widowed mistress go each night when all are abed to a certain place in the stable where she reaches out for her pitchfork. Suspecting her, he copies her action – and finds himself at a Sabbath, a story that is also reminiscent of Hans Baldung Grien's haunting woodcut, 'The Enchanted Groom' of 1544.⁴⁷ Praetorius's sources are the works of demonologists like Bodin, Rémy, Kramer and Grillando; but he exploits them for their entertainment value, making good use of the *Hundstägige Erquickstunden* and setting stories culled from demonologists alongside ghost stories, local fables and puzzles. A prolific author, Praetorius also invented the wonderful character Rübenzahl, whose adventures were often pirated from older works, such as the printed *Faust*. A collected *Daemonologia Rubinzalii* was published in 1661, its title a tongue-in-cheek reference to demonology that would have been unthinkable a generation before.⁴⁸

The second edition of the *Blockesberges Verrichtung* is illustrated with a dramatic woodcut of the Blocksberg itself, which owes more than a little to earlier panoramas of witchcraft. But instead of providing a moral commentary on the inescapable punishment of witchcraft, death by burning, this image stuffs every salacious tidbit about demons, pagan belief and witches into one pastiche (Figure 5). Again we see witches flying to Sabbaths on goats, while another tumbles precipitously downwards, her hair loose and her dress raised to reveal her legs. At the bottom of the image, a giant winged Devil defecates into a chamber-pot, a motif that seems to have been pinched straight from Lutheran propaganda about the diabolic origins of the monks, where She-Devils sitting on gallows defecate monks.⁴⁹ At the centre of the image, witches perform the anal kiss on a giant goat, while long lines of assorted pairs of Devils and

⁴⁷ Praetorius, *Blockes-Berges Verrichtung*, 'Die zauberkundige Witwe und ihr Hausknecht', which is similar to Del Rio, *Investigations*, 95–7; and on the Baldung Grien image, see, for an interpretation linking the image to fantasy and to sleep, Linda C. Hults, 'Baldung's *Bewitched Groom* Revisited: Artistic Temperament, Fantasy and the "Dream of Reason"', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 15, 3 (1984), 259–79.

⁴⁸ Johannes Praetorius, *Daemonologia Rubinzalii* (Frankfurt, 1661), which even reproduces the story about Faust and the horse-seller, but replaces Faust with his hero Rübenzahl, 329, and includes plenty of material about ghosts, Silesian legends and superstition. Praetorius, as someone who lived from his writing, had to have an eye for what would sell.

⁴⁹ See, on such images in Reformation anti-monastic propaganda, R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981; rev. edn Oxford, 1994), 85–7.



Figure 5 Johann Praetorius, *Blockes-Berges Verrichtung...*, 2nd edn (Leipzig, 1669), 4. By permission of Suhrkamp Insel Verlag.

witches wind their way in a snake-like spiral around the picture, playing phallic-looking bagpipes and horns.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Interestingly enough, the publishers of a work by Georg Spitzel in 1687 included an engraving which was a barely disguised re-hash of Praetorius's frontispiece (Gottlieb Spitzel, *Die Gebrochne Macht der Finsternuß/oder Zerstörte Teuffliche Bunds- und Buhl-Freundschaft*

The image is framed by the Blocksberg or Brocken, the mountain which was fabled as the setting for Walpurgis Night, when witches from all over Germany would gather for a huge Sabbath. Praetorius begins his work with a naturalistic description of the mountain, devoid of vegetation and shrouded in mists. Now, instead of Faust's fantastic journeys with Mephistopheles, witchcraft furnishes information for a real tourist guide, and Praetorius provides a real-life account of his ascent to the summit of the Blocksberg; and the main character of the book is not the witch or even the Devil, but the mountain itself.⁵¹

Happel's *Curiosities of the World*, a baggy, multi-volume epic, published in 1683 and another forerunner of the picaresque German novel, also includes an entire section devoted to the diabolic and miraculous, and boasts, amongst its section on geology, a long description of the Blocksberg, where it is 'generally believed that every year, on Walburg's night or May 1, the witches hold their gatherings'.⁵² Happel describes how the mountain is always wreathed in fog, and discusses the uncanny nature of the views over great distances that it affords; but he explains this naturalistically: 'the cause is that while one is surrounded by cloud, there is clear and bright sunshine both below and above'. Yet then he shifts gear, appending a story about a medical doctor who found himself on the Brocken at a spring, and sticking his hand beneath it to discover the source of the perishing coldness of the water, found pellets of silver; once off the mountain, he could never find the treasure again.

Happel draws on some chestnuts of demonology. We meet the wonderfully titled 'Diabolic Postal Service', which tells of the Dutch merchant who encounters a man at an inn in Livonia (Figure 6). The stranger boasts he can fly to his house in the Netherlands and back in an hour. Naturally the merchant bets that he cannot; but the stranger reappears within the hour, bearing a silver spoon from his house and the ring off his wife's finger.⁵³ The speedy stranger is the Devil, a motif that is indebted to the stories of witches who fly to Sabbaths while their husbands sleep. This tall tale is illustrated by a woodcut of a fabulous diabolic cart, horses, reins, diabolic outriders, and all flying through the air; the ultimate comic transmutation of the witch on her goat.

Demonology had become entertainment. By the 1690s, a clutch of old French demonological classics were being reprinted, this time not for

mit den menschen . . . (Augsburg, 1687), 207, but in a work which was a serious contribution to demonology. Spitzel did believe that some of witchcraft was illusion, though he was convinced the Devil was active in the world and that witchcraft was real.

⁵¹ Praetorius, *Blockes-Berges Verrichtung*, introduction, fos. iir–xivr.

⁵² Eberhard Happel, *Gröste Denkwürdigkeiten der Welt, oder sogenannte Relationes curiosae* (5 vols., Hamburg, 1683–90) (vol. II has two parts), II, pt 2, 140–1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, III, 472 (Teuffliche Post); this section contains such stories as Zauberbische Liebe, Verfluchte Chrystall-sehen, Teuffliche Bocksfahrt.



Figure 6 Eberhard Happel, *Gröste Denkwürdigkeiten der Welt, oder sogenannte Relationes curiosae* (5 vols., Hamburg, 1683–90) [British Library 446.b.5], III, 472. By permission of the British Library.

their worth as intellectual treatises, but for fun.⁵⁴ Witchcraft had become part of a popular market for stories; the witch, a character of fiction.

The figure of the witch can even be traced in the novels of Hans Jakob Christoph von Grimmelshausen, the best-known of all the seventeenth-century German writers, whose style epitomises the baroque. His fictional anti-hero Courasche, the woman who survives all that the Thirty Years War can throw at her, is no witch but a tough, sexually experienced harridan. She stands for the moral bankruptcy caused by the Thirty Years War, yet she has the classic attributes of a witch, sexual licentiousness and old age. At one point in the novel she even purchases a familiar, who makes her tavern business boom, for no one can resist her diabolic beer. Courasche has escaped the typology of the witch to become a character in her own right. And yet, it was the interest in character type evident in trials and demonology that provided the materials from which an emblematic figure like Courasche could emerge.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See, for example, the works of Jean Bodin, Nicolaus Rémy and others, published in a multi-part series entitled *Beschreibung Teuffelischer Zaubere- und Hexen-Pöffen; Der bösen Geister und Gespensten Wunder-seltzame Historien und Nächtliche Erscheinungen; Der Gespensten Gauckel-Wercks Dritter Theil* (Hamburg, Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1693, 1698).

⁵⁵ Hans Jakob Christoph von Grimmelshausen, *Lebensbeschreibung der Erzbetrügerin und Landstörzerin Courasche*, ed. Klaus Haberkamm and Günther Weydt (Stuttgart, 1971), 85–90 (ch. xvii).

VI

The baroque aesthetic in literature is widely treated as an inferior form of art, or even regarded as pathological. Yet the picaresque manages to celebrate the variety of life, encompassing the gross, the tragic and the comic in one gargantuan whole, and presenting without embarrassment, the closeness of pleasure to pain or of sex to comedy. By the close of the eighteenth century, these varied modes had begun to part company, as the witch of nursery tale finally separated from the *Faust* of drama.

There is a difference between fantasy and reality. Men like Rémy were implicated in the deaths of hundreds of people, and though his work breathes a disconcerting empathy for the women whose individual souls he hoped to save, he acted on his murderous impulses. It is for the historian to consider not just the subversions and interesting possibilities that art and literature offered, but the more difficult issue of the relationship between such violent, ribald fantasies about sex and women – often with a vicious streak, as in depictions of old women – and the horrors of witch-hunting. What makes fantasies and beliefs trigger violent action is not just the beliefs or the fantasies themselves, but a set of historical circumstances – which in the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century included religious tensions, legal systems and dearth.

This tour of the cultural legacy of the figure of the witch has taken us from demonology to drama, image and the novel. As we follow her progress from the demonology of the late fifteenth century through the flowering of writings about the Devil in the 1570s and beyond, we trace the gradual disenchantment of the figure of the witch and the final domestication of the Devil. From the outset, demonology fired the imagination, and, like other moralist literature, it consistently threatened to entertain its audience at least as much as it instructed. Demonologists knew their markets – or their publishers did – and the possibilities of set-piece description, writerly flair and a damn good story were always there to be exploited. Humour was not incidental to this, for audiences were gripped as much by laughter as by terror. By laughing at the Devil, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century people's belief in him was not one whit diminished. Humour, it might be claimed, is a means of warding off evil, just as the way to get rid of the Devil, according to Luther, was to fart at him.⁵⁶

But laughter, of course, also tends to tease belief. What drove demonology from the very beginning was its obsession with the issue of truth and illusion, and that is why so many of the stories that demonologists loved also stretched credulity, and are funny. What was true, and what

⁵⁶ See Heiko Oberman, 'Teufelsdreck: Eschatology and Scatology in the "Old" Luther', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 19, 3 (1988), 435–50.

was really one step too far? Was flight real? Did people truly participate in the Sabbath or only think they did? Could devils really make penises disappear? These were the questions with which demonologists played again and again. When Protestant demonologists asserted that the Devil was the master of illusion and so all his effects might be in the mind rather than literally true,⁵⁷ they seemed to solve the issue of what could be believed at a stroke. But they also immensely increased the scope of illusion, for anything could *seem* to be true. Even Catholic demonologists were willing to grant that many of the Devil's effects were illusory; but it was often the funniest of these tales that had to be explained, and once told, they stuck in the mind. Who could forget the luckless flyers Peter Binsfeld describes, who 'fall from the trees and break or crush their bones'?⁵⁸

Beyond their conscious, intentional message, these texts appeal to the senses, the unconscious and the irrational. Humour, after all, works because it appeals to the repressed, and to what cannot be easily corralled into logical argument. In the crude pranks of the burlesque Devil, we can almost hear the belly laughter of the audience. This did not stop them from watching him enter the next scene as a terrifying demon once more. Like Shakespeare's players in *Hamlet*, the German baroque imagination had no difficulty in simultaneously accommodating 'tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral'. But rather than merely laugh at this bizarre jumble of competing aesthetic modes, its very chaos may disclose something vital to understanding the early modern mind. The literature of demonology opened up a whole imaginative world that drew on classical reference as well as the Bible to create something vivid and new. Belief in witchcraft was never just a matter of subscribing to a set of propositions about witches and demons or even to a consistent binary world-view of a universe caught between good and evil. Like all belief, it consisted in a morass of images, half-articulated convictions and contradictory positions, elements of which could occasionally come together in searing clarity to fuel suspicion that a particular individual was a witch.

⁵⁷ Stuart Clark, 'Protestant Demonology: Sin, Superstition, and Society (c. 1520–c.1630)', in *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and G. Henningsen (Oxford, 1990).

⁵⁸ Peter Binsfeld, *Tractat Von Bekantnuß der Zauberer und Hexen* (Trier, 1590), 60: he thinks this proves flight is real, but concedes that some call flight dreams. Del Rio also mentions those who have the bad luck to get arrested without any clothes on, or simply fall from the sky; Del Rio, *Investigations*, 97 (qu. 16).