

Witchcraft in the Restoration

By comparison with the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods, there were very few prosecutions and executions for witchcraft during the Restoration. But despite the decline in formal indictments and convictions, lively debate about witchcraft began again during the civil war and continued, and if anything intensified, during the Restoration. Witchcraft belief, at least at the level of educated debate, had become divorced from the issue of witchcraft persecution.¹ Belief in the existence of witches as agents of the devil had been understood by many to be a guarantee of Christian piety, but prior to the Restoration witches had also been said to be a threat to human society over and above the other works of the devil. The authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum* wrote that ‘countless acts of sorcery are committed that the Devil would not be permitted to inflict on humans, if he endeavoured to harm humans by himself, but he is permitted by the just and hidden judgment of God to use sorceresses’.² A number of treatises on witchcraft in the late 1500s and early 1600s dealt extensively with the legal aspects of witchcraft, such as the rules governing evidence against witches and the degree of proof required in order to find an accused witch guilty. But the urgent threat of *maleficium* and the concern with legal procedure disappear almost entirely from the writings of witchcraft theorists following the Restoration – an indication that the practical aspects of the question were fading into insignificance.³

As the witchcraft debate moved away from questions about the extent of witches’ power and how they should be dealt with under

1 Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, p. 310.

2 Institoris and Sprenger, II.131D–132A (pp. 355–56).

3 Although Richard Bernard’s *Guide to Grand-Ivry Men*, which does deal with such questions, was reprinted in the 1680s: see Bostridge, *Witchcraft and its Transformations*, p. 88.

the law, a much more pronounced concern with the ontological status of spirits emerged.⁴ This had always been an important underlying issue, but the Restoration debate on witchcraft dealt with the relationships between witches, spirits, and the physical world more openly than had hitherto been the case. In his *Dæmonologie*, for example, James I had made passing reference to ‘the old error of the Sadducees, in denying of spirits’,⁵ but most of the book is devoted to discussing what witches can and cannot do and how the law should deal with them. In contrast, Joseph Glanvill and Henry More’s *Saducismus Triumphatus* (1681) moves ‘Saducism’ into the title, making it clear that the aim of the book is to defeat those who question the existence of spirits – witchcraft is significant primarily as a means to this end. The actual cases of witchcraft which Glanvill provides as evidence are presented in a section of their own in the second half of the book, as if they merely formed an appendix.

The discussion of witchcraft in *Saducismus Triumphatus* is often concerned with what witchcraft implies about spirits, and the witches themselves are sometimes absent from this discussion. *Saducismus Triumphatus* has generally been seen as constituting the final version of the argument on one side of the ‘Glanvill–Webster debate’, but in the expanded 1689 edition, which reprints a number of earlier writings on the topic by Glanvill and his co-author Henry More, the witchcraft sceptic John Webster is far from being the only target. This is hardly surprising given that Webster was no ‘Saducee’ – he was an occultist and natural magician, among other things, who believed that spirits were everywhere.⁶ Nor is it tenable to claim, as Wallace Notestein did, that all other participants in this debate were a kind of ‘Greek chorus’ to the main dispute between Glanvill and Webster.⁷ Indeed, *Saducismus Triumphatus* was published after Glanvill’s death in 1680, put together by More, who wrote the introduction and a fair proportion of the content.

4 Heightened interest in such questions originated in the years before the Restoration, and one scholar has recently suggested the ‘possibility that Scot’s unorthodox conception of spirits found an audience in the radical ferment of the Interregnum’ as a reason for the publication of new editions of the *Discoverie*: Davies, ‘The Reception of Reginald Scot’s *Discovery of Witchcraft*’, p. 390.

5 James I, p. 2.

6 Thomas Harmon Jobe, ‘The Devil in Restoration Science: The Glanvill–Webster Witchcraft Debate’, *Isis* 72:3 (September 1981), 343–56 (p. 343).

7 Notestein, p. 297.

Saducismus Triumphatus takes exception to the views on spirit of materialists such as Thomas Hobbes; ‘nullibists’ like Descartes (whose definition of spirit, according to More, is tantamount to declaring its non-existence); ‘Holenmerians’ (for similar reasons); followers of Spinoza; and ‘psychopyrists’ like Thomas Willis, a founding member of the Royal Society (of which More was also a fellow) who regarded the soul as a kind of flame.⁸ While More treats his colleague Willis much more respectfully than he does materialists and Cartesians, he obviously feels the need to defend his concept of spirit from competing views coming from a number of different sources. Some of these challenges originated within the emerging scientific establishment, and More feels that all of them threaten to destroy belief in spirits, and even the concept of spirit more broadly. While More and Glanvill had impressive credentials, it is clear that even their colleagues in the Royal Society did not always share their views, as Barbara Shapiro points out, and in fact Webster’s treatise was licensed by the Royal Society, while *Saducismus Triumphatus* was not.⁹

It is widely recognised that the label ‘witchcraft’ had significant political dimensions throughout the early modern period. Stuart Clark has pointed out that the early years of the Restoration in particular saw a renewal of the connection between rebellion and witchcraft established in 1 Samuel 15:23,¹⁰ while Ian Bostridge has shown that the radicalism of ‘fanatics’ and ‘enthusiasts’ was equated with witchcraft by more orthodox thinkers.¹¹ Thomas Harmon Jobe has identified this as perhaps the key issue in the dispute between Webster and Glanvill: ‘Webster opposed the belief in witches because his Paracelsian-Helmontian science and the radical Protestant theology

8 More uses the term ‘Holenmerian’ to refer to ‘those scholastics’ who had described the soul as existing in ‘all parts of the whole body equally’ according to his biographer Robert Crocker, *Henry More* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), p. 172. On Willis’s view of the soul, see John Henry, ‘The Matter of Souls: Medical Theory and Theology in Seventeenth-Century England’, in *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, edited by Roger K. French and Andrew Wear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 87–113 (pp. 108–09). A more general account of his thought can be found in Arikha, *Passions and Tempers*, pp. 223–27.

9 Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 215.

10 Clark, pp. 611–12.

11 Bostridge, p. 63.

linked to it had been attacked as the devil's work.¹² For sceptics as well as critics, witches themselves are of less interest than the implications of belief in witchcraft. Politics is frequently involved in the Restoration theatre's representation of witchcraft as well.

For orthodox writers like Glanvill and More, the existence of witchcraft served a dual purpose. It was used to attack radicals and freethinkers by associating them with witches, but it was also said to provide empirical evidence for a particular view of the operations of spirit in the material world. This view of the world of spirit was in turn regarded as essential to Anglican Christian belief. These two aims do not necessarily sit comfortably together; as I argue, Glanvill's view of spirit is in fact closer to Webster's than More's. The dispute between Webster and Glanvill may have arisen from their finding themselves on opposite sides of a religious and political divide, rather than from any real disagreement about the relationship between the material and spiritual worlds. Nonetheless, understanding how the people involved thought about this relationship is of vital importance in understanding the significance of the Restoration witchcraft debate. The first section of this chapter discusses the nature of body and spirit as understood in early modern thought and the importance of these concepts within the Restoration witchcraft debate. The following section turns to witchcraft as it was represented in the theatre, highlighting both growing scepticism towards witchcraft and growing interest in the operations of spirit in the material world.

The nature of spirit and body

A great deal was written in medieval and early modern Europe about the nature of spirits and their relationship to the human body and the physical world, but in broad terms there were two basic conceptions of the distinction between body and spirit. One such conception has its roots in Platonist philosophy. The other is based on scholastic thought, especially the writings of Thomas Aquinas, which was heavily influenced by Aristotelian ideas.

The older Platonist conception of the spirit world represents the human world as occupying one extreme of a sliding scale. According to this view, the world is at the centre of the universe because it is made of the heaviest matter, which naturally sinks to the bottom.

12 Jobe, 344.

The grossest material makes up the human world, while the areas above our world are made of progressively finer matter. Spiritual creatures have material bodies, as do humans, but they are made of finer – both in the sense that it is less dense and in the sense that it is superior – material than we are. C. S. Lewis summarises the views of the Platonist philosopher Apuleius – who also wrote about witches in *The Golden Ass* – as follows:

The daemons have bodies of a finer consistency than clouds, which are not normally visible to us. It is because they have bodies that he calls them animals ... They are rational (aerial) animals, as we are rational (terrestrial) animals, and the gods proper are rational (aetherial) animals. The idea that even the highest created spirits – the gods, as distinct from God – were, after their own fashion, incarnate ... goes back to Plato.¹³

The association of the body with earth, and spirits – including the human soul – with air, had great appeal to early Christian theologians, in particular St Augustine, whose work incorporated Platonist ideas into Christian theology. God, after all, had made Adam from soil (earth) and brought this soil to life with a breath – air (Genesis 2:7). Augustine identifies this ‘breath’ as the soul in his *City of God*.¹⁴ He also accepted the existence of the ‘airy spirits’ described by Apuleius, but denied that they were superior to human beings or should be worshipped. Rather, these spirits are identified with the fallen angels who were ‘thrust out of the glorious heaven for their unpardonable guilt’¹⁵ and are identified in VIII.19 as the source of magical power. But while Augustine disputes the moral status of the Platonists’ daemons, giving to the word its Christian sense of an evil spirit, he does not dispute that they are corporeal, although their bodies are ‘airy’.

This was not the only way of understanding the concept of spirit. The view that was to become dominant in the medieval Church made an absolute distinction between the spirit and human worlds. Rather than presenting a sliding scale, this view posited a fundamental qualitative distinction between matter and spirit. Spirits’ bodies are not made of air; instead, spirits are entirely incorporeal. This conception is present as early as the late fifth or early sixth century in the

13 C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 41–42.

14 St. Augustine, *City of God*, XII.23, p. 367.

15 St. Augustine, *City of God*, VIII.22, p. 245.

writings of pseudo-Dionysius,¹⁶ but it was fully developed much later, especially by Thomas Aquinas.

However, this new conception of spirits as non-corporeal did not greatly alter the association of spirits with the air. According to Aquinas, spirits do not have bodies but could ‘assume’ them by constructing temporary bodies from air.¹⁷ The *Malleus Maleficarum* follows Aquinas, making the rather woolly claim that ‘regarding the material and quality of the assumed body, it should be said that he [i.e. the demon] assumes a body made of air and that it is made of earth in some way inasmuch as it has the characteristic of earth through a process of thickening’.¹⁸ Whether the demon is actually made of air, or simply assumes a temporary body which is somehow constructed from air (possibly mixed with earth), spirits are clearly associated with the element of air.

At the root of this association may be a degree of confusion over whether air can really be considered a physical substance, as Hobbes later suggested:

in the sense of common people, not all the Universe is called Body, but only such parts thereof as they can discern by the sense of Feeling, to resist their force ... Therefore in the common language of men, *Aire*, and *aeriall substances*, use not to be taken for *Bodies*, but (as often as men are sensible of their effects) are called *Wind*, or *Breath*, or (because the same are called in the Latine *Spiritus*) *Spirits*; as when they call that aeriall substance, which in the body of any living creature, gives it life and motion, *Vitall* and *Animall Spirits*.¹⁹

Hobbes feels the need to clarify, explicitly and repeatedly,²⁰ that air is in fact a physical substance and not incorporeal. His observations about the etymology of the word ‘spirit’ are also relevant here. It may be that it is inherently difficult for human beings to conceive of air as physical; most of us, despite having learned otherwise, tend not to think of air as occupying space.

Both the view of Apuleius (that spirits are corporeal and have thin, airy bodies) and that of Aquinas (that spirits are incorporeal but can form temporary bodies from air in order to interact with humanity) imply that spirits are capable of directly influencing the

16 Lewis, p. 71.

17 Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, p. 62.

18 Institoris and Sprenger, II.105D, pp. 302–03.

19 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Penguin, 1968), III.34, p. 429.

20 He reminds the reader of this again in IV.45, p. 660, for example. Webster also makes this point repeatedly; see pp. 202–03.

material world. In fact, the Aristotelian natural philosophy of the late medieval period invoked the concept of spirit to explain a wide range of natural phenomena, including the physiological functions of the human body. Aquinas himself was involved in assimilating Galen's ideas into a Christian (and Aristotelian) framework. The resulting synthesis incorporated Galen's three types of *pneumata* or 'spirits' – the principles of life thought to be carried in the bloodstream – and a tripartite soul, only one part of which was incorporeal and rational.²¹ In consequence, and despite its denial of the corporeality of spiritual substances (including the rational human soul), the scholastic view involved 'spirits' in a wide range of physical processes. One clear expression of this attitude in layman's terms can be found in Thomas Nashe's *Terrors of the Night* (1594):

There be them that thinke euerie sparke in a flame is a spirit, and that the wormes which at sea eat through a ship, are so also: which may verie well bee; for haue not you seene one sparke of fire burne a whole towne, & a man with a sparke of lightning made blinde, or kild outright? It is impossible the gunnes should goe off as they doo, if there were not a spirit either in the fier, or in the powder.²²

Spirits, in Nashe's view, are essential to the functioning of the physical world, a necessary element in any explanation of cause and effect in nature, particularly in relation to the 'superior' element of fire.

The kind of 'spirit' involved in making the physical world function was not always clearly distinguished from the kind of spirits that were angels and devils, as is apparent from a passing comment of Glanvill's. Glanvill notes that 'some have thought that the Genii (whom both the Platonical and Christian Antiquity thought embodied) are recreated by the reeks and vapours of humane blood and the spirits that proceed from them'.²³ The genii are guardian spirits which were thought to be assigned to human beings from birth onwards in order to guide and protect them. The opinion Glanvill notes, without going quite so far as to endorse it, clearly links the *pneumata* thought to be necessary for the functioning of the human body with spirits of another kind. Glanvill goes on to speculate that familiars might inject 'vile vapour' into witches' blood when

21 Arikha, pp. 38–39.

22 McKerrow, p. 350.

23 Joseph Glanvill and Henry More, *Saducismus Triumphatus* (London, 1688), p. 75.

feeding from them.²⁴ This requires the belief that spirits of the supernatural variety can physically affect the natural spirits, just as the natural and embodied spirits carried in the blood can generate supernatural spirits.

The supposed interaction between corporeal and incorporeal spirits has struck many modern observers as problematic. C. S. Lewis, despite his confessed nostalgia for what he calls ‘the Medieval Model’, comments that

[t]he spirits [i.e. the Galenic *pneumata*] were supposed to be just sufficiently material for them to act upon the body, but so very fine and attenuated that they could be acted upon by the wholly immaterial soul ... This ... seems to me the least reputable feature in the Medieval Model. If the *tertium quid* is matter at all (what have density and rarity to do with it?) both ends of the bridge rest on one side of the chasm; if not, both rest on the other.²⁵

This seems obvious enough, so why did nobody at the time object? Perhaps Lewis, a twentieth-century scholar, had a clearer sense of the materiality of ‘fine’ substances like air than most medieval thinkers. On the other hand, it has been suggested that Aquinas himself was aware of the problematic nature of his opposition between the material and the spiritual.²⁶

In any case, the problem of the relationship between spirit and matter seems to have become increasingly apparent to a number of seventeenth-century intellectuals. Alternative ideas began to be proposed, the most drastic of which is Hobbesian materialism. Hobbes states unequivocally that

The World ... is Corporeall, that is to say, Body; and hath the dimensions of Magnitude, namely, Length, Breadth, and Depth: also every part of Body, is likewise Body, and hath the like dimensions; and consequently every part of the Universe, is Body, and that which is not Body, is no part of the Universe: And because the Universe is All, that which is no part of it, is Nothing; and consequently no where.²⁷

24 Glanvill and More, p. 76. Reference to this possibility is made much earlier by Johannes Weyer (*Mora*, III.7, p. 186). Glanvill’s explanation of witchcraft in physiological terms concedes much ground to the sceptical outlook of Weyer and Scot. Julie A. Davies discusses Glanvill’s views and the background to them at length in her article ‘Poisonous Vapours: Joseph Glanvill’s Science of Witchcraft’, *Intellectual History Review* 22:2 (2012).

25 Lewis, p. 167.

26 Marleen Rozemond, *Descartes’ Dualism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 45; Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, pp. 66–67.

27 Hobbes, p. 689.

Anyone foolish enough to depart from Hobbes's uncompromising opinion has been deluded, he declares, by 'the Vain Philosophy of Aristotle',²⁸ a comment which can leave no doubt that Hobbes is opposed to the dualist scholastic conception of the universe.

Descartes' version of dualism was almost as radical in its implications for the involvement of spirit in the everyday world. Descartes maintained the real existence of spirit, and for this reason is often seen today in opposition to Hobbes, who wrote one of seven sets of objections to the *Meditations*. But in his own time, Descartes' conception of spiritual substance was seen as dangerously restrictive. Descartes excluded spiritual substance from all aspects of physical existence and limited the operations of the human soul to thought – for Descartes, as John Cottingham puts it, "soul" (Fr. *âme*, Lat. *anima*) and "mind" (Fr. *esprit*, Lat. *mens*) are synonymous'.²⁹ Spiritual substance, for Descartes, is not characterised by any of the attributes of physical matter: it cannot, therefore, occupy space or even be located in space, contradicting the conventional scholastic view taken by the *Malleus* and coming dangerously close to that of Hobbes. Both views were felt to be extremely problematic by the witchcraft theorists of the Restoration.

Descartes defined spirit partly in terms of what it is not, an aspect of his position which inspired Henry More's term 'nullibist'. The nullibists, More explains,

affirm Spirits to be *nowhere*; but would be found to do it only by way of an oblique and close derision of their Existence, saying indeed they *exist*, but then again hiddenly and cunningly denying it, by affirming they are *nowhere*.³⁰

More cannot accept Descartes' minimalist conception of spirit, which defines spirit by its propensity for thought as *res cogitans*, but also negatively, in opposition to matter. The qualities of matter are, by definition, not present in spirit, which is therefore *not* located or extended in space. More needs something more positive, and he defines a spirit as 'an Immaterial Substance intrinsically endued with Life and the faculty of Motion'.³¹ Perhaps even more importantly, More also defines body as

Substance Material, of it self altogether destitute of all Perception, Life, and Motion. Or thus: Body is a Substance Material coalescent

28 Hobbes, p. 691.

29 John Cottingham, *Descartes* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 111.

30 Glanvill and More, p. 135.

31 Glanvill and More, p. 162.

or accruing together into one, by virtue of some other thing, from whence that one by coalition, has or may have Life also, Perception and Motion.³²

If spirit has historically been identified with air, then body has tended to be identified with earth. Matter has traditionally been conceived of as inert and lifeless – like soil or stone – in the absence of spirit to enliven it. More insists on this ancient view of matter, whereas both Descartes and Hobbes allow for matter to live without the involvement of a soul (since, for Descartes, plants and animals are examples of soulless matter). More also defends the Aristotelian idea of spirit as the form of the body, as it is ‘by virtue of some other thing’ – a spirit or soul – that matter can ‘coalesce’ in the first place.³³

But although More’s conception of spirit is very much opposed to the new theories of Descartes and Hobbes, *Saducismus Triumphatus* does accept the need for something more than simply repeating old assertions about the nature of spirit. Both More and Glanvill were aware of the importance of providing empirical evidence in support of their beliefs. More’s introduction to the 1689 edition highlights this aim of the book: ‘it is of main importance, that we have a true genuine and consistent Notion of the Nature of a *Spirit*, and such as will not beget a misbelief of their Existence in such as consider it’. As well as being ‘Erroneous’, More argues that it is also ‘hurtful’ to conceive of ‘the Nature of a *Created Spirit* to be such as is inconsistent with the *Perceptive Functions*’.³⁴ More and Glanvill are united in demanding spirits, and these spirits must not only exist, they must be seen to exist. This requires that they are active in the world, so that they – or at least, evidence of their activities – can be seen and heard: this is where witchcraft comes in.

The notion of spirit that is needed must be a ‘true genuine and consistent’ one, but it is of at least equal importance that this notion ‘will not beget a misbelief of their Existence’. More’s search for spirit begins with the assumption that spirit, and spirits, exist – precisely what it seeks to prove. Ian Bostridge, drawing on work by Moody Prior, suggests that Glanvill’s position in favour of the possibility of witchcraft is based on a radical scepticism that avoids

32 Glanvill and More, p. 161.

33 On the Aristotelian idea of the soul as the form of the body, adopted by many scholastic thinkers, see Rozemond, pp. 44–46.

34 Glanvill and More, p. 8.

ruling anything out.³⁵ This is true of the negative part of the argument – the part that casts doubt on arguments against the reality of witchcraft. But the positive part of the argument, where Glanvill and More offer support for the existence of witchcraft, is a different matter. Here, the sceptical attitude is suspended completely. The authors offer a great deal of speculation about how witches *might* operate; but ultimately, the only way the existence of spirits can be supported with positive evidence is by stretching the concept of empirical observation so that it includes hearsay and evidence from witnesses whose reliability is simply taken for granted. This evidence – in sufficient quantity – is claimed to be indisputable, while all the arguments of the sceptics are characterised as assertions based on unproven theoretical premises. Glanvill and More are only sceptical towards the views of people with whom they disagree.

Perhaps the most obvious objection to More's view of spirit as an 'immaterial substance' is made by Hobbes, who with typical bluntness states that the concept is a contradiction in terms.³⁶ Although More does not deal with this objection, Glanvill responds to it. His answer is to return to the spiritual ontology of Apuleius:

[T]hough it should be granted them, that a substance immaterial is as much a contradiction as they can fancy; yet why should they not believe, that the Air and all the Regions above us, may have their invisible intellectual Agents, of Nature like unto our Souls, be that what it will.³⁷

Glanvill seems grudgingly to agree, as More does not, that the idea of immaterial substance is a contradiction. Unlike his co-author, in fact, Glanvill clearly believes that those spirits which are capable of interacting with human beings are embodied, an opinion he shares with the witchcraft sceptics Webster and Wagstaffe,³⁸ for two main reasons:

(1) we perceive in our selves, that all Sense is caused and excited by motion made in matter; and when those motions which convey

35 Bostridge, pp. 74–75. See also Popkin, pp. 214–15.

36 Hobbes, for example in I.4, I.12, III.34 (pp. 108, 171, 439). Webster makes a similar argument by a more circuitous route (pp. 198–201).

37 Glanvill and More, p. 69.

38 Webster, unlike Glanvill, believes that *all* spirits, with the exception of God himself, are embodied. See Webster, pp. 204–14. John Wagstaffe, in *The Question of Witchcraft Debated* (London, 1671), argues that devils are 'aerial creatures' (p. 81).

sensible impressions to the Brain, the Seat of Sense, are intercepted, Sense is lost: So that, if we suppose Spirits perfectly to be disjoin'd from all matter, 'tis not conceivable how they have the sense of any thing ... Nor doth it (2) seem suitable to the Analogy of Nature, which useth not to make precipitous leaps from one thing to another, but usually proceeds by orderly steps and gradations: whereas were there no order of Beings between Us, who are so deeply plunged into the grossest matter, and pure unbodied Spirits, 'twere a mighty jump in Nature.³⁹

Glanvill concedes a great deal of ground to Hobbesian materialism in his first point. His use of the terms 'matter' and 'motion' seem to echo Hobbes, who uses these words constantly in *Leviathan*. What is more remarkable, however, is that this (neo-Platonist) passage, evidently at odds with More's (Aristotelian) definition of spirit, is included at all in a book in which More intended to present 'a true genuine and consistent Notion of the Nature of a *Spirit*'.⁴⁰

The confusion evident in *Saducismus Triumphatus* is not simply the result of its mixed authorship. More and Glanvill (and, more surprisingly, Webster), in one sense, share the same view of spiritual substance: they want it to be both corporeal and incorporeal.⁴¹ This is why More insists that, although it is incorporeal, spirit must be extended and located in space – possessed, in other words, of properties which both Hobbes and Descartes associate with matter only. Glanvill, by contrast, accepts that spirits must be embodied in order for them to interact with human beings – but he also wants some of them to be 'pure' and 'unbodied'. The co-authors are united in wanting to preserve the simultaneous distinction between, and conflation of, spirit and body which was increasingly being challenged by other thinkers.

To say that this confused spiritual ontology is a necessary condition for the existence of witches (as Wallace Notestein did long ago)⁴² is accurate, but it also gets things backwards. Rather, the reality of

39 Glanvill and More, p. 92.

40 Glanvill and More, p. 8. *Saducismus Triumphatus* was published after Glanvill's death and was a compilation of previously published writings by both Glanvill and More. The introduction to this work, titled 'An Account of the Second edition', was written by More.

41 As did Thomas Aquinas, according to Walter Stephens: 'Without declaring it in so many words, Aquinas argues that angels and devils have bodies that both are and are not real' (*Demon Lovers*, p. 62).

42 Notestein, pp. 290–91.

witchcraft is offered as *proof* of this particular view of spirits: creatures not of this world, but nevertheless active in it. This, in turn, was widely perceived to be a necessary precondition for the existence of God, a point made clear by Meric Casaubon. Casaubon was an ally of Glanvill's and More's who contributed a detailed attack on the witchcraft sceptic John Wagstaffe to the Restoration witchcraft debate. Casaubon writes elsewhere that

the abettors of Atheism promote the opinion, as much as they can, that nothing is truly existent, but what is corporeal ... Hence it is, that they that deny, or will not believe any supernatural operations, by witches and magicians, are generally observed to be Atheists, or well affected that way ... if there be false miracles, that is, supernatural operations, by the power of Devils; there must of necessity be true miracles also, by the power of God. Certainly, it is a point of excellent use, to convince incredulity, to know certainly, that there be witches and magicians.⁴³

Casaubon reveals his own *desire* for witches to exist, because if this can be demonstrated it is a point of 'excellent use' in a much more important question – the battle against the broader sceptical doubts of atheists. Like Glanvill and More, Casaubon is primarily interested in witches for what they imply about the existence of spirits, which are active within the material world, and therefore the existence of God.

Why, then, was witchcraft gradually abandoned as a defence for the existence of spirits? Part of the reason could be that the debate had moved out into the open by the time of the Restoration. The Civil War and Interregnum had resulted in a huge outpouring of radical political, religious, and scientific ideas, often collectively dismissed as 'enthusiasm' by more orthodox figures like Casaubon.⁴⁴ Responding to these 'enthusiasts', as Ian Bostridge has pointed out, was an urgent religious and political goal for Casaubon and More.⁴⁵ Many of the 'enthusiastic' ideas that were expressed in the period 1642–60 touched on the nature of the spirit.⁴⁶ A number of titles written in the latter half of the seventeenth century deal directly

43 Casaubon, *Of Credulity and Incredulity in Things Divine and Spiritual*, pp. 170–71.

44 See, for example, Meric Casaubon, *A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* (London, 1654).

45 Bostridge, pp. 55–56.

46 A number of such radical thinkers are discussed in Nigel Smith, 'The Charge of Atheism and the Language of Radical Speculation, 1640–1660',

with the immortality of the soul – a question that had also exercised scholastic philosophers – and at least two of these writers (Henry More and Richard Baxter) had also published on witchcraft.⁴⁷

The changed climate from the end of the Civil War onwards, in which it became possible to express a wide range of views on this sensitive topic, accounts for why the nature of spirit takes up much more space, and is much more openly acknowledged, in the Restoration debate. Before 1642 denials of the existence of spirits were scarce, despite the accusations levelled at Scot (who in fact has a clear position on the existence of spirits, which he affirms).⁴⁸ By the time of the Restoration debate, ‘enthusiasm’ of all kinds had been expressed, and Hobbes had made his terrifying, although certainly not new, point about the world being no more than ‘matter in motion’. Judging by the tone of dismay in much of *Saducismus Triumphatus*, More and Glanvill appear to have believed that materialism had won widespread acceptance.

Witchcraft had previously been a kind of Maginot line – if belief in witchcraft was defended, earlier witchcraft treatises implied, the existence of spirit, and ultimately God, could not be questioned.⁴⁹ But this line of defence was eventually circumvented, rather than defeated, by the radical ideas brought to the surface in the aftermath

in *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, edited by Michael Hunter and David Wootton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 131–58. Richard Overton, to take one example, denied the distinction between soul and body and argued that every aspect of a human being was mortal.

- 47 Titles devoted partly or wholly to demonstrating the immortality of the soul include Walter Charleton’s *The Immortality of the Human Soul* (1657), Henry More’s *The Immortality of the Soul* (1659), Richard Baxter’s *Christianity* (1667), Thomas Wadsworth’s *Antipsychothanasia* (1670), a 1675 translation of Plato’s *Phaedo*, William Bates’s *Considerations of the existence of God and of the immortality of the soul* (1676), Samuel Haworth’s *Anthropologia* (1680), Richard Baxter’s *Of the immortality of mans soul* (1682), Sir George Mackenzie’s *The religious stoic* (1685), and Timothy Manlove’s *The immortality of the soul asserted* (1697). A sermon on the subject preached to the King and Queen in 1694 was also published. On the immortality of the soul in scholastic thought, see Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, pp. 356–64.
- 48 Scot, citing Peter Martyr, explains that ‘divels are spirits, and no bodies’ and further that ‘we find not that a spirit can make a bodie, more than a bodie can make a spirit: the spirit of God excepted, which is omnipotent’ (xvii.32, pp. 540–41).
- 49 See, for example, Gaule, pp. 1–2.

of the English Civil War, ideas which often questioned the nature of spirit directly, without much or any reference to witchcraft. Witchcraft was not immediately abandoned as a badge of orthodox Christianity – More and Glanvill were among those holding on to it – but the debate on spirit had moved past it, and its significance was already dwindling by the time Glanvill and More started to defend it. The supposed position of Glanvill and More at the intellectual cutting edge is itself open to question, as Shapiro points out.⁵⁰

Ian Bostridge observes that ‘the disappearance of witchcraft belief cannot be plausibly explained by the supposed triumph of a mechanistic world-view’.⁵¹ Levack, too, expresses his agreement with the ‘widely held view ... that a fundamental philosophical scepticism based on or greatly influenced by the mechanical philosophy had little or no impact on the decline of prosecutions’.⁵² Nonetheless, it is evident from the sheer amount of space this issue takes up in the Restoration debate that there is a connection between the issues of ‘a mechanistic world-view’ and witchcraft belief. The direction of the causal link, however, is the reverse. Witchcraft belief did not disappear as the result of the victory of a mechanistic conception of the world; rather, it was one aspect of a continuing attempt to *resist* that victory. Witchcraft belief, as a respectable intellectual position, was gradually abandoned because it had become irrelevant to its original purpose. As Jobe points out,

the phenomena ascribed to witchcraft gradually lost their attractiveness as empirical proofs for the existence of the spirit world. They were superseded in Anglican science by the panoply of demonstrations set out by the Boyle lecturers, in which only divine and angelic spirits were allowed to stimulate, adjust or refresh the cosmic mechanism.⁵³

Although belief in witches eventually faded away, attempts by early scientists to prove the existence of the spirit world continued, from the Boyle lecturers to the Society for Psychical Research, founded in London in 1862. Walter Stephens detects the same desire to believe in a spirit world in academic work on supposed victims of alien abductions,⁵⁴ and other scholars with broader concerns have recently called into question the idea that the world has been, in a

50 Shapiro, p. 225.

51 Bostridge, p. 105.

52 Levack, ‘The Decline and End of Witchcraft Prosecutions’, p. 445.

53 Jobe, p. 356.

54 Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, pp. 367–68.

phrase associated with Max Weber, ‘disenchanted’.⁵⁵ While witches are no longer executed, resistance to the ‘triumph of a mechanistic world-view’ has never been abandoned and continues to this day. The resistance dates back much further than the seventeenth century, too: mechanistic world-views, after all, were found in the ancient world. The most famous pre-Hobbesian materialist was Epicurus, whose philosophy is best known through Lucretius’s infamous poem *De Rerum Natura*.⁵⁶ Stories about witchcraft, however, became increasingly marginal in the later seventeenth century, although as Bostridge points out they continued to circulate in print into the eighteenth century.⁵⁷

Perhaps the biggest problem with witchcraft stories as a source of evidence for the existence of spirits was that people kept laughing at them. While the serious works of Webster and Wagstaffe are usually seen as the important sceptical books of the Restoration witchcraft debate, perhaps more telling are a number of less well known satirical works which deal with witchcraft and the supernatural without making an explicit argument on either side of the question. A series of pamphlets appeared during the Civil War in the peculiar war of words that grew up around the Royalist commander Prince Rupert’s dog.⁵⁸ This animal was ironically said by a Royalist propagandist, in mockery of the Parliamentarians’ apparent belief in the military use of witchcraft by their enemies, to be ‘no Dog, but a Witch, an Enemy to Parliament ... a meer Malignant Cavalier-Dog, that hath something of the Divel in or about him’.⁵⁹ Some years later, *The Devill seen at St Albons* (1648) tells the story of the devil appearing in the cellar of an inn in the shape of a white ram; when the proprietor and his staff are too frightened to do

55 Jason A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 3; see also Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 1–10.

56 Lucretius argues that the universe (*omnis*) consists exclusively of bodies (*corpora*) and void (*inane*) (I.419–420), and that mind (*animi*) and spirit (*animai*) are both corporeal and mortal (III.161–62; III.417–18); Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, rev. Martin F. Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

57 Bostridge, p. 242.

58 Mark Stoye examines the story of the dog in *The Black Legend of Prince Rupert’s Dog* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011).

59 T. B., *Observations vpon Prince Ruperts White Dog, called Boy* (London, 1642), sig. A4^v. The authorship of the pamphlet is discussed in Stoye, pp. 62–67.

anything about the situation, the local butcher volunteers to deal with it and kills, roasts, and eats the enemy of mankind. The pamphlet unconvincingly claims to be ‘Printed for confutation of those that beleve there are no such things as Spirits or Devils’.⁶⁰ The mockery of credulity continued in the Restoration: two longer works published in 1673 both seek to undermine witchcraft belief with laughter.⁶¹

Like Bodin before them, the Restoration defenders of witchcraft were well aware of the threat posed by ridicule. In fact, Glanvill felt scorn to be such a problem that he responded to it in a separate work. First printed in 1668,⁶² *A Whip for the Droll, Fidler to the Atheist: Being Reflections on Drollery and Atheism* is also included in the second edition of *Saducismus Triumphatus* from 1682, and subsequent editions. Glanvill begins by pointing out that a joke is not an argument, and that laughing at witchcraft does not disprove it. He also intimates that would-be ‘wits’ who laugh at stories of witchcraft are not ‘governed by the Rules of Vertue’, before claiming that ‘these quibbling debauchees’ are not merely foolish or immoral, they are ‘the Enemies of Government and Religion’.⁶³ Glanvill, like Bodin before him, recognises that laughter and mockery are the most dangerous weapons that can be used against witchcraft, and he acknowledges, also like Bodin but more openly, that sceptical laughter may threaten more than just witchcraft belief. Glanvill does not name any specific targets in this attack on wit, but the phenomenon he describes is one that can be associated with fashionable London society, and consequently with the theatre.

Witchcraft in the theatre

The Restoration theatre’s audiences, while remaining mixed in terms of social composition, were considerably wealthier than was the case prior to 1642. Charles II was the first English monarch to be a regular theatregoer and attended at least 280 performances in

60 Anon., *The Devill seen at St Albons* (London, 1648).

61 Anon., *A Pleasant Treatise of Witches* (London, 1673); Anon., *A Magical Vision, or a Perfect Discovery of the Fallacies of Witchcraft* (London, 1673).

62 See Coleman O. Parsons, introduction to *Saducismus Triumphatus* (Gainesville: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1966), p. xx. Parsons provides a helpful discussion of the book’s complicated publication history.

63 Glanvill and More, p. 537.

public theatres during his reign.⁶⁴ Along with the King, especially in the first decade of the Restoration, came a group of noblemen and courtiers whose influence on the institution of the theatre and the writing of plays was ‘out of all proportion to their numbers’.⁶⁵ These courtiers and noblemen were regular auditors at the theatre, and a number of them also wrote plays for it. Such people could be described as ‘wits’, and were in the position to which other ‘wits’ aspired. Their opinions, and perhaps also their jesting, may have served as an example of which Glanvill disapproved.

Glanvill rather vaguely identifies ‘the looser Gentry’ and ‘small pretenders to Philosophy and Wit’⁶⁶ as the main scoffers, but it seems likely that some of the doubters were close to the very top of the social scale. Hobbes’s ‘wit’ was regarded by some of his critics to be a kind of gateway drug that would eventually lead those exposed to atheism,⁶⁷ but he had an aristocratic patron who presumably cannot have found his views offensive. The earl of Rochester, too, was undoubtedly both a wit and a sceptic about witchcraft (and much else besides). Rochester was also involved in the theatre, sometimes as more than just an audience member: he adapted John Fletcher’s play *Valentinian*, which was performed after his death in the Theatre Royal, and wrote a prologue for Settle’s *Empress of Morocco*.⁶⁸ The close association of ‘wit’ and theatrical art suggests that drama may have been aligned with the kind of sceptical mockery that Glanvill regarded as such a threat.

At the same time, however, the connection between witchcraft and rebellion, familiar in the early Jacobean witchcraft drama discussed here, is also evident in the drama of the Restoration, especially early in the period when memories of the Civil War were still fresh. While the rather comical treatment of witchcraft in most Restoration drama reflects a growing tendency to mock witchcraft

64 Allan Botica, ‘Audience, Playhouse and Play in Restoration Theatre, 1660–1710’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Oxford University, Worcester College, 1986), p. 48.

65 Botica, p. 57.

66 Glanvill and More, p. 62.

67 Roger D. Lund, *Ridicule, Religion and the Politics of Wit in Augustan England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 33–35.

68 On Rochester and Glanvill, see Marianne Thormählen, *Rochester: The Poems in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 213–15. Thormählen shows that Rochester was not merely a ‘small pretender’ to learning, although he was undoubtedly somewhat ‘loose’.

belief in society more generally, witchcraft as a symbol of rebellion is often treated seriously. In this limited respect, warnings by Glanvill, More, and Casaubon that dismissing witchcraft was a threat to the civil government as well as to the principles of established religion seem to find some dramatic support.

The later seventeenth century was the last period in which witchcraft was frequently represented on stage. Indeed, references to witches and witchcraft peaked during the Carolean Restoration. Around half of the extant plays first performed in the 1670s, 1680s, and 1690s contain at least one instance of the words ‘witch’, ‘witchcraft’, or variant forms. The words occur roughly twice as frequently as in the period during which witchcraft prosecution peaked – the 1580s and 1590s.⁶⁹ Witches were therefore mentioned in drama most frequently when they had ceased to be persecuted very much. In the eighteenth century witchcraft, and other aspects of the supernatural world, gradually ceased to be represented on the stage. By 1749, the narrator of *Tom Jones* was able to point out that

these doctrines are at present very unfortunate, and have but few, if any, believers ... the whole furniture of the infernal regions hath long been appropriated by the managers of playhouses, who seem lately to have lain them by as rubbish, capable only of affecting the upper gallery; a place in which few of our readers ever sit.⁷⁰

Even in the theatre, witchcraft and its accompanying ‘furniture’ is associated with the lower social classes by the mid-eighteenth century, and may have been abandoned entirely. This was certainly not the case in the Restoration, but it is noticeable that Restoration drama – less socially inclusive than prior to 1642 – often treats witchcraft belief as a matter for ridicule. The frequent references to, and representations of, witches in the dramatic literature of the Restoration do not seem to indicate any great public concern about the issue of witchcraft. Rather, the proliferation of witches on the Restoration stage is probably a sign that the subject of witchcraft

⁶⁹ Based on searches in the *English Drama* database, the percentages of new or adapted plays containing the words ‘witch’, ‘witchcraft’, and variants were: 1580–89: 26 per cent; 1590–99: 24 per cent; 1670–79: 52 per cent; 1680–89: 50 per cent; 1690–99: 49 per cent. Dates of first performance were checked against those in the *Annals of English Drama*.

⁷⁰ Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 581.

had lost a great deal of its urgency, as Anthony Harris suggests.⁷¹ It should be remembered, however, that Restoration theatre audiences were probably not very representative of the English population as a whole, being overwhelmingly urban, wealthier than average, and strongly influenced in taste and ideology by a small group of courtiers.

Charles II's taste in theatre had been influenced by the years he spent in France as a young man,⁷² and the innovations imported into the Carolean theatre were an important factor behind the greater number of supernatural characters and events presented on stage. The Restoration theatre utilised machinery to a much greater extent than prior to 1642. One account of an entertainment presented in 1661 at the Cockpit in Drury Lane describes a performance by French actors.⁷³ It is unclear whether it involved much speech – the focus of the pamphlet is, as its title suggests, on the visual aspects of the production. Other advances in staging, such as moveable scenery, were quickly imported into the new theatrical duopoly established by Thomas Killigrew and William Davenant at the King's and Duke's theatres.⁷⁴ The new machinery opened up the possibility of performing convincing stage magic. Stage directions from a number of Restoration plays indicate that spectacular visual display often accompanied stage witches. The epilogue to Thomas Duffett's farce version of *The Empress of Morocco* (1673), for example, requires that 'Three Witches fly over the Pit Riding upon Beesomes.⁷⁵ Heccate descends over the Stage in a Glorious Chariot, adorn'd with Pictures of Hell and Devils, and made of a large Wicker Basket.'⁷⁶ Of course, the new machines were not reserved exclusively for presenting witches.

71 Harris, p. 184.

72 Nancy Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 54–55.

73 Anon., *The Description of the Great Machines of the Descent of Orpheus into Hell* (London, 1661).

74 Derek Hughes, *English Drama 1660–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 1–2.

75 OED, n. 1: 'A bundle of rods or twigs used as an instrument of punishment; a birch.'

76 Thomas Duffett, *The Empress of Morocco* (London, 1674), p. 30. A fuller account of witches' flight on the early modern stage is provided by Roy Booth, 'Witchcraft, Flight and the Early Modern English Stage', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 13:1 (May 2007), <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/13-1/bootwic.htm>.

A wide variety of supernatural characters, including spirits and devils, but also characters from mythology, are to be found in plays and semi-operas like Shadwell's *Psyche* (1675) and the various adaptations of *The Tempest*.

The tendency of visual effects to distract from the literary aspects of plays had frequently been regretted by playwrights such as Ben Jonson, and Restoration playwrights did not necessarily appreciate the change in audience tastes either. One prologue makes a revealing complaint about the recent history of English theatre:

Th' Old English Stage, confin'd to Plot and Sense,
 Did hold abroad but small intelligence,
 But since th' invasion of the forreign Scene,
 Jack pudding Farce, and thundering Machine,
 Painted to your grave Ancestours unknown,
 (Who never disliked wit because their own)
 There's not a Player but is turned a scout,
 And every Scribler sends his Envoys out
 To fetch from Paris, Venice, or from Rome,
 Fantastick fopperies to please at home.
 And that each act may rise to your desire,
 Devils and Witches must each Scene inspire,
 Wit rowls in Waves, and showers down in Fire
 With what strange Ease a Play may now be writ,
 When the best half's compos'd by painting it?
 And that in th' Ayr, or Dance lyes all the Wit?⁷⁷

Rawlins's patriotic complaint identifies the 'thundering machine' as part of the 'invasion' of the foreign into English theatre, an invasion which is linked to a proliferation of witches and devils. But aside from his complaint about the ascendancy of the special effects made possible by machinery and the allure of painted and moveable scenery, the prologue also identifies singing and dancing as a distraction from the playwright's wit – or an excuse for the deficiency of playwrights in that regard.

Singing and dancing was another aspect of the theatre which grew in prominence during the Restoration, the period during which the opera began to emerge as a distinct theatrical form in England. These innovations generated considerable resistance, usually on the grounds that it was unnatural and nonsensical for characters to communicate by singing. As Stephen Plank has argued, supernatural elements countered this objection by providing an excuse for music:

77 Thomas Rawlins, *Tunbridge-Wells* (London, 1678), prologue.

‘Magical scenes peopled by those from the irrational, supernatural world might rationally proceed in music; where “incantation” is the *modus operandi*, music would be essential’.⁷⁸ Witches in Restoration drama almost invariably sing.

Witches were not the only supernatural characters that could be used to justify a song and dance, and Curtis Price has pointed out that even in the Restoration, ‘[c]auldron-stirring hags of the sort depicted by Middleton, Shakespeare, and Davenant are rare in both plays and semi-operas.’⁷⁹ Nevertheless, references to witches do peak in this later period, and some Restoration plays feature a lot of talk about witches without representing any actual ‘cauldron-stirring hags’ on stage. One example is Sir Robert Stapylton’s *The Step-Mother* (1663). This play has been described by Price as a ‘bold attempt to create a novel genre for the English stage’ based on its integration of music into the action of the play.⁸⁰

Like most plays of the very early Restoration, the plot of *The Step-Mother* is laden with contemporary political significance. It represents a pseudo-historical Britain peopled by Romans and Britons, and ruled by King Sylvanus, who has unwisely married the scheming Roman lady Pontia, the title character. The mixed population of Roman republicans and monarchical Britons obviously bears little relation to ancient Britain, but it has considerable relevance to the recent division of the country into Cavaliers and Roundheads. The play even features an honourable Roman general, Crispus, whose sense of duty draws admiration from all the other characters. In the first few years of the Restoration, the honourable or king-restoring general was something of a stock character, created in recognition of the role played by General Monck in establishing Charles II as monarch.⁸¹

While there are no supernatural events in *The Step-Mother*, it seems significant given the political context of the play that the character of Pontia is associated with witches throughout. The association begins when she attempts to commission a witch and a conjurer to murder her husband. Unfortunately for her, the pair

78 Stephen Plank, “‘And Now about the Cauldron Sing’: Music and the Supernatural on the Restoration Stage”, *Early Music* 18:3 (August 1990), 392–407 (pp. 395–96).

79 Curtis Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 231, footnote 11.

80 Price, p. 9.

81 Maguire, pp. 48–49.

are in fact her husband's men, Fromund and Tetrick, in disguise. Even though these witches are not genuine, they take the trouble to stress that their powers are dependent on a greater power. Rather than the devil, however, the 'great Witch-maker' is identified as a Merlin-like character: 'the British Bard', who later sings a song taken by Pontia to be a prophecy. The 'witch' herself only claims to be able to tell fortunes by palmistry, although, in accordance with the established witch stereotype, she is motivated by the desire for revenge on a 'scurvy proud young widow' who insulted her.⁸² The tone of the scene is not particularly sinister, though, and the fact that the witches' power comes from a bard rather than from the prince of darkness emphasises their status as fictive, literary creations. After they have negotiated with Pontia, Tetrick and Fromund 'fall into a Dance, then comes in another Conjuror, and another Witch, and from under his Coat and her Gown, drop out two little familiars, an he and a she' (II, p. 23). Judging by the stage direction, this dance seems unlikely to have inspired much terror in the audience; the fake witches are played mostly for comic effect.

Pontia herself, however, is another matter. Unlike the fake witch Fromund, she does appear to be in league with hell in some sense. Asked to write down the names of those she wishes to die, she writes, Faustus-like, 'DIS MANIBUS. Pontia devotes to hell Filamor, Violinda and Sylvanus' (II, p. 22). Earlier, in declaring her own fitness to rule, Pontia claims that '[a] Crown he merits, who piles Tow'r on Tow'r / To scale the Stars, and ristle Sovereign Pow'r' (I, p. 14). In associating herself and her ambition with the Tower of Babel, Pontia declares herself – like a witch – to be a rebel against God. This rebellion against God is conflated with a challenge to the 'Sovereign Pow'r', associating Pontia with the republican cause, as well as with witchcraft.

While the character of Pontia could easily be understood to represent a particularly pernicious 'enemy within' in the England of the 1660s, *The Step-Mother*, like other early Restoration political tragicomedies, ends with an optimistic reconciliation scene. After Pontia mistakenly stabs her son Adolph she repents, and in the ensuing masque she plays the part of the goddess Diana. The

82 Robert Stapylton, *The Step-Mother* (London, 1664), II, p. 21. Briannella, Pontia's favourite, is also witch-like in her desire for revenge on Crispus: 'Mighty General / 'Twill elevate my Soul to see thy Fall; / There is a Pleasure in Revenge, above / The expectation or the joyes of Love' (IV, p. 71). Subsequent references to this edition are given in parentheses.

association with Diana is significant. As Crispus puts it at the end of the play, '[n]ow Pontia, like the Planet of the Night, / Breaks from her cloud, and shews us her pure light' (v, p. 82). Both Diana, goddess of women, childbirth, and virginity, and Hecate, goddess of witchcraft, are associated with the moon, and Stapylton uses the ambiguity to lend a classical twist to Pontia's transformation. The redemption of Pontia and the reconciliation of Romans and Britons sent an important message in a country still scarred by a traumatic period of civil war.

Both Pontia's association with witchcraft and her ultimate repentance and forgiveness are used to draw attention to the political issues of the day, but witchcraft itself is treated as a joke. The appearance of (fake) witches on stage is the cue for some comic relief, and the only characters who take the predictions of witches seriously are Pontia and Brianella, both of whom are obviously mistaken in doing so. The heroic general Crispus dismisses the witch-making British Bards as 'Juglers' (II, p. 24). The theme of witchcraft performs a dual function, as in *The Late Lancashire Witches*. Witchcraft is only taken seriously as a symbol of rebellion against husband, king and god. In itself, witchcraft is treated as laughable.

The most famous witches on the Restoration stage were of course those in the Davenant adaptation of *Macbeth* (1664). The political appeal of *Macbeth* in a theatre that was partly revived for propagandistic purposes⁸³ is hard to miss: Macbeth murders a king, whose son flees abroad but later returns to replace the tyrant as ruler. The parallels with the situation of Charles I, Oliver Cromwell, and Charles II could hardly be more obvious. This aspect of the political context could account in part for the cruder and more obvious villainy in Davenant's version of the main character. Davenant's alterations have received some censorious critical comment, including from Anthony Harris, who condemns their 'trivialising effect'.⁸⁴ From the point of view of this study, however, they are interesting for two reasons: first, because the most significant change is the expansion of the witches' roles, and second, for the addition of references to the nature of spirits.

Towards the end of the play, when Macbeth is preparing for the battle against the English army that will depose him, the Davenant

83 Maguire, p. 17.

84 Harris, p. 187.

text exaggerates the fears of which Shakespeare's Macbeth had almost forgotten the taste:

MACBETH I am sure to die by none of Woman born.
 And yet the *English* Drums beat an Alarm,
 As fatal to my Life as are the Crokes
 Of *Ravens*, when they Flutter about the Windows
 Of departing men.
 My Hopes are great, and yet me-thinks I fear
 My Subjects cry out Curses on my Name,
 Which like a North-wind seems to blast my Hopes:
 SEATON That Wind is a contagious Vapour exhal'd from Blood.⁸⁵

Seaton's rather baffling choric comment becomes clearer in the light of the passage in *Saducismus Triumphatus* quoted above, which bears repeating: Glanvill states that 'some have thought that the Genii (whom both the Platonical and Christian Antiquity thought embodied) are recreated by the reeks and vapours of humane blood and the spirits that proceed from them'.⁸⁶ The genii are guardian spirits, and Seaton's remark suggests the possibility that the blood of Macbeth's victims has unleashed spiritual forces that are now working against the usurper. The terms 'wind' and 'vapour' might seem to suggest naturalistic, physical causation, but the association of air with spirit means that this need not preclude spirits at work. The implication of both these passages – Glanvill's and Davenant's – is that the spiritual and physical worlds interact, and indeed that they might be difficult to distinguish. The 'Crokes Of Ravens', which are also disturbances in the air, are said to have a direct effect on dying men. Macbeth's actions in the physical world, the passage suggests, have consequences in the spirit world, which in turn come back to haunt him in the physical world.

Another reference to spiritual powers and their functioning in the physical world comes when Lady Macbeth, having repented her part in the old king's murder, confronts her husband and urges him to abdicate:

MACBETH Resign the Crown, and with it both our Lives.
 I must have better Councillors.
 LA. MACB. What, your Witches?
 Curse on your Messengers of Hell. Their breath
 Infected first my Breast: See me no more.
 (iv.1, p. 53)

85 William Davenant and William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (London, 1674), v.3, p. 59. Subsequent references are given in parentheses.

86 Glanvill and More, p. 75.

Davenant's Lady Macbeth appears to identify the witches as responsible for her conversion to evil, suggesting that their 'breath' – which, since it is air, is in the grey area between body and spirit – has somehow 'infected' her, presumably in the same way that Glanvill claimed evil spirits could inject witches with 'vile vapours' when sucking their blood.⁸⁷ Her claim is not entirely persuasive, since to the audience's knowledge she has not come into contact with the witches. Nevertheless, the fact that it is possible for her to make this claim at all suggests that she is performing in front of an audience which might consider such a thing possible in principle.

The witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* are evil, and seemingly possessed of mysterious powers. Davenant's witches are also evil, most of the time, but their powers are made less mysterious. The witches may be capable of affecting the human body directly, presumably by acting on the spirits or *pneumata* that are carried in the blood. Davenant's *Macbeth* gives more prominence to spirits than Shakespeare's version, and the manner in which it does so includes those spirits within the chain of causal relationships that make up the visible world of 'matter in motion'. Things which had previously been left to the imagination are, in the adaptation, highlighted and even explained. It seems that it has become interesting or necessary to account for the abilities of the witches in mechanistic terms.

The play's references to the operations of spiritual winds and vapours are dealt with seriously, but the same is not always true of the witches themselves. At times, the witches are straightforwardly and exuberantly infernal, as when Heccate appears and demands that the witches meet her 'at the pit of Achæron' in order to summon a spirit (III.1, p. 44). But the witches' songs do not always dwell on their evil:

Oh what a dainty pleasure's this!
 To sail i'th' Air
 While the *Moon* shines fair;
 To Sing, to Toy, to Dance and Kiss;
 Over Woods, high Rocks and Mountains;
 Over Hills, and misty Fountains;
 Over Steeples, Towers, and Turrets:
 We fly by night 'mongst troops of Spirits.
 No Ring of Bells to our Ears sounds,
 No Howls of Wolves, nor Yelps of Hounds;
 No, nor the noise of Waters breach,

87 Glanvill and More, p. 76.

Nor Cannons Throats our Height can reach.
(III.1, p. 45)

The earliest appearance of this song is in Middleton's *The Witch*, and original audiences of that play might have understood it to satirise the apparent impunity with which the Carrs had committed murder.⁸⁸ Like the singing witches, the Carrs were unperturbed by earthly threats which could not reach their 'height', leaving them free to concentrate on their dainty pleasures. (The song may have appeared in the Jacobean *Macbeth*, too, but the folio text only reproduces the opening lines.) But by the Restoration, this song must have lost its fleeting political significance: the Overbury murder is unlikely to have been uppermost in auditors' minds in 1664. Stripped of this potential meaning, the significance of the singing witches turns from satire to pantomime.

Witches' songs often undercut the sense of threat that they might otherwise generate. However seriously or otherwise the witches in *Macbeth* were taken by Restoration audiences, it is certain that they inspired at least one parody. Elkanah Settle's tragedy *The Empress of Morocco* (1673), in addition to Dryden's attack in prose (*Notes and Observations on The Empress of Morocco*), prompted a farce of the same title by Thomas Duffett in which Settle and his play are openly mocked. The epilogue to this farce features witches explicitly modelled on those of *Macbeth*. Duffett's witches directly address, and indeed mock, the audience, in words based on Shakespeare's:

1. WITCH Fie! Fah! Fum!
By the itching of my Bum, {pointing to the
Some wicked Luck shou'd that way come. Audience.}

HECATE Stand still – by yonder dropping Nose I know,
That we shall please them all before we go.
Hail! hail! hail! you less than wits and greater!
{Hecate speaks to the
Hail Fop in Corner! and the rest now met here, Audience.}
Though you'l ne're be wits – from your loins shall spread,
Diseases that shall Reign when you are dead.⁸⁹

Hecate's prophecy to the audience – predicting their role in spreading venereal diseases but denying them the crown of wit – is obviously based on the witches' words to Banquo. Duffett's version of *The*

88 See Chapter 3 on Jacobean drama.

89 Duffett, *The Empress of Morocco*, pp. 34–35.

Empress of Morocco is not an isolated example of witchcraft being made farcical; in fact, Duffett seems to have specialised in absurd witches. *Psyche Debauch'd* (1675) was also written by Duffett in mockery of a Whig playwright's work, in this case Thomas Shadwell's *Psyche* (1675). Shadwell's opera featured Venus, who is replaced in Duffett's burlesque by Woosat, a witch addressed as 'your hagship', who makes her entrance on 'a Charriot drawn by two Brooms'.⁹⁰ Despite her malevolence it is difficult to imagine Woosat, or anything else in the play, inspiring much fear in contemporary audiences. That Duffett uses the witches in this way does not necessarily imply that the witches were not taken seriously in performances of *Macbeth*. Nonetheless, the fact that witchcraft could be used in such an obviously ridiculous manner provides support for the complaints of Glanvill and other believers in witchcraft that the subject was now regarded as laughable by a significant, if not necessarily a large, section of the population.

One play from the period which treats the subject of witchcraft seriously and at some length does so from a decidedly sceptical perspective. Henry Neville Payne's *The Fatal Jealousy* (1672) is, like Henry Porter's *The Villain* (1662), inspired by *Othello* (a play with interesting witchcraft elements of its own).⁹¹ The Iago-like character, Jasper, has an aunt who practises as a witch, but she is a self-professed fraud and describes herself as preying on the credulity of the populace:

The Vulgar People love to be deluded;
 And things the most unlikely they most dote on;
 A strange Disease in Cattle, Hogs or Pigs,
 Or any Accident in Cheese or Butter;
 Though't be but Natural, or a Sluts fault,
 Must strait be Witchcraft! Oh, the Witch was here!
 The Ears or Tail is burn'd, the Churn is burn'd;
 And this to hurt the Witch, when all the while
 They're likest Witches that believe such Cures.⁹²

All of these observations are familiar from the arguments of Scot and others, and the last line repeats an argument made long before by George Gifford.⁹³ It seems likely, on the basis of this speech, that Payne had read some of the English sceptical writers.

90 Thomas Duffett, *Psyche Debauch'd* (London, 1678), p. 16.

91 On the witchcraft in *Othello* see Willis, pp. 164–65.

92 Henry Neville Payne, *The Fatal Jealousy* (London, 1673), II, p. 22.
 Subsequent references to this edition are given in parentheses.

93 Gifford, *Discourse*, sig. H3'.

Scepticism in its more general, philosophical sense is also a major theme of the play.⁹⁴ Characters are repeatedly mistaken or deceived by their senses. In the blood-soaked denouement, these mistakes turn the play into a kind of gruesome farce: Eugenia is wrong about the man who kills her; she dies thinking it was Francisco. Gerardo dies believing, wrongly, that Francisco both murdered Eugenia and lied about it with his last words. Antonio first mistakes Eugenia for his wife and kills her, then mistakes Gerardo for Francisco and stabs his friend's corpse. Antonio, and later Francisco and Sebastian, hear other characters speaking but cannot make out the words. The point is made repeatedly: the evidence of the senses is not reliable; human knowledge and perception is limited and we cannot fully understand the world around us.

The play also represents human beings drawing the wrong conclusions from the evidence of their senses in order to undermine witchcraft belief specifically. Some of the characters obstinately cling to their mistaken interpretations despite being presented with evidence to the contrary. Jasper, having met his aunt and seen her familiar spirit – actually a young boy in disguise – is told at some length that all her magic is faked. Nevertheless, after the ‘familiar’ leaves, Jasper comments: ‘I’m glad it’s gone, for surely it was a Devil, / What ever you pretend’ (II, p. 24). Antonio, despite the captain of the watch explaining to him that the witch is a trickster, later reverts to believing in her power. In contrast to the situation in *The Late Lancashire Witches*, it is the believers in witchcraft in Payne’s play who obstinately resist the obvious conclusion.

As has been argued, one underlying function of belief in witchcraft was to guarantee the existence of the world of spirits. This vital question also seems to be addressed in *The Fatal Jealousy*, with less reassuring results. A range of spiritual creatures are ‘seen’ by characters in the play. Antonio and Jasper, among others, see the witch’s familiar, who turns out to be a human boy. (In case the audience were in any doubt, the boy confesses all to the captain of the watch before the end of the play.) The nurse believes that she has seen Eugenia’s ghost, which actually turns out to be her fellow servant, Flora. The case of the angel seen in a vision by Caelia, Antonio’s virtuous wife, is a little more complicated. Upset when Antonio leaves the house with Jasper, and orders her to stay home, Caelia faints and in a dream or vision thinks she sees an angel leading her husband back. Gerardo’s first reaction is that ‘[h]er

94 Hughes, p. 90.

fancy is disturb'd', but when Antonio suffers a nosebleed and, briefly, returns, Antonio and Eugenia take the apparent omen seriously. In the end, though, Antonio leaves, dismissing the idea that his nosebleed is any kind of portent.⁹⁵ If heaven is at work at this point in the play, however, it works indirectly, and its help is dependent on Antonio choosing to act on the hint, which he fails to do. Later in the play, when Gerardo calls on an angel for help, no aid is forthcoming.

The uncertainty pervading the play is not restricted to the events of the plot, or to the natural world. While the epilogue to the play claims that it contains 'no atheism', the text itself shows a great deal of concern with issues of faith and belief in the religious, as well as the epistemological, sense. Gerardo and Antonio debate free will and predestination in one scene, and later Gerardo, the most sympathetic of the male characters, speculates about the afterlife:

Eternity, whose undiscover'd Country
 We Fools divide, before we come to see it;
 Making one part contain all happiness,
 The other misery, then unseen fight for't.
 Losing our certainties for uncertainties;
 All Sects pretending to a Right of choyce;
 Yet none go willingly to take their part,
 For they all doubt what they pretend to know,
 And fear to mount, lest they should fall below:
 Be't as it will; my Actions shall be just,
 And for my future State I Heav'n will trust.
 (III, p. 34)

Payne was a Catholic and a Jacobite, arrested and imprisoned for his part in the Montgomery plot in 1689,⁹⁶ and Gerardo's criticism of 'sects' and the loss of certainty associated with difference of opinion in religion may reflect his beliefs.

While Gerardo's speech presupposes the existence of an afterlife, any possibility of direct knowledge of heaven, and the spiritual world more generally, is disavowed in the play. In renouncing ambitions to discover religious truth, and trusting instead to heaven,

95 Nosebleeds seem to have been regarded as bad omens; Adolph in *The Step-Mother* gets one and says: 'My nose bleeds, and these drops some hold to be / Ominous Effects, when they've a natural Cause' (III, p. 51). Adolph may be wrong to dismiss the significance of this portent, however, since he is stabbed by his mother soon afterwards.

96 ODNB, 'Henry Neville Payne'.

Gerardo adopts a fideistic attitude. He does not develop this into an argument in favour of accepting the authority of the Catholic Church, for obvious reasons, but such arguments were frequently advanced by leading figures in the French Counter-Reformation.⁹⁷ Gerardo's view appears alongside a clear denial of the reality of witchcraft, belief in which is based on a mistaken interpretation of empirical evidence, and this is no coincidence. Both God's realm and the devil's – the entire world of the supernatural – is unknown and unknowable for humans, and the supposed evidence of it on earth (witchcraft, and more broadly the communication of humans with spiritual beings such as demons) is either straightforward trickery or, as with Antonio's nosebleed, ambiguous at best. Philosophical scepticism and scepticism about witchcraft are inseparable within the play, and both are motivated by similar (religious) concerns.

Nonetheless, despite the play's rejection of witchcraft as a real phenomenon, it is again used as a kind of metaphor for the evil deeds of some of the characters, one of whom is depicted in ways reminiscent of the stereotypical witch. The nurse who arranged for Eugenia's rape is described by Eugenia as '[t]hou fatal Hagg, thou Mother of all mischief', by Gerardo as 'that old wrinkl'd Hag!', and by Jasper as a 'lying witch' (III, IV, v, pp. 37, 56, 71). The character of the nurse combines advanced age and an active sex life, which also accords well with the witch stereotype.⁹⁸ It was standard practice for stage witches to be played by male actors at the time,⁹⁹ and the nurse was played by James Nokes, who was famous for his 'comic transvestite' roles and was nicknamed 'Nurse Nokes' as a result.¹⁰⁰ Jasper's aunt, the fake witch, was played by a female actor, Mrs Norris. While the play discourages belief in actual witchcraft, the witch stereotype is used to emphasise the evil of some characters.

It has been argued that the Restoration debate on witchcraft was more openly concerned with the status of spirits than had previously been the case, and the content of plays would suggest that spirits

97 Popkin, p. 74.

98 While witches were not typically depicted as particularly lustful in Elizabethan and Jacobean pamphlet accounts, later witchcraft cases started to incorporate sexual elements into the narrative, a characteristic that became increasingly marked as the seventeenth century wore on; see Millar, 'Sleeping with Devils', pp. 207–31.

99 Plank, p. 398.

100 *ODNB*, 'James Nokes'.

became increasingly interesting to theatre audiences. The incidence in plays of the word ‘spirits’ and its variants increased in the Restoration, in similar proportion to the increasing incidence of references to witches. ‘Spirits’ and its variants appear in around a third of plays first performed in the 1580s and 1590s, which increases to a peak of three-quarters in the 1680s.¹⁰¹ The plays themselves seem to support the contention that spirits were of greater interest – not merely in terms of their capacity to provide spectacular effect, but also on intellectual grounds. Several plays reflect an increasing concern about the nature of spirits.

Just as the role of the witches is expanded in Davenant’s *Macbeth*, so the role of the spirits is expanded in his and Dryden’s adaptation of *The Tempest* (1667). Act II is much altered, with Alonso and Antonio repentant from the start, and terrified by singing devils and personified sins who upbraid them with their crimes. Spirits are thus much more obviously involved in the action; in Shakespeare’s version the men are magically deceived, but they remain unaware of Ariel’s presence. The adaptation also introduces Milcha, a female spirit who appears to be Ariel’s lover. In Thomas Shadwell’s operatic *Tempest* (1674), closely based on the Davenant-Dryden version, several more spirits are introduced. After being presented with their sins (pride, fraud, rapine and murder) by two devils, Alonzo and Antonio are confronted by another devil, who bursts into song:

Arise, arise! ye subterranean winds,
 More to disturb their guilty minds.
 And all ye filthy damps and vapours rise,
 Which use t’ infect the Earth, and trouble all the Skies;
 Rise you, from whom devouring plagues have birth:
 You that i’ th’ vast and hollow womb of Earth,
 Engender Earthquakes, make whole Countreys shake,
 And stately Cities into Desarts turn;
 And you who feed the flames by which Earths entrals burn.
 Ye raging winds, whose rapid force can make
 All but the fix’d and solid Centre shake:
 Come drive these Wretches to that part o’th’ Isle,
 Where Nature never yet did smile:
 Cause Fogs and Storms, Whirlwinds and Earthquakes there:
 There let ‘em houl and languish in despair.
 Rise and obey the pow’rful Prince o’th’ Air.¹⁰²

101 Again, figures are based on searches in the *English Drama* database.

102 Thomas Shadwell, *The Tempest* (London, 1674), II.3, p. 30.

The stage direction immediately following this song also refers to dancing ‘winds’. The concept of wind or air is so strongly identified with that of spirit in this song that the terms are treated as synonymous. Without actually using the word ‘spirit’, Shadwell’s devil – a spirit himself – summons more spirits. The song provides a great deal of detail, not often present in earlier dramatic treatments, about the nature and activities of spiritual beings. In fact, these spirits – the ‘subterranean winds’ – are associated with all four of the elements – earth and air, of course, but also water (‘damps and vapours’) and fire (‘the flames by which Earth’s entrails burn’). This might suggest that they are tetrarchs – elemental spirits – rather than devils,¹⁰³ but it is their destructive power that is emphasised in the song. They are credited with a wide and frightening array of powers, and they are able to cause natural disasters such as plagues and earthquakes in the material world.

The four elements are certainly present in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. Ariel is described as an ‘airy spirit’, and is sometimes associated with fire; Caliban – although he is not a spirit – is associated with both earth and water. However, Shakespeare’s *Tempest* does not really interrogate the nature of spirit: that spirits exist, and that they are airy and rapid, is merely taken for granted. The characteristics of spirits, and the nature of their operations in the material world, are dealt with much more explicitly and in much greater depth in the song above. This particular alteration to the story would not seem to be the result any particular enthusiasm for the existence of spirits on the part of the individual playwright, as Shadwell was, as Chapter 7 argues, in all probability a Hobbesian materialist, and a similar curiosity about spirit is also evident in Davenant’s *Macbeth*. The nature of the changes made to Restoration adaptations of Shakespeare suggests a changing attitude towards, and growing interest in, spirits in theatregoing society as a whole.

The theatrical representations of witches seem to suggest widespread scepticism about the phenomenon among playwrights and theatregoers – a suggestion reinforced by the writings of many witchcraft theorists at this time, including those of the believers. But in both the theatre and the continuing witchcraft debate outside the theatre, witchcraft had important political resonance during the Restoration. Tyrants and rebels, especially in the early Restoration theatre, are tarred with the brush of the witch stereotype in plays

103 On tetrarchs see Lewis, pp. 134–35. Lewis suggests that Ariel is a tetrarch of air, or sylph.

like *The Step-Mother* and *The Fatal Jealousy*, even though the same plays disavow any kind of credulity about the reality of witchcraft either as magical power or as a pact with the devil. Many sceptical writers on witchcraft, such as Webster, also accepted the broad outline of the witch's character, as a person driven by an infernal desire for revenge:

[T]he Devil is author and causer of that hatred, malice, revenge and envy, that is often abounding in those that are accounted Witches, which desire of revenge doth stimulate them to seek for all means by which they may accomplish their intended wickedness, and so they learn all the wicked and secret wayes of hurting, poysoning & killing.¹⁰⁴

While the fake witches in the plays examined in this chapter are not possessed of magical powers, they are taken seriously as 'witches' in terms of their character and psychological motivation, as well as in the threat they present. The 'real' witches, meanwhile, are frequently used as little more than a source of bawdy humour, as well as providing an excuse to sing and dance.

Spirits seem to have become increasingly important in both the theatre and the witchcraft debate, with the question of the activities of spirits in the material world taking up an increasingly large part of the latter. In the theatre, new adaptations of older plays featuring witches and spirits point to an increased interest in the nature of these beings, as the role of the supernatural is both expanded and explained in the adaptations. However, this increased interest does not necessarily indicate a greater degree of belief in the spirit world. As I have argued, it is evident from the witchcraft debate and related writings that the increased discussion of spirits is associated with a greater diversity of opinion and an increase in challenges to conventional understandings of the subject – challenges which demanded the kind of clarification offered both in theoretical writings and in dramatic speeches and songs. The detailed descriptions of how spiritual beings interact with the physical world show that their activities were now expected to function within the physical world of cause and effect in a way that is, in principle, comprehensible to humans. This requirement for all of existence to operate within the boundaries of nature and human perception is a point of consensus between defenders of spirit and materialists, but one that inevitably worked to undermine the status of the spiritual realm as separate.

104 Webster, pp. 231–32. Webster follows Scot in this respect; see Scot, vi.1, p. 112.