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Theatre and/as Witchcraft: A Reading of *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634)

Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood's The Late Lancashire Witches (1634) is a journalistic play so clearly inspired by judicial records of the contemporary trial that it has been characterized as a commission from the privy council, destined to further the case of the prosecution — but opinions diverge as to the authors' obedience to or challenge of political authority. This close reading re-examines the ambiguous subversiveness of the play, highlights the pervasive destabilization of patriarchal authority, and shows how by equating witchcraft with theatre the play may expose the fictitious bases of the trial. On the other hand, the reciprocal notion that theatre is witchcraft epitomizes the playwrights' exploitation and promotion of the public theatre's resources.

Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome's *The Late Lancashire Witches* is a journalistic play capitalizing on the presence in London of four women¹ who had been convicted of witchcraft in Lancashire, but were referred to central authority (together with their accusers) for further examination.² They arrived in the capital in late June 1634. The play was performed mid-August at the Globe with great success, judging by Nathaniel Tomkyns's letter of 16 August.³ As scholars have demonstrated, it draws on details from the depositions of both accused and accusers: this source material has led to a theory that members of the privy council commissioned the play in order to further the case of the prosecution,⁴ which looked more and more fragile as on 10 July the eleven-year-old boy whose testimony was key evidence confessed he had made it all up.

The hypothesis has sparked a critical debate about the play's support to or challenge of political authority.⁵ On the one hand, the play presents witchcraft as real and patriarchal law eventually checks the witches' unruly

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energies. On the other hand, most of the play is devoted to comic misrule, as the witches 'celebrate to sport' and explicitly 'mean no hurt' (4.4.805).⁶ At a deeper level Helen Ostovich has emphasized the variety of attitudes to witchcraft in the play, drawing attention to 'its sharper critiques of credulity'.⁷

Ostovich's recent electronic edition,⁸ with its detailed notes and exploration of staging possibilities, has shed new light on the texture of the play and invites further literary investigation (in the broad sense of attention to text, dramatic construction, and performance) as a useful complement to a historical and contextual approach. This is the path I wish to follow in order to look again at the play's ambivalent subversiveness. I will first address the representation of patriarchal authority, whose pervasive destabilization still resonates after the witches' inversions of social and sexual hierarchies have been set straight. Articulating that patriarchal insecurity along with pointed metatheatricity, the play offers its most subversive suggestion that the actual trial is about fiction and performance-like illusion. Yet the apparent challenge is perhaps not as daring as it seems in the context of growing scepticism. The other effect of equating witchcraft with theatre is to allow the playwrights to exploit and even promote the resources of the public stage.

The Destabilization of Patriarchal Authority

The preservation of judicial records allows us to identify what the playwrights adapted from alleged facts and what they added. On 10 February 1634, young Edmund Robinson told the court about meeting two greyhounds who turned into a woman and a boy. The woman supposedly transformed the boy into a horse, then rode to a devilish rally where witches produced a feast by pulling magic ropes: acts 2 and 4 dramatize those events. The miller's boy's report of meeting with a cloven-footed demon in 5.1 also comes from Robinson's deposition, while the details of Meg's intercourse with the devil (5.5) are lifted from Margaret Johnson's confession of 9 March 1634. The dramatists introduced the whole Seely plot, as well as the events in the Generous household.⁹ Theirs is the description of the topsy-turvy Seely family, with servants bullying children who dominate their parents, and the servants' marriage resulting in Lawrence's magically induced impotence and Parnell's consequent aggressiveness. Theirs, too, is the motif of Mistress Generous riding Robert/Robin the groom. Here the playwrights amplified a detail from the deposition, supplementing the boy's alleged equine transformation with a number of other horses, including Robert's and Mistress Generous's

metamorphoses as well as Mall and Robert's riding of a magic horse, and the animal used in a skimmington in act 4. Horses play an important structural part as an element of continuity between diverse episodes, while the authors exploit the sexual connotations attached to 'riding' and the reversibility of mount and rider.

Comparison of the play with its topical source material reveals that the playwrights' additions all contribute to defining witches as agents of inversion, both social and sexual — something which was not perceptible in the informer's testimony. The play thus exemplifies the contextual discourse of misrule which framed the perception of witchcraft in early modern culture and gave meaning to it.¹⁰ The additions provide a coherent conceptual framework at the same time as they exploit the comic dimension of misrule. My emphasis will be on the other side of the coin; that is, the pervasive fragility of male authority.

In the Seely house, witchcraft overturns patriarchal hierarchy, and the characters insist on the disruption of conventional order. The situation is 'topsy-turvy', 'preposterous', 'retrograde' (1.1.88 and 90).¹¹ The privileged image of verticality associates comic and graphic effects with an emphasis on hierarchy and the 'proper' order of domination:

ARTHUR The house (as if the ridge were fixed below,
And groundsels lifted up to make the roof)
All now turned topsy-turvy. (1.1.88)

SEELY Alas, he is my child.

DOUGHTY No, you are his child to live in fear of him; indeed they say old men become children again, but before I would become my child's child, and make my foot my head, I would stand upon my head and kick my heels at the skies. (1.2.98–9)

DOUGHTY [*Aside*] This is quite upside-down: the son controls the father, and the man overcrows his master's coxcomb. Sure they are all bewitched! (139)

Doughty's 'Here's a house well governed!' (160) draws attention to the larger implications of such subversion, expanding from the familial into the political sphere: the transition occurs easily in a culture where family is a microcosm for the state and 'a King is trewly *Parens patriae*, the politique father of his people'.¹² Similarly Seely's later explanation for his bewitchment does not draw on the traditional pattern of refused charity¹³ but on a story of filial disobedience:

I fear it was by witchcraft: for I now
 ... remember that
 Some three months since I crossed a wayward woman
 (One that I now suspect) for bearing with
 A most unseemly disobedience
 In an untoward ill-bred son of hers. (5.5.1000)

From first to last, including the reversals of situation which introduce variety by presenting tyrannical or over-indulgent parents (3.3), the Seely story centres on the question of authority and obedience, and the dramatic privilege accorded to the father-son relationship further underlines how patriarchal rule is the main target of the witches' spells.

The Generous plot reflects a similar preoccupation in its focus on Generous's horse and the master's inability to control his wife's movements. Mistress Generous's riding alone and without permission is the first element in that plot, and her rebelliousness is clear when she exclaims to Robert, the representative of her husband's authority: 'must I then be controlled by him, and now by you?' (3.2.465) — just before bridling and riding him. As the play unfolds, it comically foregrounds sexual concerns in depictions of erotically-charged horse-riding, male impotence (which probably expands beyond Lawrence to Generous, as his obsession with his 'gelding' suggests),¹⁴ and the possibility of widespread bastardy. As the focus narrows from social order to sexual relationships what becomes clearer is the gendering of authority and the anxiety of threatened male rulers. The play on horse-riding, for instance, not only conveys images of sexual intercourse¹⁵ but also echoes a patriarchal discourse that equates a wife with a horse in order to emphasize submissiveness to her husband — and betrays anxiety at the potential reversibility of mount and rider.¹⁶ The motif is not purely metaphoric: Mistress Generous's transformation of Robert into a horse by putting a bridle into his mouth refers to the contemporary 'scolds' bridles' designed as a punishment for unruly women.¹⁷ The witch is turning the instrument of patriarchal violence back upon its inventors in a fantasy of revenge which possibly plays on the latent fear of male spectators.

When the Lancashire community attempts to curb the magically-induced inversions with other traditional punishments, it is powerless: the villagers' skimmington (a humiliating ritual involving the parading of hen-pecked husband and aggressive wife) is literally dismantled by the uncontrollable Parnell — who beats her husband and openly expresses her frustration that

he is 'a Downought' (do-nothing) and that 'he connot, he connot!' (4.3.729, 739, 741). Ironically, her euphemistic language accentuates the threat to masculine identity by implying a man who cannot have an erection cannot 'do' anything. As it happens, two characters have the word 'stone' in their name. While bawdy onomastic is no novelty for a fool like Whetstone the redundancy is unusual, and so is Shakestone's gentlemanly status. Such intimations of virility contrast with the play's emphasis on the unreliable power of male organs.

Historical evidence indicates that men were also accused of witchcraft (though in smaller proportion) and that women accused other women of being witches and participated in the legal proceedings.¹⁸ Although the relationship of witch-hunting to women-hunting is a controversial issue among historians,¹⁹ in the fictive world of drama the play clearly pits women witches against male pursuers: all witches are female (Whetstone is only briefly suspected of witchcraft), and though their victims include both men and women the latter do not participate in the witch-hunt led by old Doughty. The very first scene suggests a strict gendering of roles with its evocation of gentlemen pursuing a hare that may have been a witch — and is referred to as a female creature, thus reinforcing the paronomasia 'hare/'her'. The context literalizes the idea of witch-*hunting* and of the elusiveness of witches, and the intensity of Arthur's frustration in spite of the frivolous context²⁰ stresses how men see themselves as the victims, and consequently become the accusers, of witches.

But the deepest threat lies in the connection between witches and bastardy. From the start the play identifies Whetstone as a bastard and his mother as a probable witch:

ARTHUR Why, was your mother a witch?

WHETSTONE I do not say as witches go nowadays, for they for the most part are ugly old beldams, but she was a lusty young lass and, by her own report, by her beauty and fair looks bewitched my father.

BANTAM It seems then your mother was rather a young wanton wench,
than an old withered witch. (1.1.37–9)

While the characters rightly point out the discrepancy between this hypothesis and the reality of contemporary witchcraft cases,²¹ the exchange emphasizes the subversive sexual autonomy of the play's witches²² and recalls early modern associations between illegitimacy and the devil.²³ Like the witches, Whetstone is a disturbing element in the patriarchal community.²⁴

A standing proof of men's unattainable control over their own family, he not only indicates their sexual vulnerability but also perturbs the entire economic system of transmission and inheritance, a recurrent concern in the play,²⁵ and reflects deep uncertainty about social identity — as implied by the show which the witches create for Whetstone's revenge. In response to the gentlemen's insults, a pedant, a tailor, and Robert the groom appear as the gallants' alleged fathers (4.5). Interestingly, the last exchange of the play is about kinship and fatherhood:

BANTAM Why do not you follow, Master By-blow. I thank your aunt for the trick she would have fathered us withal.

WHETSTONE Well, sir, mine aunt's mine aunt, and for that trick I wil not leave her til [sic] I see her do a worse.

BANTAM You're a kind kinsman. (5.5.1081–3)

Brome and Heywood were playing on cultural as well as dramatic common ground when they added a bastard to their witchcraft play;²⁶ they were also reinforcing their depiction of witchcraft as a threat to patriarchal organization.

The witches' subversiveness seems safely contained by the end, however, when men are firmly 'back on top',²⁷ with the witches arrested, all spells cancelled, and Whetstone excluded. Doughty's lengthy questioning of Meg (5.5.1054–73), though dramatically unnecessary, enables the male characters to 'recover their masculinity through a ritual of public confrontation of their female victimizers'.²⁸ Yet I want to question this reversal by focusing on two ambivalent signs: the play's insistence on hands and the character of the soldier.

Act 5 shows how the parallel efforts of the military and the judiciary finally overcome the witches. While Doughty is using the miller's boy's testimony to arrest some of them, a soldier fights demons and cuts off a cat's paw which turns into Mistress Generous's hand. The soldier is a highly masculine type, whose preoccupation with his phallic sword counterpoints Generous's concern for his gelding. He will not lend his sword, a 'bedfellow, / That never failed [him] yet' (5.2.888), but only show it 'To look on, not to part with from my hand' (931). Arthur's observation that 'tis bloody towards the point' (932) seems another hint at the soldier's sexual ability, while the man's claim that 'I have kept my face whole, thanks my scimitar, / My trusty bilbo' (5.3.927) stresses the essential instrument again and perhaps adds to the

sexual subtext — the Spanish town of Bilbao made high-quality swords,²⁹ but the word also sounds very much like ‘dildo’.³⁰

On the other hand the soldier’s status is not as firm as he presents it. While the man compares himself with a knight of the Round Table,³¹ his position as he gets pinched by (admittedly demonic) cats in an old mill is far removed from such epic context. More importantly, the soldier is a distinctly ragged character at the beginning of the play: coming back from the Russo-Polish war where he was taken prisoner, his status is that of a vagrant, and though he has a legal pass³² he is associated with the disreputable world of vagabonds and beggars. His first speech is to beg money (2.2.271), and Generous’s answer refers to early modern law that sought to control both geographic mobility and unnecessary begging: ‘I could tax you, friend, and justly too, / For begging ’gainst the statute in that name’ (272). The law distinguished between ‘impotent beggars’, who were to be taken care of by the parish, and ‘sturdy beggars’, who being fit for work were forbidden to beg.³³ As Generous remarks, the soldier could belong to that dishonest category: ‘Perhaps thou lov’st this wandering life, to be an idle loitering beggar than to eat of thine own labour’ (276). The soldier’s social status is precarious. His economic dependency dissociates him from the business world of Generous, who is also firmly anchored in his house, as the insistence on his hospitality conveys (1.1.16 and 62). Conversely, the soldier’s mobility connects him with the other ‘side’, that of the witches whose subversiveness is partly manifested in their abnormal freedom of movement,³⁴ a trait also reflected in the bastard’s unfixed residence: ‘Where do I lie? Why, sometimes in one place, and then again in another. I love to shift lodgings, but most constantly, wheresoe’er I dine or sup, there do I lie!’ (30).

The soldier’s trajectory may hence be read as one of rehabilitation and new-found social function. Generous offers him work in his mill (thus re-anchoring him in a fixed place) and when he defeats the witches in act 5 he becomes a figure of recuperated authority and a synecdoche for the entire male community. But how efficient is that reversal? In the same way as the witches’ inversions would leave lingering traces, the soldier’s troubled past might destabilize the apparent demonstration of control when Generous orders him to seize Mall: ‘Soldier, take her / To your charge’ (5.4.956). Generous addresses him as ‘soldier’, not ‘miller’, to reinforce the sense of power. But this direction recalls the man’s unstable identity³⁵ and his undetermined future: as a mercenary soldier he does not belong to this community and his being there is probably temporary — will male authority depart with him?

The fact that he acts on Generous's order also raises questions. He does not go witch-hunting on his own initiative, but only as Generous's employee. While the man with the sword seems the perfect remedy for the owner of the gelding, the distinction between commander and agent leaves room for uncertainty.³⁶ Whose virility, whose authority is foregrounded? Is Generous, and by extension the Lancashire community, really back in command?

Similar uncertainties about agency and mobility are perceptible in the insistence on hands. When Generous visits him after the mill fight, the soldier finds the cat's paw, which he had cut off, now metamorphosed into a human hand. This severed hand is crucial in the men's triumph over witchcraft. First, it provides evidence against Mistress Generous, literally proving that she 'had a hand' in the upheaval at the mill. The ring allows unequivocal identification, and the hand metonymically functions as the witch's signature: several puns refer to handwriting, such as 'Know you the hand, sir?/Yes and too well can read it' (5.3.940–1), or 'The best is, if one of the parties shall deny the deed, we have their hand to show' (944). Part of the play's comedy, here distinctly turning to black humour, the puns are also reminiscent of contract-signing earlier in the play (2.2). On a first level, the episodes stand in opposition to each other, contrasting the gentlemen's signing of a legal contract designated to protect patriarchal property (Generous is helping Arthur recover a mortgaged estate) with the witches' illegal activities epitomized by their signing a covenant with the devil, the 'contract' or 'compact' mentioned in act 4.³⁷ On another level, the puns on hands and handwriting (in both instances) may go beyond comic effect and suggest that the linguistic instability reflects a form of uncertainty about action and commitment. Among the gentlemen's signatures, Whetstone's 'scurvy hand'³⁸ is already a disturbance.

Mistress Generous's hand is not only a means of identification. As 'the body part most often associated with intentional, effective action',³⁹ it represents the witches' capacity to act upon the world, and its mutilation is a clear indication that the men have curbed their powers — anticipating their ineffectual appeal to their familiars and the abrupt ending of all enchantments. As the men seize the hand and draw attention to their manipulation of it,⁴⁰ the passage literalizes the notion that the witches who 'handled' everyone are now in somebody else's hands, or power. The subsequent insistence on the 'hands' of justice confirms this reversal:

GENEROUS I must deliver you
Into the hand of justice.

(5.4.970)

GREGORY Sir I have heard that witches apprehended under hands of lawful authority, do lose their power;
And all their spells are instantly dissolved. (5.5.1001)

DOUGHTY They are all in officers' hands, and they will touch here with two or three of them for a little private parley before they go to the justices. (1009)

The very proliferation of hands, and of puns, however, may raise doubts about this apparent transfer from feminine to masculine control. Severed hands problematize the discourse of human action precisely because they are detached from the subject and have a mobility of their own:

Wandering or ghostly, they symbolize the loss, theft, or withering of an individual's capacity to act with real political or personal effect. And their tenuous, prosthetic affiliation to the body raises questions about whether the powers they embody are in fact proper to any person.⁴¹

Capacity in general has moved from one set of characters to another, but it may remain mobile — especially if Mistress Generous's dead hand is associated with the 'Hand of Glory' of witchcraft lore, the severed hand of an exhumed corpse which, adequately prepared and burnt, was supposed to facilitate the witches' activities by neutralizing their enemies.⁴² The Hand of Glory had legal status as proof of witchcraft and was used in trials.⁴³ But 'its very status as a thing that can be taken up by another and turned to unwonted uses reveals a profound weakness in — and threat to — each person who employs it.'⁴⁴ The reference is only latent in *The Late Lancashire Witches* but the folk-tales may reinforce the sense that the severed hand represents an alarmingly detachable form of agency.

The ring adds another layer of meaning: having 'given' her hand to Generous, his wife wore a betrothal ring symbolizing her marriage and submission to her husband, which is now ironically reversed into proof of her rebellious activities. This symbolic uncertainty invites us to approach the metonymic hands of justice with a critical eye. The witches make their last entrance with a constable and officers who never utter a word.⁴⁵ Though they have legal authority over the defendants, Doughty carries out the questioning, prompted by Arthur's suggestion that they could 'try if we can by examination get from them something that may abbreviate the cause unto the wiser in commission for the peace before we carry them before 'em' (5.5.1030).

The spectators' knowledge that the trial did not end in the Lancashire assizes reinforces this unfixing of local control, because a sceptical judge deferred the case to central authority in London. While the village community is successfully purged of disturbing agents at the end of the play, the spectator is aware of instability as far as hands or control are concerned. Even the epilogue contributes to the instability with its cautious statement that

We represent as much
As they have done, before law's hand did touch
Upon their guilt. (Epilogue, 1084)

The phrase brings back to mind the severed hand revealed onstage, leaving viewers conscious of the vague nature of 'law', either local or central, while the verb 'touch', if taken literally, suggests a less than firm clutch on the situation.⁴⁶

Witchcraft as Fiction and Theatre

I have tried to demonstrate so far that beyond the apparent dialectic of subversion *vs* containment the play is more subtly ambivalent in its presentation of the military and the judiciary, conveying the instability of agency and control. There could be a reflexive dimension to this, if one accepts the theory of a commission from the privy council, which turns the playwrights into the instruments or 'hands' of authority — or more generally, if one considers the journalistic and topical nature of the play. The play's puns on handwriting support this sense of reflexivity, and echo Heywood's recent claim that he 'had either an entire hand, or at the least a maine finger' in the writing of 220 plays.⁴⁷ Endowed with new ambivalence, the severed hand may then signify either detachment from personal intentionality, or on the contrary, a claim of independence and emphasis on the playwrights' contribution to the plot, which actually adds to the judicial material as much as it draws from it.

The added episodes relate to the dramatists' theatrical background and make the description of the play as journalistic somewhat misleading: the Seely plot is comparable to Brome's other experiments with social topsyturvydom, most clearly illustrated in his later *Antipodes*; and the Generous story, with the wife's repentance and husband's pardon, recalls Heywood's own speciality as a writer of domestic tragedies. The play does not just illustrate a contemporary case but incorporates its protagonists in a recognizable world of fiction and dramatic patterns. An unmistakable consequence is that

it *fictionalizes* the supposedly real witches. Or perhaps more accurately, it reveals their fictive status.

When Doughty questions him in act 5, the kidnapped boy recounts a meeting with the devil that the audience never witnessed. This event might have happened offstage, as part of the play's careful articulation of dramatic space and stage space which I will discuss later. But if spectators take the narrative as 'embroidering the story of his experience at Goody Dickieson's hands' and blowing it 'out of proportion to events',⁴⁸ the play exposes the accusation as a lie in a way that either guesses at or reflects knowledge of young Robinson's 10 July confession. Interestingly, the boy's false testimony used old tales from the 1612 witch-craze in the Pendle forest.⁴⁹ People knowing the tales would realize not only that witchcraft is fiction but that it is made of *layers* of fiction, to which the playwrights are adding their own rendition, specifically transposed into dramatic codes.

The fact that narratives frame act 5 (the boy's at one end, Meg's at the other) reinforces the idea that, despite everything the spectators have witnessed, witchcraft is discourse. Meg's confession to Doughty, like the real Margaret Johnson's, rehearses long-standing clichés of witch-lore.⁵⁰ The protracted confession grows more and more detached from the play's 'facts' and seems to stand on its own as a kind of cultural recapitulation, reminiscent of informative notes in Heywood's pageant texts which shared current knowledge about exotic animals or mythological gods.⁵¹ The comparison invites caution: in pageant texts, such passages serve a social purpose in establishing a common cultural ground and drawing the community together. I am inclined to think the rehearsal of witchcraft-related information serves the same purpose, which is hardly subversive, but the analogy also underlines a possible view of the witches and their trial as cultural rather than factual material.

Contrary to Meg's and the boy's glib revelations, Generous repeatedly emphasizes terseness. When his guests thank him for his hospitality he refuses their compliments. His response to Arthur's ready acceptance of the dinner invitation is 'Such plainness doth best please me' (1.1.64) and he follows his own rule when asking a favour: 'In few I shall' (70) — where the elliptic syntax confirms his commitment to conciseness. The claim that he 'ever studied plainness and truth withal' (68) implicitly connects elaborate rhetoric with insincerity. The paradox, of course, is that Generous's suspicion of Arthur's flattery does not extend to his wife's lies. He later views his own gullibility as regrettable 'incredulity' (5.3.939),⁵² a detail which reinforces

the ambivalence of belief and disbelief in the play. Generous's insistence on language may also hint that the audience should be wary of words, not taken in by elaborate narratives. His professed brevity contrasts with the layers of discourse that accumulate around witches and witchcraft, exemplified by the boy's embellishments or Meg's unfolding of hitherto unmentioned intercourse with a man in black (5.5.1060–72). Both characters are responding to Doughty's questioning, in a clear transposition of the judicial proceedings of spring 1634. Doughty's avidity for information stands in opposition to Generous's desire to hear little; by implication, the copious details arise from the specific situation and should not be taken at face value.

The metatheatrical dimension of the witches' activities is also revealing. As Hirschfeld remarks, 'Their revelry is explicitly termed *sport*, and as sport it occupies a metadramatic register: it resembles the activity of playgoing'.⁵³ Mistress Generous behaves like a playwright figure when she sets up the show that Whetstone offers to the gallants. In their meetings the witches consistently discuss what they have done and what they will do next. This dramatic device ensures the cohesion of various episodes by anticipating as well as reminiscing; it also conveys the impression that the witches are organizing the distribution of events, that they are, in fact, the writers of this play. This authority is perceptible from their first appearance:

MEG What new device, what dainty strain,
More for our mirth now than our gain,
Shall we in practice put?

GOODY DICKIESON Nay, dame,
Before we play another game,
We must a little laugh and thank
Our feat familiars for the prank
They played us last. (2.1.191–2)

The witches appear responsible both for what the spectators have seen and for what they are about to witness: though this suggestion simply confirms that the community is bewitched, it also shows the witches are careful about how they arrange their 'devices'. The vocabulary removes the threat from their activities, insisting on the festive dimension of 'pranks' and 'games', and the lexicon of 'device' and 'play' suggests entertainment of a theatrical kind, thus reinforcing the connection between witches and playwrights. Even though the scene shows interaction with supernatural familiars, the dialogue seems to be exposing witchcraft *as* theatre; that is, as tricks and plots rather than real

demonic activity. A few lines later, another exchange reveals the same careful (dramatist-like) balancing of previous and upcoming events:

GILL Now, spirits, fly about the task *Spirits exit.*
 That we projected in our masque.
 MEG Now let us laugh to think upon
 The feat which we have so lately done,
 In the distraction we have set
 In Seely's house. (2.1.200–1)

The description of their own dance as a 'masque' points at courtly theatrical entertainment: it erases the supposedly supernatural nature of the dance and replaces it with self-conscious theatricality. The 'task' 'projected in [the] masque' implies a dumbshow such as were common in older plays, a specifically dramatic device which reinforces the coherence of events: again, the self-conscious allusion associates the witches with the writers. While we hear of their involvement after seeing the disorder in the Seely house, they claim responsibility for the topsy-turvy wedding beforehand and demonstrate how they have it all planned, all written as it were.

One disturbing detail in their careful controlling of events is the mention that 'we dance today / To spoil the hunters' sport' (208), and Meg's intention to squat 'like a wily wat, / Until they put me up' (213). The play opens on the hunters' disappointment and suspicion that the elusive hare was a witch. The women do not confirm it, but plan to carry out that exact trick in the afternoon, during a hunt which the gentlemen plan, but neither perform onstage nor recall afterwards. This strange telescoping of past and future, intentions and facts, is different from their acknowledging that the witches *did* upset the Seely household. It contributes to presenting witchcraft as based on inversion not only of social hierarchy but of any form of order, including dramatic sequences. The deliberate disturbance also draws attention to the artificiality of everything that the play presents, to witchcraft as a dramatic *construct*.

A number of hints, therefore, imply a close identification of the witches and their activities with theatre and artifice. After witnessing the witches behaving as playwrights, stage directors, and actors in their own 'masques', after seeing Mistress Generous's hypocritical show of repentance, how are we to take Meg's confession? This last moment of the play may well appear as another histrionic feat, where the alleged witch rehearses an old part. Those elements not only present the witches as harmless, but also expose witchcraft

as fiction, and suggest that nothing substantial warrants the current trial. Hence, perhaps, the pervasive fragility of the patriarchal system, and the ambivalent representation of the judiciary and military: the real source of frailty is not vulnerability to the supernatural power of witches, but the excessive credulity of officials who are taking this matter seriously. Or to put it another way, the presentation of witchcraft as a fictitious construction reflects back on patriarchal authority, whose accusatory gendered discourse seems as illusory as its object.

Perhaps the playwrights were not so much transposing as subverting judicial documents by exposing the fictions on which they rested. I am, however, wary of overestimating Brome's and Heywood's rebelliousness. Critics are divided about Brome's political stance, which seems to 'combine a radical aversion to tyrannical authority with a strong disapproval of ambitious insurrection'.⁵⁴ And Heywood's writing of an exceptional number of lord mayor's shows in the 1630s characterizes him as a more conservative than subversive figure,⁵⁵ as does his earlier defence of theatre on the grounds that

Playes are writ with this ayme, and carried with this methode, to teach the subjects obedience to their King, to shew the people the vntimely end of such as haue moued tumults, commotions, and insurrections, to present thē with the flourishing estate of such as liue in obedience, exhorting them to allegiance, dehorting them from all trayterous and felonious stratagemes.⁵⁶

To resolve the question, we might qualify Berry's and Findlay's hypothesis of a direct commission from the privy council. Though both critics analyze the political and religious divisions within the council, they consider that 'the King's Men were to produce a play presenting the case for the prosecution'.⁵⁷ They support this claim with the fact that the lord chamberlain was the earl of Pembroke, a puritan and presumably intent on the condemnation of witches.⁵⁸ On the other hand, if the council was divided, the conjectured commission may not have been categorical. Historians emphasize the growing scepticism of the time, and the contrast between the witch trials of 1633–4 and the witch-craze of 1612:

If the 1612 executions can be adduced as a symbol of the more extreme aspects of English witch persecution, the government handling of the 1633–34 accusations demonstrates just how sceptical central authority, the upper reaches of the

Church, and possibly educated opinion in general had become about malefic witchcraft by that date.⁵⁹

Tomkyns, the spectator who wrote about the performance, was a sceptic, and Ostovich's analysis of the variety of attitudes to witchcraft in the play, and of Shakestone's scepticism in particular, suggests the King's Men were counting on incredulous responses.⁶⁰ The epilogue, while appropriately diffident and cautious,⁶¹ suggests the possibility of a pardon:

Perhaps great mercy may,
 After just condemnation, give them day
 Of longer life. (Epilogue, 1084)

... which is exactly what happened. I would then qualify Findlay's theory that, after the collapse of young Robinson's evidence, 'the Council members wishing to sentence the witches did as Robinson had done before them, and turned to the power of the story' as something 'stronger' than truth.⁶² Putting a witchcraft case onto the stage inherently exposes a double edge. A representation of the witches' activities implied a proliferation of spectacular effects which could but draw attention to its own artifice in the non-realistic setting of an early modern public theatre. The audience at the Globe were well aware that everything they saw was but illusion and optical tricks, even though the characters claimed to witness magical doings — and I think the opening scene's insistence on sight hints at this ambivalence, with Arthur exclaiming that the elusive hare was 'in constant view' (1.1.6), that he needs no glasses (8), and that

what I see
 And is to me apparent ...
 To that will I give credit. (11)

The comments draw attention to the spectators' activity in an ironic way, as they subvert the legendary incredulity of St Thomas (his refusal to believe until he has *seen*) into a form of credulity. Sight stands as evidence for the reality of witches, although everything shown onstage is illusory. Could authorities have seriously considered that the theatre would make a stronger case for the witches' existence? Or, if scholars retain the hypothesis of a commission, could officials have intended the play to gauge public opinion as much as shape it, suggest the possible deflation of the case, and perhaps float the idea of a pardon?

Theatre as Witchcraft

So far I have only examined one side of the theatre/witchcraft equation. If we can only conjecture the possibility and content of a commission, the case offered a clear opportunity, from the dramatists' viewpoint, to explore a reciprocal definition of theatre *as* witchcraft. The metatheatrical hints function both ways, suggesting the extraordinary powers of playwrights creating masque-like dances, magical feasts, and animal metamorphoses.

The search for spectacular effects is a constant trait in Heywood's forty-year long career, something he both practiced and defended. In the early 1610s, he explored the stage potential of the gods' deeds in his *Ages* plays, which abound in descents and ascents,⁶³ dances and fireworks. In *The Brazen Age* (1613), Hercules tackles shape-changing Achelous in a fight which provided previous experience for onstage metamorphosis.⁶⁴ The *Apology for Actors* (1612) betrays a strong belief in the power of stage images.⁶⁵ Twenty years later Heywood designed impressive pageants including gods and exotic animals, and he is the only pageant writer who mentions purely visual shows.⁶⁶ Finally, in 1636 he devoted half the preface to *Love's Mistress* (a masque-like play performed at court in November 1634) to an enthusiastic digression about Inigo Jones's wonderful settings.⁶⁷

Brome's background is less documented, especially at this early stage in his career — he was about seventeen years younger than Heywood. His association with Ben Jonson⁶⁸ must have given him direct knowledge not only of the comedies which were an important influence in his later work, but also of his master's masques. Several of Brome's plays include variants on the masque.⁶⁹ While Athéna Efstathiou-Lavabre downplays the connection because of the minimalist setting on the public stage,⁷⁰ she emphasizes Brome's exploration of theatricality. Actually the public theatre is not devoid of spectacular effects, and I would argue that the witches' allusion to their dance as a 'masque' is not to be dismissed too quickly. Though *The Late Lancashire Witches* could not but be performed on a bare stage and without the extravagant expenses of a masque, its staging of the witches' tricks does reflect a commitment to theatre as show and, I think, a promotion of the public theatre's particular resources. Their activities involve the use and combination of several theatrical devices, and I want to underline how the playwrights experimented with them and how they negotiated the possibilities and limitations of their own medium.

The play exploits music, for instance, with a clear effort at variety. In acts 2 and 4 the witches sing and dance when they meet, actions that both emblemize the harmony among them and provide spectacle for the audience. But music is also used for disharmony, even cacophony. When Seely and his wife wait for their newly married servants they hear the church bells ring backwards (3.1.369);⁷¹ then the musicians '*play the battle*' (379), a conventional stage music for battle scenes hardly appropriate for the celebration of a wedding. Music also accompanies the apparition of dancing spirits impersonating putative fathers (4.5). The use of music and dance signals that those characters are illusions: the piling up of spectacular devices is necessary for audiences to perceive the show within the show as such — but it also emphasizes that theatre *is* show, or rather, that witchcraft is theatre is show.

The wedding feast provides further musical opportunities with a dance accompanied by (supposedly devilish) bagpipe music, and striking cacophony as the fiddlers play '*everyone a several tune*' (3.3.519). The playwrights are pushing their tools to the limits when they have the musicians first pretend to play '*as loud as [they] can possibly*' (541) without making any sound, then smash their instruments onstage (545). Heywood and Brome are clearly experimenting with theatrical resources, and using them as diversely as possible for maximum entertainment.

They also exploit visual effects, with greater ambiguity. The witches' most spectacular skill, shape-changing, is not easily represented onstage. The text thus reveals a careful negotiation between the exploitation of available resources and constant supplementation through speeches. Tomkyns was struck by the accumulation of transformations and apparitions.⁷² But looking closely at the playtext, we cannot help but notice how little the audience actually witnesses and how carefully the playwrights negotiate the interaction of dramatic space and stage space. For each feat that is shown, another more impressive but irrepresentable deed is either reported or transferred offstage. The hounds beaten by the miller's child, for instance, turn into Gillian and a demon boy. The quarto reads '*As he beats them, there appeares before him, Goody Dickison, and the Boy upon the dogs, going in*' (E1v), which Ostovich modernizes into '*As he beats them, there appears before him GOODY DICKIE-SON and BOY 2, upon the dogs' going in*' (2.5.324). Drawing on workshops with RSC actors, she comments:

The actors who worked on this scene for the Brome editors suggested that there might be a stage bush over the trapdoor in the stage, through which the dogs

might ‘disappear’ while the yipping sound of beaten dogs could be picked up by the actors who appear through the trap as Goody Dickieson and Boy 2. This effect would be more ‘magical’ than having actors play the dogs from the start, a less likely option on the early modern stage, where dogs (presumably pets of company members) were not infrequently used as supernumeraries. On the other hand, an actor does play a dog in Rowley, Dekker, and Ford’s *The Witch of Edmonton*.⁷³

Laird H. Barber suggested the substitution could also have been performed at the door of the tiring-house, with the help of a curtain.⁷⁴ Though the RSC actors play the dogs to comic effect,⁷⁵ the disappearance of live dogs would have provided a nice show in 1634. But the more impressive transformation of the demon boy into a white horse is displaced offstage. The dramatists actually draw attention to this strategy of showing and not showing by repeatedly emphasizing that the characters ‘see’ the show which the audience cannot see. Gillian asks, ‘Now look and tell me where’s the lad become?’ (2.5.333) and, as the boy ‘*peers through the stage door after him*’,⁷⁶ he answers ‘The boy is vanished, and I can see nothing in his stead but a white horse ready saddled and bridled’ (334).

The dramatists employ the same strategy for Moll’s magical skills. Her milk pail moves of itself in 2.6, a trick easily performed with string or wire. As the *Richard Brome Online* workshops demonstrate, a good way to do this is to have, not one, but two people pull the string from either side of the stage: thus they are ‘able to pull it back and forth without risk of the pail’s falling over’, and ‘Having the pail back up if Robin attempts to come too close to see how it works creates a good comic effect by endowing the pail with magical intelligence’.⁷⁷ But this visual effect is reinforced by a *report* of how Mall’s broom ‘[swept] the house without hands tother day’, which is clearly more difficult to show (2.6.343). Mall then transforms Robert’s old horse into a powerful steed — of course this transformation takes place offstage. Like the miller’s boy, Robert is invited to ‘look’ beyond the stage,⁷⁸ just inside the tiring-house where the wonderful vision must be imagined.⁷⁹ The detail reinforces the spectators’ awareness of the stage, of its possibilities and its limitations.

The recurrent horse metamorphosis, like the musical effects, reveals a degree of experimentation. After using offstage metamorphosis the playwrights resort to symbolic transformation: a bridle is enough to effect the change of Robert (3.2) and Mistress Generous (4.1), a transformation which

is both economical and entertaining to watch. While the short stage direction in the quarto suggests a stylized or conventional transformation,⁸⁰ it also leaves the possibility that, as with duels and battles, a longer interval of time may be exploited onstage. The *Richard Brome Online* videos present the boy's transformation in act 2 as follows:

The actors in the workshop chose to have Boy 2 turn into a horse on stage by gradually taking on horse-like characteristics: pawing the ground, shaking the head, snorting, whinnying, and chewing the bit. The effect was extraordinary.⁸¹

The last 'horse experiment' is the skimmington parade (4.3). While E.K. Chambers contemplates the possibility of live animals onstage,⁸² Gabriel Egan convincingly argues that a dummy would have been sufficient in this case since it only carries effigies of Lawrence and Parnell.⁸³ Thus the audience's rising expectations, in a play that makes so much of horses, are both fulfilled and frustrated. Parnell's determination to dismantle 'the show' only reinforces the audience's consciousness of theatricality, especially as she becomes the alternative spectacle that onstage spectators gather to watch (4.3.765–7).

Finally, the magical banquet where the witches recover stolen food (4.1) also exemplifies the dramatists' ability to make the most of their resources. After making a show out of the disappearance of the food with live birds and cats in its stead,⁸⁴ they exploit the retrieving of the food, pretending it magically appears when the witches pull on ropes. The detail comes from young Robinson's deposition, where he claimed that

he saw six of them kneeling, and pulling all six of them six several ropes, which were fastened or tied to the top of the barn. Presently after which pulling, there came into this informer's sight flesh smoking, butter in lumps, and milk as it were flying from the said ropes.⁸⁵

There are several ways of staging this rope business. Tomkyns's letter mentions 'all sorts of meat and drink conveyed unto them by their familiars upon the pulling of a cord',⁸⁶ suggesting the rope-pulling was a signal for demonic servants to enter with a banquet. The script indicates no entrance, however, only insistent mentions of pulling (4.1.576, 579, 583, 598). The *Richard Brome Online* actors chose to dispense with props altogether, keep the feast invisible, and convey spectacle through gestures and noises.⁸⁷ But

those ropes strike me as precisely the kind of tools used in the theatre for supernatural apparitions: in Heywood's *Ages* plays the gods, their animal companions, and even their beds sometimes,⁸⁸ were carried up and down with a rope-and-pulley system hidden in the hut above the stage. This effect could transfer to *The Late Lancashire Witches* by having witches pull down dishes, or boy actors (playing familiars) carrying dishes — thus reconciling the quarto with Tomkyns's observations, and justifying allusions to physical exertion. Even though the detail comes from the deposition it functions as a metatheatrical device, with the normally invisible ropes now made visible. The scene exposes the theatre's tools for the spectators' recognition. The stage exhibits its own tricks in the same play where it proves its most spectacular, witchcraft-like capacities.

Thus *The Late Lancashire Witches* reveals Brome and Heywood's rich experimentation with their resources in a minimalist setting: music, dancing, possible apparitions through trapdoors, suggested metamorphoses. The text betrays careful negotiation between what can or cannot be done, what is shown and what is reported, what is placed onstage and what can only be suggested offstage. In this respect the opening lines ('Was ever sport of expectation / Thus crossed in th'height!', 1.1.2) read as an ironic comment on the spectators' expectations and the limited means available for their fulfilment. In its representation of threatened patriarchy, the play opposes the witches' 'overdoings', in terms of both subversion and excess,⁸⁹ to the men's 'underdoings', especially from a sexual viewpoint. But it is also caught between two extremes of 'over' and 'under' from a theatrical viewpoint. Looking at the witches' feats we realize how much the play 'underdoes' it, or limits its exhibition of magic because of the constraints of reality and particularly the constraints of the public theatre. And yet Tomkyns's account makes it seem to rather 'overdo' it, with its accumulation of spectacular shows and its combination of music, dances, and optical tricks. Besides the playwrights' ability to work collaboratively and articulate diverse episodes into one whole, the play manifests their specifically theatrical skills — their capacity to exploit and playfully exhibit the tools at their disposal.

As Hirschfeld underlines, both Brome and Heywood were committed to the public, professional theatre.⁹⁰ Their most recent opposition came from Prynne's *Histrion-Mastix: The Players Scourge, or Actors Tragædie*, published in late 1632.⁹¹ In this puritan assault, the association of the theatre with the devil is a leitmotiv. The thousand-page-long book illustrates the view that 'Stage-Playes are the workes, and Pompes of Satan',⁹² arguing that 'all

Theatricall Playes, or Enterludes, had their Originall birth from the very Deuill himselfe, who inuented them for his owne honour, and worship, to detaine men captiue by them, in his infernall snares'.⁹³ Evil permeates all dimensions of the theatre down to play-going, for 'the Factors, and Minions of the Deuill ... onely did frequent, and Act them heretofore, and applaude, performe, and haunt them now'.⁹⁴ In Prynne's words again, 'as if wee had made a couenant with Hell, and sworne allegiance to the Deuill himselfe', when we watch a play we 'inthrall, and sell our selues to these Diabolically, and hellish Enter-ludes'.⁹⁵ In early modern culture, this idea of a 'covenant' with the devil is reminiscent of witchcraft, and my last suggestion will be that Brome and Heywood's play can be read as a provocative answer to Prynne's pamphlet.⁹⁶

The Late Lancashire Witches takes the notion that the theatre is demonic literally, and exploits its potential. It shows 'minions of the devil' organizing performances and playing parts. It gives pride of place to women characters and boy actors who were particular concerns of Prynne's,⁹⁷ and in its suggestion of the witches' sexual interest in boys it enacts the puritan's denunciation of the theatre's dangers. The association of the witches with multiple forms of entertainment also resonates with Prynne's view that all distractions are connected and morally dangerous, 'being either the concomitants of Stage-playes, or hauing such neare affinity with them, that the unlawfulness of the one are necessary mediums to evince the sinfulness of the other'.⁹⁸ The play seems like an open challenge to the puritan, down to its metatheatrical implications which ultimately turn the spectators into witches: when the play points at its own artifice it also hints at the audience's wilful embrace of illusion and participation in its creation.

The authorities condemned *Histrion-Mastix* — at another trial that also took place in 1634. Because some passages seemed to target the queen, Prynne was imprisoned in the Tower of London. In May 1634, only three months before *The Late Lancashire Witches* was performed, he was pilloried and had his ears cut off.⁹⁹ This recent event seems to lurk beneath the surface of the text, which alludes to the 'most itching ears / Of this our critic age' (2.2.227) and insistently refers to wounded ears, with the boy's complaint that the demon's 'sharp nails made [his] ears bleed' (5.1.881) and the soldier's wondering whether he cut the ear of a witch (5.2.898). Whetstone actually makes a direct allusion to the punishment suffered by Prynne: 'But if thou, Bantam, dost not hear of this with both thine ears — if thou hast them still, and not lost them by scribbling' (2.4.320).

The inversions characteristic of the witches' spells were my starting-point for a deeper investigation of the play's ambivalent subversiveness, which has revealed the pervasive fragility of patriarchy and lasting uncertainty surrounding figures of authority. This uncertainty relates to another form of subversion: the play does not so much translate judicial documents into theatrical material, as it exposes the theatrical and fictitious nature of witchcraft, hence destabilizing the entire judicial pursuit. If 'witchcraft is theatre', then the response is that 'theatre is witchcraft' — a suggestive notion for playwrights committed to the public stage, and one of whom at least was intent on spectacular effects throughout his career. *The Late Lancashire Witches* demonstrates its authors' skills in negotiating their resources, and flaunts the capacities of the commercial stage. Ultimately, it suggests a provocative answer to Prynne's attack on the theatre, taking advantage of the security signalled by official condemnation to provokingly enact the puritan's accusation that actors and spectators consort with the devil. The witches are indeed carted out at the end of the play, but not before the playwrights have made the most of their extraordinary material.

Notes

I would like to thank Denis Lagae-Devoldère, Stephen Orgel, Helen Ostovich, and *Early Theatre's* anonymous readers for their insightful comments and invaluable suggestions during the various stages of this paper.

- 1 Their names were Margaret Johnson, Frances Dicconson or Dickieson, Jennet Hargreaves, and Mary Spencer. All four surnames appear in the play.
- 2 Helen Ostovich expounds the details of the case, with transcriptions from the depositions, in her 'Critical Introduction', in Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, ed. Helen Ostovich, *Richard Brome Online* (<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/brome>), 9–16. See also Herbert Berry, 'The Globe Bewitched and *El Hombre Fiel*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 1 (1984), 211–30; and Alison Findlay, 'Sexual and Spiritual Politics in the Events of 1633–34 and *The Late Lancashire Witches*', Robert Poole (ed.), *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories* (Manchester and New York, 2002), 146–51.
- 3 This letter to Sir Robert Phelps was discovered by Berry and transcribed in 'The Globe Bewitched', 215. Ostovich reproduces it in modern spelling in her 'Critical Introduction', 1. Tomkyns states the play was performed three days in a row, which was unusual at the time.

- 4 Berry put this explanation forward in 'The Globe Bewitched', 219–23. Findlay takes it in, 'Sexual and Spiritual Politics', 150–1, 159–60.
- 5 While critics relay Berry's hypothesis, interpretations of the playwrights' response differ. Findlay, 'Sexual and Spiritual Politics', analyzes how they 'seem to have steered an intriguingly ambiguous line' (160) and may have used the play for religious satire. Heather Hirschfeld, 'Collaborating Across Generations: Thomas Heywood, Richard Brome, and the Production of *The Late Lancashire Witches*', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 30.2 (Spring 2000), 339–74, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/10829636-30-2-339>, argues that their commitment to professional theatre led them to reject patronage and deliberately make the witches' case impossible to judge.
- 6 Quotations of the play are from the Modern Text in Ostovich, *The Late Lancashire Witches*. The identifying numbers in parentheses refer to act, scene, and speech paragraph.
- 7 Ostovich, 'Critical Introduction', 16.
- 8 Earlier editions include Gabriel Egan (ed.), *Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome, The Witches of Lancashire* (London, 2002); and Laird H. Barber, *An Edition of The Late Lancashire Witches by Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome* (New York and London, 1979).
- 9 The critical consensus is that Heywood wrote the Generous plot and Brome is responsible for the Seely plot — see Ostovich, 'Textual Introduction', 2. Catherine Shaw, *Richard Brome* (Boston, 1980), 107–17, proposes a more specific distribution but is criticized by Matthew Steggle, *Richard Brome: Place and Politics on the Caroline Stage* (Manchester, 2004), 58. Hirschfeld, 'Collaborating Across Generations', discusses further the method of collaborative play-writing.
- 10 See Stuart Clark, 'Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft' [1980], Darren Oldridge (ed.), *The Witchcraft Reader* (London and New York, 2002), 149–60.
- 11 The entire play provides a neat illustration of Patricia Parker's essay on the word 'preposterous' in early modern England, whose literal significance (prepost-, before-after) makes it particularly useful for pointing disruptions in what was thought to be the natural order of things in a variety of spheres, political, sexual, or linguistic. See Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (Chicago and London, 1996), 20–55.
- 12 King James I, Speech to Parliament of 21 March 1610, *Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge, 1994), 181. His *Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) further develops the analogy: see *Political Writings*, 65 and 77–8.
- 13 The idea that witches' curses were uttered in revenge for refused charity dates back to Reginald Scot, *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (London, 1584). Taken up and developed

- by Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane in the 1970s, it has become a major interpretive model. See Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (New York, 1970).
- 14 The Miller's complaints about 'butter' also suggest sexual frustration: 'we could not make it come, though she and I both together churned almost our hearts out, and nothing would come, but all ran into thin waterish gear' (5.1.868).
 - 15 The filmed extracts accompanying the online edition highlight this bawdy dimension: see videos LW_2_6, LW_2_13, LW_2_14, and LW_4_6 on *Richard Brome Online* (<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/brome>). Later mentions of videos refer to the same site.
 - 16 See Ostovich, 'Critical Introduction', 21–2, and Findlay, 'Sexual and Spiritual Politics', 157. Charlotte Coffin offers further material in "'Hot Horse to Horse": Le héros et sa monture dans le théâtre de Shakespeare', *Études Épistémè* 20 (2011), 48–9.
 - 17 Findlay, 'Sexual and Spiritual Politics', 157. Lynda E. Boose documents those objects in 'Scolding Bridles and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42:2 (1991), 179–213. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2870547>.
 - 18 See James Sharpe, 'Women, Witchcraft and the Legal Process' [1994], Oldridge, *The Witchcraft Reader*, 289–302, and *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550–1750* (London, 1996), 169–89.
 - 19 Sharpe's work challenges the interpretations of feminist critics. Oldridge, *The Witchcraft Reader*, offers several viewpoints on the issue: see Christina Lerner, 'Was Witch-Hunting Woman-Hunting?' [1984], 273–5; Marianne Hester, 'Patriarchal Reconstruction and Witch-Hunting' [1996], 276–88; Clive Holmes, 'Women: Witches and Witnesses' [1993], 303–21.
 - 20 Ostovich discusses the matter of sport and game in *The Late Lancashire Witches* in 'Critical Introduction', 17–31.
 - 21 See Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 172.
 - 22 Whetstone's mother, though not visible, has a counterpart in lusty young Mall, Robin's lover.
 - 23 See Alison Findlay, *Illegitimate Power: Bastards in Renaissance Drama* (Manchester and New York, 1994), 45–84.
 - 24 Ostovich demonstrates how the social disturbance translates into linguistic and metrical discrepancies: see notes to 1.1.
 - 25 Gregory worries that his father's actions might jeopardize his inheritance (1.2); Arthur has financial troubles which make him hopeful when Doughty contemplates

- making him his heir, and worried when the old bachelor falls in love (3.1.421, 3.3.479); Generous finally names Arthur as his heir (5.5.1017).
- 26 As Findlay demonstrates in *Illegitimate Power*, 213–52, bastards are popular characters in early modern theatre.
- 27 Ostovich, ‘Critical Introduction’, 31.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 More generally, a bilbo was ‘a sword noted for the temper and elasticity of its blade’ (*OED* 1).
- 30 The meaning of ‘substitute penis’ was current since the 1590s (*OED* 1.a), and many early modern examples are listed in Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, 3 vols (London, 1994), 1.387–90.
- 31 The soldier calls his sword Morglay and evokes the dragon Askapart — two references to Sir Bevis, knight of the Round Table (see 5.2.888 and notes).
- 32 ‘I was took prisoner by the Pole, and after some few weeks of durance, got both my freedom and pass. I have it about me to show; please you to vouchsafe the perusal’ (2.2.273).
- 33 See Pascale Drouet, *Le vagabond dans l’Angleterre de Shakespeare, ou l’art de contre-faire à la ville et à la scène* (Paris, 2003).
- 34 See Findlay, ‘Sexual and Spiritual Politics’, 154.
- 35 The soldier hired as a miller is actually a miller turned soldier (see 2.2.282).
- 36 See Katherine Rowe, *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern* (Stanford, 1999), 1–23; and Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins*, 149–84. Both highlight the early modern concern about agents, their responsibility, and their faithful performance.
- 37 See 4.2.669, 673, 675.
- 38 ‘My hand is there too, for a man cannot set to his mark, but it may be called his hand. I am a gentleman both ways, and it hath been held that it is the part of a gentleman to write a scurvy hand’ (2.2.222).
- 39 Rowe, *Dead Hands*, 3.
- 40 ‘Reach me that hand’, ‘There’s that of the three I can best spare’ (5.3.937–8).
- 41 Rowe, *Dead Hands*, 4.
- 42 Ibid, 98–103.
- 43 Ibid, 101.
- 44 Ibid, 100.
- 45 The ironic comment, moreover, on ‘this little demogorgon constable’ suggests a less than overpowering actor, perhaps even a boy actor (see 5.5.1029 and note).

- 46 From a historical perspective, Kevin Sharpe explores the complex articulation of local and central government in the 1630s as well as the interdependence of constables, justices of the peace, and assize judges. See *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven and London, 1992), 403–506.
- 47 Thomas Heywood, *The English Traveller* (London, 1633), ‘To the Reader’, A3r.
- 48 Ostovich’s notes to act 5 and to 5.1.857.
- 49 See Findlay, ‘Sexual and Spiritual Politics’, 146–7.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 147.
- 51 See Charlotte Coffin, ‘From Pageant to Text: The Silent Discourse of Heywood’s Omissions’, Laetitia Coussemont-Boillot and Christine Sukic (eds), *‘Silent Rhetoric’, ‘Dumb Eloquence’: The Rhetoric of Silence in Early Modern English Literature* (Paris, 2007), 71–96.
- 52 He talks of incredulity because he refused to believe his wife was a witch.
- 53 Hirschfeld, ‘Collaborating Across Generations’, 365.
- 54 Ira Clark, *Professional Playwrights: Massinger, Ford, Shirley and Brome* (Lexington, 1992), 170. See 157–71 for the whole critical discussion. Steggle, *Richard Brome*, 7–8, summarizes the debate.
- 55 Richard Rowland has recently challenged this view in *Thomas Heywood’s Theatre, 1599–1639: Locations, Translations, and Conflict* (Farnham and Burlington, 2010), 301–69. Analysis of Heywood’s pageants appears in Coffin, ‘From Pageant to Text’, and David Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry 1558–1642* (Tempe, 2003 [1971]), 214–35.
- 56 Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (London, 1612), F3v.
- 57 Findlay, ‘Sexual and Spiritual Politics’, 150; she rephrases Berry, ‘The Globe Bewitched’, 222.
- 58 Berry, ‘The Globe Bewitched’, 223.
- 59 James Sharpe, ‘Introduction: The Lancashire Witches in Historical Context’, Poole, *The Lancashire Witches*, 5.
- 60 See Ostovich, ‘Critical Introduction’, in particular 46–8.
- 61 ‘We ... dare not hold it fit / That we for justices and judges sit, / And personate their grave wisdoms on the stage / Whom we are bound to honour’ (Epilogue, 1084).
- 62 Findlay, ‘Sexual and Spiritual Politics’, 151.
- 63 Some are technical feats, as in *The Silver Age* (1613) when a bed catches fire and rises up with Semele on it — in parallel with Jupiter’s ascent, holding the baby he rescued from the fire. See *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood*, 6 vols (New York, 1964), 3.154–5.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 3.175–6.

- 65 See for instance the enthusiastic passage about Hercules (Heywood, *Apology*, B4r), which is part of a broader argument about the exemplary power of theatre.
- 66 David Bergeron, 'Stuart Civic Pageants and Textual Performance', *Renaissance Quarterly* 51:1 (1998), 180. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2901666>.
- 67 *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood*, 5.85–6.
- 68 Brome was Jonson's 'man', which has been variously interpreted to mean servant, amanuensis, actor, apprentice, or theatrical assistant. See Shaw, *Richard Brome*, 18–25; and Steggle, *Richard Brome*, 13–20.
- 69 Richard Allen Cave explores Jonson's influence on Brome in 'The Playwriting Sons of Ben: Nathan Field and Richard Brome', Brian Woolland (ed.), *Jonsonians: Living Traditions* (Aldershot, 2003), 81–9. See additional analysis of Brome's embedded masques in Athéna Efstathiou-Lavabre, *Jeux d'espace et lieux de théâtre: L'œuvre dramatique de Richard Brome*, 2 vols, PhD thesis (University of Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2007), 1.153–87.
- 70 Efstathiou-Lavabre, *Jeux d'espace et lieux de théâtre*, 1.98.
- 71 The characters mention this but no stage direction implies an actual musical performance.
- 72 See his account in Ostovich, 'Critical Introduction', 1.
- 73 Ostovich, notes to speech 324.
- 74 Barber, *An Edition of The Late Lancashire Witches*, 163a.
- 75 See videos LW_2_9 and LW_2_10.
- 76 This quotation refers to Egan's edition, 2.5.50; no stage direction appears in the quarto or Ostovich's modern text.
- 77 Notes associated with video LW_2_3; see the video itself and LW_2_4.
- 78 The verb is repeated throughout the scene with various meanings: 'I would but see that' (2.6.351), 'Look yonder' (352), 'Look you sir, here I have it' (354), 'Look again' (356), 'I'll leave you to look [ie, look for] your horse' (360).
- 79 'There stands a black long-sided jade' (2.6.357). The *Richard Brome Online* workshops take a different view on that episode and experiment with the idea of an onstage horse: see videos LW_2_5 and LW_2_6.
- 80 '*Exeunt Neighing*', F2v. Actually the neighing is enough to create comic effect, as the recorded transformation of Mistress Generous demonstrates: see video LW_4_6.
- 81 Notes associated with video LW_2_13. Ostovich discusses the choice to perform this offstage event in 'Critical Introduction', 27.
- 82 'Living dogs and even horses may have been trained' (E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols [Oxford, 1923], 1.372). Alan Dessen and Leslie Thompson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama 1580–1642* (Cambridge, 1999), 117, are more ambiguous: they remark that 'three onstage horses are called for' in

- early modern drama, but they do not discuss how the horses might have been (re) presented.
- 83 See Gabriel Egan, 'Horses in Early-Modern Drama', *Indian Journal of Ecocriticism*, 2 (2009), 61–72.
- 84 The text mentions the birds (3.1.413); we know about the cats from Tomkyns's letter.
- 85 Quoted in Ostovich, 'Critical Introduction', 9.
- 86 Quoted *ibid.*, 1.
- 87 See video LW_4_3. Eleanor Rycroft directed a performance in Lancaster Castle, 17 August 2012, in which a rope was lowered from the upper level and encircled the witches, but the food remained invisible; the actors performed consuming each course. I thank Helen Ostovich for this information; further discussion of the staging is forthcoming in Eleanor Rycroft, 'Staging *The Late Lancashire Witches* at Lancaster Castle', *Preternature* 3:1 (2014).
- 88 See note 63 above.
- 89 Findlay, 'Sexual and Spiritual Politics', 153, shows how the witches represent 'a dangerous excess of female activity'.
- 90 See Hirschfeld, 'Collaborating Across Generations'.
- 91 '*Histrion-Mastix* bore the imprint of 1633, but copies became available at the end of 1632' (David Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England: Tales of Discord and Dissension* [Oxford, 2000], 216).
- 92 William Prynne, *Histrion-Mastix: The Players Scourge, or Actors Tragædie* (London, 1633), 43.
- 93 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 94 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 95 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 96 Prynne's specific targeting of Heywood in *Histrion-Mastix* reinforces the probability of a counter-attack. He mentions the playwright several times for his public defence of the stage, though Heywood's and Thomas Lodge's 'ridiculous Player-like Pleas' were 'soledly refuted' (Prynne, *Histrion-Mastix*, 700; see also 179, 719, 722, 785). Arthur M. Clark identifies some of Prynne's references to Heywood as well as an allusion to Prynne's punishment in *The Late Lancashire Witches*, but he does not expatiate on the latter. On the other hand, he argues that the contemporary play *Love's Mistress* is 'Heywood's real revenge', with *Midas* standing as a satirical representation of Prynne. See Arthur M. Clark, *Thomas Heywood: Playwright and Miscellanist* (Oxford, 1931), 126, 138–42.
- 97 As Lucy Munro emphasizes in her introduction to Brome's *The Demoiselle*, *Richard Brome Online*, 17: '*Histrionmastix* criticises every aspect of female participation in

Caroline drama, including female playgoing, female playreading, and the representation of women on stage'. Prynne, *Histrion-Mastix*, 214–16, compares the effects of having women or boys play female roles — and concludes that both are ‘abominable’, the former encouraging prostitution and the latter, ‘sodomy’.

- 98 Prynne, *Histrion-Mastix*, ‘To the Christian Reader’ (pages are unnumbered). The rambling enumerations of wicked pastimes include most of the activities represented in *The Late Lancashire Witches*.
- 99 For a detailed analysis of Prynne’s 1634 trial and its hidden agendas, see Cynthia Clegg, *Press Censorship in Caroline England* (Cambridge, 2008), 164–78; and Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, 216–22.

