

Macbeth

Act 1



The North Berwick witches from *Newes from Scotland* (1592)

Primary Documents

(Witchcraft and Religion)

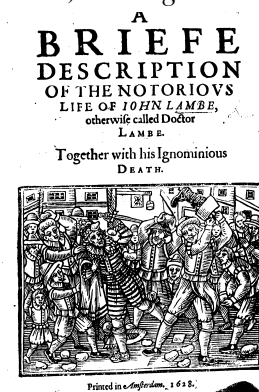
John Lambe (1545-1628) was an English astrologer who served George Villiers, 1st Duke of Buckingham. Accused of black magic and rape, he was stoned to death by an unruly mob in London.

An Indictment preferred against *John Lambe*, otherwise called *Doctor Lambe*, at Worcester.

Worcester ss. *The Iury for our Soueraigne Lord the King, doe vpon the holy Sacrament present that Iohn Lambe late of Henlipp, in the County of Worlcester aforesaid, Gentleman, not hauing the feare of God before his eyes, but by Diabolically instigation being moued and seduced, the thirteenth day of May, in the yeere of the Raigne of our Soueraigne Lord Iames, ... certaine euill and impious Spirits, did inuoke and entertaine with the intent that hee the said Iohn Lambe by the same impious and wicked spirits should follow the euill determinations by him the said Iohn Lambe, vnlawfully, maliciously, and diabolically then deterlined, or from thence to be determined, to the great Displeasure of the omnipotent God, and to the manifest perill of his soules health, and to the euill and pernicious example of all other the Subjects of our said Souelraigne Lord the King...*

Vpon this indictment, hee pleaded not guilty, but by the Iury he was found guiltie, but Iudgement was stayed.

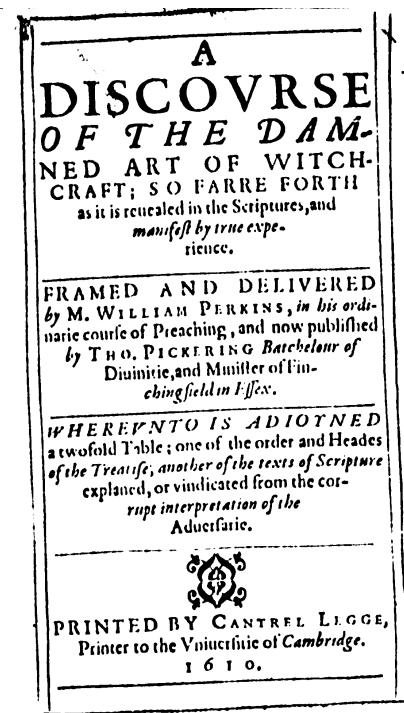
Here follow some exploits done by *Doctor Lambe* during his Im|prisonment in the Castle of *Worcester*.



Doctor *Lambe* beeing merry at the Castle with diuers of his acquaintance, espied a woman not farre from thence walking towards them, & told the Company hee would make that woman take up her coates aboute her middle. And immediatly, to the wonder of the company the woman began to take vp her cloathes, and by degrees lifted them vp aboute her middle. Some women that beheld her, called out aloud, and asked what she meant by so shameles a behaiour, she answered them that shee meant to wade through the water and saue her clothes, imaginging (it should seeme) that there had bin a poole, where it was dry land.

For before hee was brought thither, the people had had him downe, and with stones and cudgels, and other weapons had so beaten him, that his skull was broken, one of his eyes hung out of his head, and all partes of his body bruised and wounded so much, that no part was left to receiue a wound. Whereupon (although Surgeons in vaine were sent for) hee neuer spoke a word, but lay languishing vntill Eight a clocke the next morning, and then dyed. This lamentable end of life had Doctor *Iohn Lambe*, who before prophesied (although hee were confident hee should escape Hanging,) that at last he should die a violent death. On Sunday following, hee was buried in the new Church-yard neere Bishops-gate.

A briefe description of the notorious life of Iohn Lambe otherwise called Doctor Lambe. Together with his ignominious death. 1628. EEBO. STC (2nd ed.) 15177, copy from British Library.



**TO THE RIGHT HONOVABLE, SIR EDWARD
COOKE Knight, Lord chiefe Iustice of his
Maiesties Court of Common Pleas; Grace and
peace**

...Satan by obseruation perceiueth, that man vpon a weake and ignorant minde, is prone superstitiously to dote vpon the creatures, attributing some diuine operation or vertue to them, without any ground of Gods word, or common vnderstanding; and consequently disposed to worship God in some worke of man, or to ioyne to the same worship the inuentions of man, which he hath not commanded...


we conclude it a necessarie thing for the Church and people of God, to be acquainted with the dealing of Satan in this kinde, that knowing his subtill deuises, they may learne to auoyd them. For which purpose this Treatise was first framed, and now exhibited to your Lordship...

First, the Deuil is by nature a spirit, & therefore of great vnderstanding, knowledge, & capacitie in all naturall things, of what sort, qualitie, & condition soeuer, whether they be causes or effects, whether of a simple or mixt nature. By reason whereof he can search more deeply & narrowly into the grounds of things, then all corporall creatures that are clothed with flesh and blood.

Secondly, he is an auncient spirit, whose skill hath beene confirmed by experience of the course of nature, for the space almost of sixe thousand yeares... Hereupon it is, that whereas in nature there be some properties, causes, and effects, which man neuer imagined to be; others, that men did once know, but are now forgot; some, which men knewe not, but might know; and thousands which can hardly, or not at all be known: all these are most familiar vnto him, because in themselus they be no wonders, but only misteries and secrets, the vertue and effect whereof he hath sometime obserued since his creation.

Thirdly, he is a spirit of wonderfull power and might, able to shake the earth, and to confound the creatures inferiour to him in nature and condition, if he were not restrained by the omnipotent power of God. And this power, as it was great by his creation, so it is not impayred by his fall, but rather increased and made more forcible by his irreconcilable malice he beareth to mankind, specially the seede of the woman.

Perkins, William. A discourse of the damned art of witchcraft so farre forth as it is reuealed in the Scriptures, and manifest by true experience. 1610. *EEBO*, STC (2nd ed.) 19698, copy from Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 04 July 2016.


DAEMONOLOGIE, IN FORME
of a Dialogue,

Diuided into three Bookes.



EDINBURGH

Printed by Robert Walde-graue

Printer to the Kings Majestic. An. 1597.

Cum Privilegio Regio.

Daemonologie (1597), considered to be a philosophical dissertation on necromancy,¹ includes a study of demonology and the methods demons use to “trouble” man. It was both political and theological in that it was meant to inform the population about the reasons for persecuting witches. It was produced the same year as Gerard’s *Herball*, seven years before James VI of Scotland became James I of England, and ten years before Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth*.

DAEMONOLOGIE. FIRST BOOKE

Philomathes : **a skeptic on magic**
Epistemon: **teacher**

PHI. ...is there such a thing as Witchcraft or Witches?

EPI. ...Witches have bene, and are, the former part is clearely proved by the Scripture, and the last by dailie experience and confessions...

PHI. But I thinke it very strange, that God should permit anie man-kynde (since they beare his owne Image) to fall in so grosse and filthie a defection.

EPI. Although man in his Creation was made to the Image of the Creator, yet through his fall having once lost it, it is but restored againe in a part by grace onely to the elect: So all the rest falling away from God, are given over in the hands of the Devill that enemy, to beare his Image, and being once so given over, the greatest and the grossest impiety, is the pleasantest, and most delytefull vnto them...

PHI. I pray you tell me how manie, and what are they?

EPI. There are principallie two sortes...whereof the one is called *Magie* or *Necromancie*, the other *Sorcerie* or *Witch-craft*...

PHI. What difference is there betwixt this art [*Magie*] and *Witch-craft*?

EPI. ...Witches are servants onely, and slaves to the Devil; but the *Necromancers* are his maisters and commanders.

PHI. But, I pray you likewise forget not to tell me what are the *Devilles rudiments*.

¹ *Practice of magic through communication with the deceased*

EPI. His rudiments, I call first in general, all that which is called vulgarly the virtue of worde, herbe, & stone: which is vsed by vnlawful charmes, without natural causes...By curing of Worme, by stemming of blood, by healing of Horse-crookes, by turning of the riddle, or doing of such like innumerable things by words...

PHI. But me thinks these meanes which yee call the Schoole and rudimentes of the Devill, are thinges lawfull, and haue bene approoued for such in all times and ages...as in special, this science of *Astrologie*, which is one of the special members of the *Mathematicques*.

EPI. There are two things which the learned haue obserued from the beginning, in the science of the Heauenlie Creatures, the Planets, Starres, and such like: The one is their course and ordinary motions, which for that cause is called *Astronomia*...The other is called *Astrologia*...[or] preaching of the starres: which is diuided in two partes: The first by knowing...the course of the seasons and the weather...yet it is not vnlawful...the second part is to truste so much to their influences...of this roote last spoken of, springs innumerable brances...*Cheiromancie*...leaning to no ground of natural reason...

PHI. But I praye you or euer you goe further, discourse me some-what of their circkles and conjurations...

EPI. There are foure principall partes; the persons of the conjurers; the action of the conjuration; the words and rites vsed to that effect; and the Spirites that are conjured...these conjurations must haue few or mo[re] in number of the persones conjurers...according to the qualitie of the circle, and forme of apparition. Two principall things cannot...be wanted²: holie-water (whereby the Devill mockes the *Papistes*) and some present of a liuing thing vnto him....circles are made triangular, quadrangular, round, double or single, according to the forme of the apparition that they craue.

PHI. Surelie ye haue said much to me in this arte, if all that ye haue said be as true as wouderfull.

EPI. One word only I omitted: concerning the forme of making of this contract, which is either written with the *Magicians* owne bloud; or else being agreed vpon (in termes his schole-master) touches him in some parte, though...no marke remaine: as it doth with all Witches.

James I, King of England. *Daemonologie, in forme of a dialogue, divided into three bookes*.

Edinburgh, printed by Robert Walde graue printer to the kings majestie, 1597. EEBO. STC

(2nd ed.) 14364, Copy from Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

² lacking

1. 2. *Antirrhinum purpureum sine album.*
Purple or white flowered Snapdragon.3 *Antirrhinum luteum.*
Yellow Snapdragon.4 *Antirrhinum minus.*
Small Snapdragon.5 *Antirrhinum viviparum repens.*
Small creeping Snapdragon.

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*Calves Snout, or
SnapDragon* from John
Gerard's *Herball, or Generall historie
of plantes* (1597), amended by Thomas
Johnson (1633)

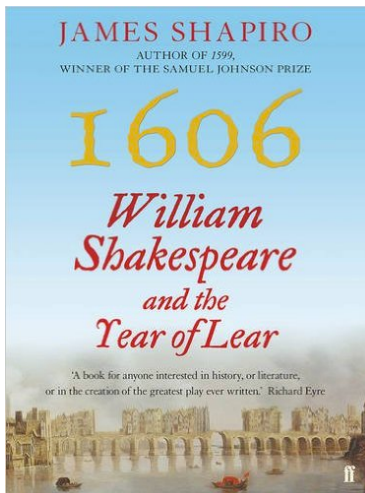
¶ *The Vertues.*

The seed of Snapdragon (as *Galen* saith) is good for nothing in the vse of physicke; and the herb it selfe is of like facultie with *Bubonium* or Star-wort, but not so effectuall.

They report (saith *Dioscorides*) that the herbe being hanged about one preferueth a man from being bewitched, and that it maketh a man gracious in the sight of people.

Apuleius writeth, that the distilled water, or the decoction of the herbe and root made in water, is a speedy remedy for the watering of eyes proceeding of a hot cause, if they be bathed therewith.

Gerard, John, *The Herball, or General historie of plantes*. 1597. Edited by Thomas Johnson. 1633.
Printed by Adam Islip Ioice Norton and Richard Whitakers, anno 1633. EEBO. STC (2nd ed.) 11751.
Copy from Cambridge University Library.



As was typical of reports of demonic possession at that time, neighbors gathered to see and validate the signs of the devil at work, visits encouraged by the family. A few weeks after first showing signs of possession,



James Shapiro

Anne Gunter identified three local women as her tormentors...The

evidence was overwhelming and the villagers of North Moreton were convinced that Anne was possessed; so too were the physicians and clerics who visited from Oxford and closely observed her fits. The women...were brought to trial in nearby Abingdon, to be judge under the recently enacted Witchcraft Act of 1604, harsher than the Elizabethan law that it had replaced. According to the new Act, anyone convicted of invoking or conjuring "any evil and wicked spirit" or practicing any "witchcraft, enchantment, charm, or sorcery; whereby any person shall be killed, destroyed, wasted, consumed, pinned, or lamed" shall "suffer pains of death as a felon."

The trial took place on March 1, 1605, and the jurors heard evidence for eight hours...

Two things would have confirmed in the minds of his English subjects King James' own unswerving belief in the danger of witchcraft. The first was accounts of his role in persecuting as many as a hundred Scottish witches in the North Berwick trials fifteen years earlier [those who had taken part in raising a storm to kill his wife Anne and himself on their voyage to Scotland]. The second was James' publication of *Daemonologie* (1597)...

King James belief that witches were the devil's agents is confirmed in a letter Sir John Harington wrote not long after a private audience with the King: "His majesty did much press for my opinion touching the power of Satan in matter of witchcraft, and asked me, with much gravity 'If I did truly understand why the devil did work more with ancient women than with others?'"...[James] told Harington that the death of his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, "was visible in Scotland before it really did happen, being, as he said 'spoken of in secret by those whose power of sight presented to them a bloody head dancing in the air'"...

Their exchange also suggests something Macbeth-like about James' pursuit of this knowledge, especially his powerful desire to know what the future holds. (69-71)

An Act against Conjuraton, Witchcraft, and Dealing with Evil and Wicked Spirits 1604

Be it enacted by the King our sovereign Lord, the Lords spiritual and temporal, and the Commons in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, That the Statute made in the fifth year of the reign of our late sovereign lady of most famous and happy memory Queen Elizabeth, entitled "An Act against Conjuratons, Enchantments and Witchcrafts"³...That if any person or persons...shall use, practice, or exercise any invocation or conjuration of any evil and wicked spirit, or shall consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit to or for any intent or purpose; or take up any dead man, woman, or child out of his, her, or their grave, or any other place where the dead body resteth, or the skin bone, or any other part of any dead person, to be employed or used in any manner of witchcraft, sorcery, charm, or enchantment...shall suffer pains of death as a felon...and shall lost the privilege and benefit of clergy and sanctuary...

*That if any person or persons shall, from and after the said Feast of St. Michael the Archangel next coming...tell or declare what place any treasure of gold or silver...or where goods or things lost or stolen should be found...to provoke any person to unlawful love...and being thereof lawfully convicted, shall for the said offence suffer imprisonment by the space of one whole year...and once in every quarter of the said year, shall in some market town, upon the market day...stand open upon the pillory⁴ by the space of six hours, and there shall openly confess his or her error...⁵ (Qtd. in *Texts and Contexts* 328-329).*

The Acts of Elizabeth and James changed the law of witchcraft by making it a felony, thus removing the accused from the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts to the courts of common law. This provided, at least, that the accused witches theoretically enjoyed the benefits of ordinary criminal procedure. Burning at the stake was eliminated except in cases of witchcraft that were also petty treason; most convicted were hanged instead. Any witch who had committed a minor witchcraft offence (punishable by one year in prison) and was accused and found guilty a second time was sentenced to death.⁶

³ Many documents were dated by reference to saint's days or other holidays.

⁴ Wooden framework on a post, with holes for head and hands

⁵ *I Jac. I, c.12* [in the first year in the reign of James I, chapter 12] (London, 1604)

⁶ Gibson, Marion (2006), "Witchcraft in the Courts," *Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550-1750*. Continuum International Publishing Group, pp. 1-9, ISBN 978-0-8300-3.

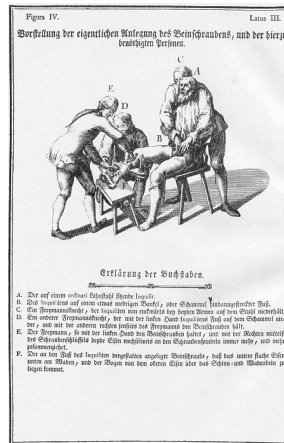
The North Berwick Witch Trials – 1590



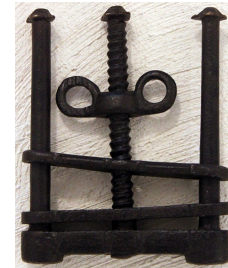
The North Berwick Witches meet the Devil in the local kirkyard, from a contemporary pamphlet, *News From Scotland*.

One of the first sensational cases of witchcraft was when King James I traveled to Copenhagen to marry Princess Ann of Denmark. On the return trip a storm placing them all in danger, was blamed on witchcraft. Five Danish women confessed to raising the storm; two were burned at the stake.

Newes from Scotland – declaring he damnable life and death of Dr. John Flan is a pamphlet “likely” written in 1591 by James Carmichael who advised King James I on his own treatise on witches: *Daemonologie*. Dr. Flan was tortured by the “boot,” by the “pilliwinks,” and by extracting his nails.



Torture by the boot where a vice is clamped to the boot and pressure is applied until the victim is unconscious.



Thumbscrews were called thumbkins or pillywinks.

Soon more than one hundred were convicted of witchcraft and confessed to meeting the devil in the local church and to attempting to do evil to the King. Dr. Flan and Agnes Sampson, both respectable citizens, at first refused to confess but later, after considerable torture, confessed to all allegations. After Sampson was fastened to the wall with a witch’s bridle, kept without sleep with a rope around her neck, she confessed to the 53 indictments against her. She was finally strangled and burned at the stake.



Dr. Flan involved in necromancy. *Newes from Scotland*.

Carmichael, James. *Newes from Scotland, declaring the damnable life and death of Dr. Flan*. 1592. EEBO. image 12. STC (2nd ed.) 10841a, copy from Bodleian Library.

Lady Macbeth: Demonic or Evil?

Ideas to consider:

The “weird sisters” never make direct contact with the devil, even though they do wear beards, conjure apparitions, and plan spells. What about Lady Macbeth? Consider her speech “Come you spirits...” (1.5.46-71).

The weird sisters do not fit the same mold as the North Berwick witches. Shakespeare did not create witches to be apprehended and punished. His “sisters” are uncontrollable.

*Shakespeare, a wide reader, would have read the King’s own works, such as *Daemonologie* (1597), as well as others’ works on witches. Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, one of the sources for *Macbeth*, refers to the weird sisters as “goddesses of destiny” (qtd. in Knight 19).*

The weird sisters are also called “wayward,” providing another perspective that is more wild than demonic. Remember, the source play was written 200 years before Shakespeare’s, so other authors have used different adjectives to describe these women: fairies, elves, goddesses, fates. By not specifically identifying these weird

sisters, “Shakespeare keeps his true feelings about the nature of witchcraft unknown and unknowable” (Saliba 77).

When Banquo and Macbeth meet the three weird sisters, Banquo does most of the talking, even though he seems to speak to them and for them at the same time. He sees that they have beards, yet he remarks, “You should be women” (1.3.47). According to Daniel Swift, proof does not work here. (179)

Neither Macbeth nor Banquo know if the women are a figment of their imagination and wonder if they have “eaten on the insane root, / That takes the reason prisoner”(1.5.87-88). Many stage and cinematic productions show witches vanish and appear suddenly; they seem to be “other worldly.” Lady Macbeth, however, is part of the earthly realm, confident and direct. She speaks plainly. Who is she, really?

Saliba, Dawn A. "King James and the Theatre of Witches: Subversion upon the Jacobean Stage." Order No. 3590899 State University of New York at Binghamton, 2013. Ann Arbor: ProQuest. Web. 4 July 2016.
Swift, Daniel. *Shakespeare’s Common Prayers: The Book of Common Prayer and the Elizabethan Age*. Oxford UP, 2013.

