

Satire, Fantasy and Writings on the Supernatural by Daniel Defoe

A System of Magick (1727)

Edited by
Peter Elmer



THE PICKERING MASTERS

THE WORKS OF DANIEL DEFOE

General Editors:

W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank

SATIRE, FANTASY AND WRITINGS ON THE SUPERNATURAL BY DANIEL DEFOE

- Volume 1: *The True-Born Englishman and other Poems*, ed. W. R. Owens
- Volume 2: *Jure Divino*, ed. P. N. Furbank
- Volume 3: *The Consolidator*, *Memoirs of Count Tariff*, and *The Quarrel of the School-Boys at Athens*, ed. Geoffrey Sill
- Volume 4: *Minutes of the Negotiations of Monsr. Mesnager*, *Secret Memoirs of a Treasonable Conference at S— House*, and *The Old Whig and Modern Whig Revived*, ed. P. N. Furbank
- Volume 5: *The Conduct of Christians made the Sport of Infidels* and *A Continuation of Letters written by a Turkish Spy at Paris*, ed. David Blewett
- Volume 6: *The Political History of the Devil*, ed. John Mullan
- Volume 7: *A System of Magick*, ed. Peter Elmer
- Volume 8: *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions*, ed. G. A. Starr

SATIRE, FANTASY AND WRITINGS ON THE
SUPERNATURAL BY DANIEL DEFOE

General Editors: W. R. Owens and P. N. Furbank

Volume 7:

A SYSTEM OF MAGICK (1727)

Edited by
Peter Elmer

First published 2005 by Pickering & Chatto (Publishers) Limited

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © Taylor & Francis 2005

All rights reserved, including those of translation into foreign languages.
No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or
by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter
invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage
or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and
are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

BRITISH LIBRARY CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Defoe, Daniel, 1661?–1731

Satire, fantasy and writings on the supernatural

Vols. 5–8. – (The works of Daniel Defoe) (The Pickering masters)

I. Title II. Owens, W. R. III. Furbank, Philip Nicholas IV. Blewett, David
828.5'09

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

A catalogue record for this title is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN-13: 978-1-85196-733-9 (set)

Typeset by P&C

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
<i>A System of Magick</i> (1727)	21
Explanatory notes	285
Textual notes	313



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

INTRODUCTION

Daniel Defoe's *A System of Magick* first appeared anonymously in London on 24 November 1726, not 1727 as indicated on its title page. It was published by John Roberts, one of Defoe's regular publishers, and was intended as a sequel to the popular *The Political History of the Devil*, which had appeared earlier the same year. A third volume of supernatural writings, *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions*, was to follow in 1727.¹

The subject matter of these books was a long-standing interest of the author. In 1705, writing in the first issue of the *Little Review*, he promised to 'make due Inquisition after the Improvement the Devil makes in the Manufacture of Vice, and to discover him as far as possible, in all his Agents, and their Meanders, Windings and Turnings in the Propagation of Crime'. In a later number of the same work, he specifically addressed the feasibility of magic when he granted that 'in Ancient Times, the Devil had frequent Communication with men, and as a Subtile Spirit, has Power of doing things invisibly, which therefore seems to Spectators to be done by the Man himself, with whom such Correspondence was held'.²

Defoe returned to the subject of the supernatural in 1711, when he used the pages of his pro-government journal, *The Review*, to state his

¹ For a summary of the basic facts surrounding the early publishing history, see the introduction by Richard Landon to the 1973 edition of Defoe's *A System of Magick* (East Ardsley, Wakefield, 1973). The title page of a so-called 'second edition', published in 1730, attributes the work to 'Andrew Moreton, Esq.', one of Defoe's favourite pen names, though it is not certain that this was with Defoe's approval. See P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens, *A Critical Bibliography of Daniel Defoe* (London, 1998), p. 226.

² Defoe, *Little Review* for 6 June and 20 July 1705, in *Defoe's Review*, ed. Arthur Wellesley Secord, 22 vols (New York, 1938; repr. 1965).

unequivocal support for the belief in witches and their ability to form pacts with the Devil:

It is most necessary to understand and explain the Term, before we can begin to Argue upon it – *What is understood by a Witch?*

All the commentators that I have read upon the Word, as used in Scripture, agree; That it is One in Covenant with the Devil, and uses his help to deceive or hurt others. *See Pool's Annot. On Levit. 18. v. 10.* I should think it were very absurd, to ask me if there were any such; after God, in his Original Institutes to the Children of Israel, by his Prophet Moses, had told them expressly in that Text, *v. 10. There shall not be found among you, &c. an Inchanter, or a Witch, or a Charmer, or a Consulter with Familiar Spirits, or a Wizard, or a Necromancer* – See what follows, *v. 12. For all that do these Things are an Abomination to the Lord, and because of these Abominations, the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee.* Again, *Levit. 19.31. Regard not them that have Familiar Spirits* –

Does this not undeniably prove, 1st. *That such are*; because, such that are so, *are an Abomination to the Lord*; Would God have express'd his Abhorrence and Detestation of such, if there were not, or could not be any such Thing in the World?³

The twin pillars of proof lay in the established laws of the land, which prescribed the death penalty for witches, and above all, the word of God, which left no room for the scoffing prevarications of sceptics. After a gap of nine years, during which time the latter had gained the upper hand in the ensuing debate over the reality of witchcraft and demonic magic, Defoe once more returned to the theme of the defence of the supernatural in his third volume in the Crusoe trilogy, where he again warned of the dangers posed to society by the views of freethinkers and deists who undermined belief in a providential God and the reality of demonic intervention in the world of men.⁴

A System of Magick, along with its companion volumes on the Devil and apparitions, thus represents the culmination of a lifelong interest in such issues on the part of Defoe. Not surprisingly, the reception of these works has proved highly problematic. Defoe scholars for long either ignored them entirely or sought to excuse, or explain away, the author's attachment to what now looked like antiquated superstitions. Interest in the

³ Review for 20 October 1711.

⁴ Defoe, *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe. With His Vision of the Angelick World* (London, 1720). In 'A Vision of the Angelick World', Defoe hinted at future plans to publish on this subject when he wrote that '[I]t would take up a long Tract by itself, to form a System of the Devil's Politicks, and to lay down a Body of his Philosophy' (p. 38).

supernatural writings was revived in the 1960s, when a new generation of Defoe scholars, in line with general historical trends, began to take witchcraft and demonology more seriously. Maximillian Novak, for example, argued in his *Defoe and the Nature of Man* that Defoe's 'remarks on the treatment of witches' were 'in the best spirit of rationalism', though Peter Earle was probably more typical in remaining puzzled by the attachment of 'the rational and modern' Defoe to a body of ideas that 'ran counter to the views of the educated men of his age who were becoming increasingly sceptical of the existence of witches'.⁵

The first serious attempt to analyse Defoe's supernatural writings, including his *A System of Magick*, was reserved to the American scholar Rodney Baine, who argued that Defoe's views on the occult, once deattributions had been taken into account, were both cogent and consistent. Baine traced Defoe's interest in the subject to the first decade of the eighteenth century. In so doing, he persuasively argued that a full and proper appreciation of Defoe's fiction rested on a better understanding of these views as promulgated by Defoe throughout his publications. For Baine, it was no longer feasible, as some had done, to disregard these writings as the output of a jobbing journalist who sought to titillate his readers' fancies with exotic stories of diabolism and magic. Instead, they represented the works of 'a serious Puritan concerned to demonstrate God's persisting care, through angelic ministry, to reclaim and guide lost man'. Gone was the paradoxical Defoe, the prophet of modernity in the thrall of superstition; in his place, Baine depicted a devout Christian and moralist whose fictional works, like his other writings, were a vehicle for the old-fashioned values of Christian fundamentalism.⁶

Subsequent evaluations of Defoe's demonological writings by Defoe scholars have tended to focus on them as potential sources for shedding light on the author's fictional works. Richard Titlebaum, for example, has endorsed Baine's view of Defoe as a 'backward-looking' Puritan whose demonologies were indebted to a literal reading of the Bible. Like Baine, Titlebaum readily acknowledges the influence of such concerns on Defoe's

⁵ Maximillian E. Novak, *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (Oxford, 1963), p. 13; Peter Earle, *The World of Defoe* (London, 1976), p. 42. Novak's comment is echoed in the recent work of the historian Owen Davies, who has argued that Defoe's *A System of Magick* is largely sceptical in tone and as such helped pave the way for the repeal of the Witchcraft Act in 1736; see O. Davies, *Cunning-Folk. Popular Magic in English History* (London and New York, 2003), pp. 40–1.

⁶ Rodney M. Baine, *Defoe and the Supernatural* (Athens, Georgia, 1968), p. 35.

fictional works. He dissents from Baine, however, by depicting Defoe as a biblical fundamentalist wrestling with a rationalist conscience:

Much of Defoe's irony, a considerable amount of his irresolution, and many of the ambiguities surrounding his comments on witches may be attributed to a conflict in his own mind between an inherited protestant theology and the influence of the rampant skepticism of the early eighteenth century.⁷

Attempts to reconcile and incorporate the many sides of Defoe's character and thought into a single analysis of his demonological works has, however, for the most part remained the prerogative of historians of witchcraft rather than literary commentators. In recent years, the study of the occult in early modern Europe has undergone radical revision. No longer treated as an obscure and exotic branch of Renaissance learning, demonology and related beliefs are now seen as integral to a wider understanding of early modern European thought and culture.⁸ As a result, new studies have illuminated various aspects of the early modern preoccupation with the supernatural, not least the uncertain circumstances in which demonology fell out of favour with the educated classes in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Foremost among these is the work of Ian Bostridge who, in a seminal work concerned with the decline of witchcraft in this period, has commented extensively upon Defoe's contribution to this process.⁹

Unlike Baine and others, Bostridge has found few problems in incorporating the various faces of Defoe – the meretricious alongside the serious – into his account of the writer's approach to the supernatural. The key for Bostridge lies in establishing the ideological purchase which supernatural beliefs held for educated Englishmen such as Defoe in an age of political and religious conflict and uncertainty. Put simply, Bostridge argues that witchcraft and related ideas acted as a powerful agent in defining the boundaries of the confessional state. To assert belief in diabolical witchcraft was, according to its proponents, akin to a statement of religious ortho-

⁷ Richard Titlebaum, 'Some Notes Towards a Definition of Defoe's Demonology', *Unisa English Studies*, 14 (1976), pp. 1–7; p. 6.

⁸ For a general overview, see especially Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997).

⁹ Ian Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations c.1650–c.1750* (Oxford, 1997), esp. pp. 111–38. For an earlier summary of his analysis of Defoe's contribution to this debate see Bostridge, 'Witchcraft Repealed' in J. Barry, M. Hester and G. Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 309–34; pp. 314–16.

doxy and political legitimacy. Witches and sorcerers, like Roman Catholics and radical Protestant sectaries, lay beyond the pale, their existence providing a useful counter-image, or inversion, of the godly commonwealth. Bostridge has traced the ideological dimension of belief in the supernatural in Britain from the Restoration to the middle decades of the eighteenth century, arguing along the way that the decline of such beliefs was intimately connected to the religious and political debates of the period. In particular, he has stressed the extent to which, 'if belief in witchcraft ... is ideologically conditioned, then as a subject for dispute it may go into hibernation from time to time'.¹⁰

According to Bostridge, Defoe's early interest in the supernatural, as manifest in his occasional literary forays on the subject, outlined above, provides exemplary evidence for this thesis. Defoe's first in-depth discussion of witchcraft in 1711 came at a time when the country was once again experiencing extreme religious and political conflict precipitated by the 'rage of party'. As a spokesman for the moderate Toryism of Robert Harley, chief minister to the Queen, Defoe was actively pursuing a middle way between the extremism of the high-flying Tories and Jacobite sympathisers on the one hand, and the deist and heterodox associations of the Whig junto on the other. Under such circumstances, the active advocacy of witchcraft acted as a rallying cry for those who wished to avoid these two extremes. In the process, Bostridge dismisses earlier images of Defoe as a Lockian progressive and proposes instead a far more nuanced picture in which Defoe's political pamphleteering and occult beliefs are reconciled. Defoe's supernaturalism was not then

some quirk or a cobwebby vestigial corner of his imagination, but part of a conservative and religious cast of mind, embedded as much as Harley's in visions of a polity free from party, and a Protestant nation at one.¹¹

The diminution of the 'rage of party', concomitant with the Hanoverian succession in 1715, thus marked an important turning point in the history of witchcraft in Britain. According to Bostridge, belief in witchcraft rapidly fell out of favour among the educated classes so that by the time Defoe

¹⁰ Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations*, p. 118. Following similar lines to Bostridge, I have tried to trace this political dimension to witchcraft in Britain throughout the early modern period; see especially Peter Elmer, 'Towards a Politics of Witchcraft in Early Modern England' in Stuart Clark (ed.), *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 101–18.

¹¹ Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations*, p. 122.

produced his supernatural trilogy in 1726–7 he was forced to pursue ‘a far more ambiguous line’ with respect to witches, apparitions, magic and the Devil. By the middle years of the 1720s

his Harleian vision of non-party Christian government evaporated. Party rule triumphed in Defoe’s eyes. Witchcraft thus lost much of its use in Defoe’s scheme of things. It reemerged, parodically inverted, as a metaphor for party conflict and party rule themselves. In Defoe’s history of the devil, witches properly speaking were no longer needed because diabolism (factional rule incarnate) reigned at the very seat of power.¹²

* * * * *

What kind of a work, then, was *A System of Magick*, and how did it relate to earlier treatments of the subject? Despite its title, *A System of Magick* demonstrates little concern with theoretical debates surrounding the nature of magic and its relation to other forms of human knowledge. In this work, as elsewhere in his supernatural writings, Defoe declines to engage with the arguments of theologians and natural philosophers that had characterised so much of the earlier debate surrounding the reality of magic and witchcraft. Their absence suggests that Defoe had no intention of generating a scholarly controversy in print – an aversion which owed much, no doubt, to Defoe’s professed ignorance of the formal methods employed in such forms of discourse.¹³ This is not to say that Defoe was uninfluenced by earlier academic debates on the subject of magic and witchcraft. However, these have left little ostensible trace on *A System of Magic* and related writings. Rodney Baine has suggested a number of potential sources for Defoe’s supernatural trilogy, including *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (1677) by the Yorkshire physician and sceptic, John

¹² Bostridge, ‘Witchcraft Repealed’, p. 315. The eminent medical historian, Roy Porter, has taken a similar line with regard to Defoe’s later supernatural writings. Alluding to the more ‘sceptical’ approach taken by Defoe to the Devil, he suggests, in line with Bostridge, that in these works ‘Defoe turned from the power of the Devil to the diabolism of power’; Roy Porter, ‘Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment, Romantic and Liberal Thought’ in B. Ankarloo and S. Clark (eds), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Vol. 5, *The Athlone History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*; London, 1999), p. 208.

¹³ In his article on witchcraft in the *Review* in 1711 (see note 3 above), Defoe had stated that it was not his intention to become engaged in a sophisticated debate, ‘Reasoning against Foundations and Principles, confuting Demonstrations, and the like, which is a part of Logick I never was taught’; cited in Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations*, p. 127.

Webster.¹⁴ Like Webster, Defoe was keen to minimise the role played by the Devil in human affairs, stressing instead human free will and the disposition of humankind to perpetrate acts of evil without the formal assistance of the great seducer, Satan. For Webster, as for Defoe, the Devil was then largely confined to the role of mischievous instigator of evil thoughts. All notions of a formal contract between magician and Devil were rejected on the basis of the latter's spiritual being, which made it impossible in Webster's eyes for him to enter into a direct compact with men and women. Though Defoe did not go as far as rejecting the possibility of such pacts, the whole tenor of his approach in *A System of Magick* and *The Political History of the Devil* is aimed at undermining the popular image of the Devil as a real and ever-present threat to humankind. In typical fashion, Defoe's preferred weapon of choice in cutting the Devil down to size was that which had served him so well as a popular journalist and writer for over two decades, namely parody. Throughout his supernatural writings, Defoe depicts the Devil as 'the old gentleman' or 'a poor shabby out at heels devil' forced to perform menial tasks for conjurors and evil magicians. Such images owe little to those characterisations of the Devil favoured by learned men such as Webster, Joseph Glanvill and Henry More. On the contrary, they reflect the descriptions typically to be found in the pamphlet literature of the period, aimed at the popular market, which in turn were imitated by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century playwrights who sought to dramatise diabolical encounters on the stage. Just how much Defoe was influenced by such popular imagery, as opposed to the extensive learned literature on witchcraft and magic, is open to question. But it seems reasonable to point out that Defoe, in his preface to *A System of Magick*, applauds recent impersonations of conjurors and the Devil on the London stage, whereby the magician is 'made a Fool, the Fool tickl'd into more Wit, and the *Devil* himself laugh'd out of Countenance'.¹⁵

If Defoe's view of the Devil owed little to the sceptical arguments of men like John Webster, or to the substantial literature for and against the reality of witchcraft and magic, *A System of Magick* did in a more general sense owe a debt to earlier writings on the subject. This is particularly

¹⁴ Baine, *Defoe and the Supernatural*, p. 64. In addition to Webster, Baine also notes the possible influence of Richard Bover's *Pandaemonium* (London, 1684) on Defoe, in particular Part 1 of that work which, like Defoe's supernatural writings, 'followed an approximately Miltonic pattern'; Baine, *Defoe and the Supernatural*, pp. 53, 64.

¹⁵ *A System of Magick*, below, p. 24. Future quotations are from this edition, and are given in parentheses in the text.

apparent in Defoe's use of an historical framework in which to depict the origins, progress and subsequent corruption of magic. Divided into two parts, *A System of Magick* is essentially a 'history' of the black arts that discusses the development of magic in the ancient world (Part I) and the modern (Part II). This format, which owes much to the traditional practice observed by early modern historians of dividing history into sacred and profane eras, may also have been suggested to Defoe by the historical approach to magic and witchcraft that was characteristic of much later writing on the subject in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This approach was adopted both by the 'credulous' and the 'sceptical', and is evident in the title of many of their works, including William Turner's *A Compleat History of the Most Remarkable Providences* (London, 1697), which included a passage from Defoe's *Essay upon Projects*. The word 'history' here embraces two distinct meanings: writing about the past, and taxonomy or 'natural history'. Turner's work, and others like it, such as Richard Baxter's *Certainty of the World of Spirits* (1691), consciously sought to put into practice Francis Bacon's plan to create a methodical and authoritative natural history of witchcraft and related phenomena.¹⁶ Similar motives lay behind the work of Joseph Glanvill, a leading figure in the Royal Society who, in his *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1681), insisted on the importance of belief in the Devil and witchcraft, as providing the clearest evidence of the supernatural in an increasingly sceptical age. He was supported by such stalwarts of the newly founded Royal Society as Robert Boyle. Sceptics, too, adopted a similar approach for opposite ends. Francis Hutchinson's *An Historical Essay Concerning Witchcraft* (1720), which provided a chronology of supposed magic as well as witchcraft, was itself a response to Richard Boulton's *A Compleat History of Magick, Sorcery and Witchcraft* (1715), one of the last texts in the witchcraft debate to restate the standard position of orthodox demonology. History, clearly, was widely conceived as a potent weapon by men on both sides of the witchcraft debate, and it undoubtedly shaped Defoe's approach to the subject, providing the key to his otherwise elusive 'system' of magic.

A second feature of Defoe's approach to magic and witchcraft in common with earlier writers on the subject is his profound biblicism. At the heart of his defence of the being of witches and sorcerers and the existence

¹⁶ The various 'illustrious providences' collected and published by Baxter's New England Puritan colleagues, Cotton and Increase Mather, were similarly indebted to Bacon's scheme for a comprehensive and systematic natural history of all such phenomena. The original inspiration for both was the nonconformist clergyman, Matthew Poole, who first suggested such a collection in the 1650s.

of diabolic magic is the evidence of the scriptures, or the literal word of God, which for Defoe remained the ultimate source of authority. The Bible makes it clear that diabolical magic is real and has a long pedigree. It also contains vital clues as to when man first established contact with the Devil, whereby he was led into the pursuit of illicit magic, and how that contact took place. The scriptures also provided evidence for the moral decline of mankind after the events of the Great Flood – an epochal moment for Defoe, which he alludes to elsewhere in his supernatural and other writings – which in turn paves the way for the descent of man into demonic magic. Defoe's framework, then, for the discussion of magic is essentially biblical and historical. The reader is offered a chronological account of man's gradual seduction by the Devil, including the diabolical gift of magic.

The early chapters chronicle this process in some detail, which Defoe depicts as a three-pronged affair. In the first age of man, from the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Eden to the period of the Flood, magic is depicted as purely benign and wholly without diabolical connotations. The first magi or leaders of mankind – the ancient prophets, seers and magicians of the Bible and classical fable – were in fact scholars or men of learning on a par with the great experimental scientists of Defoe's own age, though lacking their more complete knowledge and understanding of the natural world.¹⁷ The second, or 'middle' age of man was ushered in by the Flood, after which the sons of Noah were cursed to live sinfully and idolatrously. For a brief period, the 'magicians' of the first age (e.g. the Babylonian priests and astrologers) continued to pursue legitimate 'magical' studies (e.g. mathematics, astronomy, medicine, etc.). Many also became admired for their learning and took on the role of rulers or 'petty Royalty'. However, under pressure of competition and the need to continually amaze their subjects with more and more wondrous secrets and discoveries, a few were tempted to mix magic with religion and to use cheats and delusions in order to maintain their popularity and reputation. It was at this point that these proud and deluded magicians turned to the

¹⁷ In line with a number of contemporary apologists for belief in witchcraft and the supernatural, including Richard Boulton, Defoe was decidedly on the side of the 'moderns' in the debate over the merits of the new science; see esp. Ilse Vickers, *Defoe and the New Sciences* (Cambridge, 1996). Vickers, like Bostridge, makes much play of Defoe's debt to Charles Morton, his Baconian instructor at the dissenting academy which he attended as a young man some time between 1674 and 1679; see Vickers, *Defoe and the New Sciences*, pp. 32–51; Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations*, pp. 112, 113, 115.

Devil and implored his help in maintaining their credit through the use of diabolical magic. Significantly, the diabolical union was sealed by some form of covenant or pact, which for Defoe, like generations of demonologists before him, represented the defining characteristic of the sorcerer or witch.

On one issue alone does Defoe diverge from the popular consensus, namely with regard to his attempt to exonerate the earliest generations of priests and rulers from the charge of using diabolical magic. In this respect, as elsewhere in the early chapters concerned with charting the chronology of the ancient world, Defoe owed much to Sir Walter Raleigh's *The History of the World*, which provided him with the basic framework for his discussion of early magic. It was Raleigh, for example, writing under the influence of the Neoplatonist and hermetic revival, who provided Defoe with the idea that the earliest magicians were in fact philosophers and scientists, whose knowledge of the natural world elevated them above their contemporaries.¹⁸ It was Raleigh's influence, again, which led him to argue, against tradition, that the origin of diabolical magic lay in ancient Egypt rather than Mesopotamia. In *A System of Magick*, Egypt is repeatedly invoked as the 'Nursery of human *Devils* for all the World' (p. 64; cf. pp. 69–70, 72), where magic and witchcraft flourished and from whence it was exported to the rest of the ancient world. Here, the priests sought to spread the pagan religion of the Pharaohs by 'wonders and miracles', most of which were either fraudulent or diabolical in origin, a point which Defoe illustrates with a long digression on the biblical story of Moses's confrontation with Pharaoh's magicians (pp. 74–7). The association of paganism with magic and witchcraft is largely conventional, though there are hints of 'unorthodoxy' in Defoe's claim that the slide into demonic magic was essentially an aspect of ancient 'priestcraft', and in his intimation that it was man, and not the Devil, who instigated the first contact between the two.

'[T]he Clergy of those times seem to me to be the first Conjurers, and Dealers with the *Devil*; and so in all the subsequent Times', writes Defoe (p. 148). Thus he discusses at length the association between magic and priestcraft in the ancient and modern world, citing numerous examples of the way in which the clergy have used, or rather abused, magical practices

¹⁸ Another possible source for Defoe was the French *libertin*, Gabriel Naudé, who likewise suggested that those falsely accused in the past as sorcerers and witches were in fact, more often than not, scholars and natural philosophers; see Gabriel Naudé, *The History of Magic by Way of Apology*, trans. John Davies (London, 1657).

in order to sustain their own authority.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, Defoe's chief target in the modern world was the Catholic Church which, in Protestant eyes, was widely seen as the natural heir to the corrupt and magical dealings of the pagan religions. However, the ironic nature of many of his other comments, allied to his well known anti-clerical sentiments, might perhaps give the impression that he had imbibed some of the radicalism of the deistic opponents of all organised religion, Protestantism included. This may also be inferred elsewhere in *A System of Magick*, as, for example, where Defoe seeks to justify the moral probity of specific ancient thinkers, whose paganism otherwise excluded them from the canon of Christian apologists. His citation of the moral rectitude of men such as Numa Pompilius (widely credited as the founder of the ancient Roman religion), Lycurgus, Solon and Confucius is particularly suggestive (p. 152). All were widely applauded by the radical thinkers of Defoe's age as men who admired morality and virtue for their own sake and thus represented, in deist circles, an exemplary alternative to the fake piety of organised Christianity or 'priestcraft'.²⁰

Nevertheless, any suggestion that Defoe was using *A System of Magick* as a platform to undermine established religion and to promote deism is firmly scotched by the contents of Part II of the work, in which he sketches the progress of magic since biblical times. He begins with a very full exposition of the various forms of magic that make up the dark arts

¹⁹ For an example of Defoe's anti-clerical spirit witness his pretence to exculpate the clergy of his own day from the imputation of magic in his comment that they have 'plenty of Grace, and paucity of Brains', a combination which he sarcastically alleges ought to be sufficient to guarantee protection from the magical wiles of the Devil; *A System of Magick*, p. 148; cf. p. 151. Defoe's association of early priestcraft with magic, and allusion to the subjection of ancient oracles to political ends, has many potential sources, including Thomas Hobbes, Antonius van Dale and Balthasar Bekker. It can also be found in the work of the English witchcraft sceptic, John Wagstaffe; see his *Question of Witchcraft Debated* (London, 1669), pp. 68–77 (chapter 6: 'How the Opinion of Witches came at first into the World').

²⁰ For a good overview of the deist assault on the priestcraft of the Anglican Church, see Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and Its Enemies 1660–1730* (Cambridge, 1992). It is possible that Defoe's allusion in *A System of Magick* (p. 152) to Numa Pompilius, Lycurgus, Confucius and Solon is derived from the frontispiece to John Toland's edition of the *Works of James Harrington* (London, 1700), where these exemplary ancient rulers appear alongside the biblical patriarch Moses and modern-day rulers such as William III.

(ignoring for the moment the distinction between genuine and pretended practitioners). The eight branches, as he lists them, are:

Divining ...

Observing of Times.

Using Incantment.

Witchcraft.

Charming, or setting of Spells.

Dealing with *Familiar Spirits*.

Wizardizing, or *Sorcery*, thought to be the same as Witchcraft, but mistaken.

Necromancing. (p. 168)

A few phenomena are noted (e.g. second-sight men in Scotland and Lapland witches who sell winds to sailors). Defoe's main drift here, however, is the ironic one that the patron of magic, the Devil, has been outstripped by humankind. It is man, not the Devil, who has instigated a new generation of human depravity and corruption. The Devil is characteristically depicted as a helpless onlooker or drudge, his disciples having taken 'the very Trade out of his Hand' (p. 174). As people have grown wiser so they have become more corrupt in their ways. It is not magic in its conventional sense that now concerns Defoe so much as the new brands of evil, in their various guises, which he lumps together under the umbrella term of magic. Among the worst are atheism and irreligion, 'a new invention', which, Defoe argues, 'has gain'd upon Mankind by a general Infatuation', and is therefore deserving of the name of magic which it 'may well be call'd ... in its very Abstract' (p. 179). But included in this mix is a range of other related ideas and unorthodox opinions which all fall under the label of magic. Sceptics, Arians, freethinkers and masons are thus joined by a variety of radical sectaries who make false claims to a new religious dispensation on the grounds of a mystical communion with God (pp. 179–86).

Defoe's attempt to redefine magic in this way constitutes the most obvious break with earlier demonologies and histories of magic. The role of the Devil is clearly delimited and prescribed. Under the new dispensation of the present age, man performs the role of master, the Devil that of servant. Where once the Devil used craft and guile to trick mankind and gain his confidence, demanding worship and a covenant, now he is reduced to the role of a menial servant, one who 'comes ... at every old Woman's Call, and upon the most trifling Occasion' (p. 187). Witchcraft, like other forms of original magic, is thus relegated to a minor role in Defoe's 'system' of magic. The Devil himself has been reduced, like the deist's God, to the role of passive observer, 'an Engineer who has with infi-

nite Art and great Fatigue form'd a new Machine, then sets it at Work, and seeing it perform according to Expectation, sits down with Satisfaction, and lets it go round of it self' (p. 186). The Devil has become obsolete, his place firmly usurped by man.

In order to underline this radical realignment of evil and man's role in the spread of diabolism, Defoe presents numerous examples of the Devil's subservience in running errands for stargazers, fortune tellers and 'white witches'. The latter, of course, defend their actions by claiming to invoke good spirits – a claim which Defoe opposes on the wholly orthodox grounds that such communication is impossible since it flies in the face of divine providence (good spirits may operate in the world, but never at the beck and call of man). There then follows a substantial section (pp. 210–32) devoted to the paradigm case of Dr Boreman, a reputed 'sorcerer' whose practice, as relayed to Defoe by a mutual acquaintance of both men, provided Defoe with considerable material to support his belief in the illusory nature of diabolical magic. Defoe's lengthy retelling of his associate's encounter with the good doctor, which can be dated to some time in the first half of the 1690s, thus merits closer inspection.²¹

Boreman was the only contemporary magician named in person by Defoe, and he had clearly spent much time investigating his practice and the whereabouts of his writings after his death. The Dr Boreman of Defoe's story was in fact Dr William Boreman or Burman (not Thomas *pace* Rodney Baine), a celebrated medical practitioner who was widely known in Dissenter circles in London and Kent in the 1680s and 1690s. The nonconformist physician, Henry Sampson, refers to his reputation as a conjuror, many of whose cures were ascribed to a form of white witchcraft. Sampson claimed that he was a frequent visitor to London from his native Kent, had a chamber in Walbrooke in the City and grew rich from his London practice.²² His reputation as an exorcist and witchfinder in Kent, well attested by Defoe, is further substantiated by his involvement in a number of contemporary witchcraft trials. In 1679, he attempted to exorcise a young maid at Orpington in Kent, while in 1681 and 1690 he provided expert testimony in two cases of suspected witchcraft at the Kent assizes.²³ Boreman's involvement in one of these cases, that of the trial of

²¹ The incident can be roughly dated from the landlord's reference to the time and setting of these events as during wartime, when 'the King is like to want Soldiers'; i.e. before 1697 and the Treaty of Ryswick. Dr William Boreman, who was a real person (see note 25 below), was certainly active at this time.

²² British Library, Additional MS 4460, ff. 47v–48r. For Baine's discussion of Boreman, see his *Daniel Defoe and the Supernatural*, pp. 71–2.

Thomas Whiteing of How in 1681, is particularly intriguing as one of his fellow witnesses was a physician, Dr Edward Hooker, who would appear to have shared Boreman's enthusiasm for the Silesian mystic Jacob Boehme (1575–1674) and the promotion of the recently founded mystical sect, the Philadelphian Society. In 1683, Hooker published the posthumous works of the foremost Behmenist scholar in England, Dr John Pordage.²⁴ The work was financed by Boreman, and provided the first platform for the expression of the views of the female prophet, Jane Lead, whose special oracular powers underpinned her position as the spiritual head of the Philadelphian Society.²⁵

Boreman is clearly no ordinary, rustic wise man with only a rudimentary understanding of his subject. On the contrary, Defoe goes out of his way to stress his outward respectability and learning. On encountering Boreman at his house in Kent, Defoe's friend is soon led into a fascinating dialogue on the nature of true magic, in which he plays the role of inquisitive sceptic and treats the learned doctor with much respect. It is clear from the outset that Defoe's friend is partially seduced by what the doctor has to say and the tone of the piece is generally sympathetic. This is evident throughout the dialogue between Defoe's associate and the young man who comes with him to seek the counsel of Dr Boreman, where the former

²³ Anon., *Strange News from Arpington near Bexly in Kent* (London, 1679); C. L'Estrange Ewen, *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials: The Indictments for Witchcraft from the Records of 1373 Assizes Held for the Home Circuit A.D. 1559–1736* (London, 1929), pp. 261, 263.

²⁴ For Hooker, see the introduction and notes, interspersed throughout, to J[ohn] P[ordage], *Theologia Mystica: or, the Mystic Divinitie of the Æternal Invisibles* (London, 1683). For the Behmenist and radical clergyman, Pordage, who also had the reputation of a conjuror, see esp. Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London, 1984), pp. 220–2; Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640–1660* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 205–10. Like Defoe, the nonconformist Richard Baxter allocated a special place in his demonology for the (in his view) misguided activities of enthusiasts such as Jacob Boehme and John Pordage; see Richard Baxter, *The Certainty of the World of Spirits* (London, 1691), pp. 176–7.

²⁵ Boreman's role in financing the publication of Pordage's *Theologia Mystica* (London, 1683) is alluded to in the text itself, where he is referred to as W. B. of Wilmington in Kent, 'that famous Anti-Satanic *Athleta*, Anti-Demoniac *Palestrita*, and Hell's black Regiment's *Antagonist*'; Pordage, *Theologia Mystica*, p. 61; see also pp. 7–8 ('To the Reader' by J[ane] L[ead]). It is just possible that Defoe's source for the story of Dr Boreman was Lead's devoted son-in-law, Francis Lee, who was said, like Defoe, to be intimate with Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford; see C. E. Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660–1688* (London and New York, 1931), p. 303.

does everything in his power to allay his protégé's fears. Indeed, the story of the young man's longing to discover the likely outcome of his quest for true love is largely incidental to the larger questions raised by the doctor in his conversation with Defoe's friend.

The point of this long story of Defoe's is expressive of the teasing, elusive and undogmatic approach of his *A System of Magick*, with its rich assemblage of conflicting traditions, observations, orthodoxies and sceptical reflections. It is that Dr Boreman is essentially a philanthropist, a man of goodwill, who finds it convenient to be widely regarded as a white witch, but whose real purpose in life is to do good to his neighbours. He knows how superstitious country people can be, and he finds ways to exploit their superstition both for their personal benefit, as well as that of society as a whole (e.g. by preventing them from begetting bastards). He is shrewd enough to guess how they are likely to act in certain circumstances, and if they choose to regard this as supernatural foresight, he will not object. He insists that he is not in contact with the Devil and is only in communication with beneficent spirits; and Defoe even hints that the good doctor may in fact be an out-and-out sceptic. Whatever the truth of this, his work is aimed at the general good, and for that alone Defoe would appear to have fallen, metaphorically at least, under his spell.

In all probability, Defoe's depiction of Dr Boreman as a well-intentioned conman presents a distorted image of the true motives that underlay his magical practice and beliefs. Elsewhere, in fact, Defoe hints heavily at the strong intellectual foundation of Dr Boreman's magic, when he describes how the latter defends his converse with good spirits as the product of 'the Operation of a higher and exalted Mind, the Eyes of the Soul, which is a Spirit' and which can 'operate upon immaterial Objects, and see what to common Sight is call'd invisible' (p. 216). The language is unmistakably that of one of the many radical sects of the period, whose adherents claimed the gift of divine illumination, and this is further suggested by similar utterances relating to the nature of man before the Flood, when 'divine spirits daily illuminated the Minds of Mankind ... by which all the most exalted Parts of both natural and supernatural Knowledge were convey'd into their Understandings' (p. 217). Defoe later identified the likely source of Boreman's enlightened magic as being the works of Jacob Boehme. Boehme and his English followers argued that true knowledge, both of God and nature, came from within and was communicated to man in trances, visions and revelations. In this sense, all knowledge was thus a form of magic, which before the Fall was intuitive and innate to Adam, but was now only accessible to those who were pure

in mind and heart. It is worth noting that Defoe himself had depicted the antediluvian age in similarly glowing terms, and that he blamed the descent of man into 'bad' magic and immorality on the tragic consequences of the Flood. It is just possible, therefore, that Defoe was sympathetic towards the illuminist claims of the seductive Dr Boreman, as reported by his friend. For Defoe, Boreman represented something of an earlier age, when 'pure magic' represented true wisdom and knowledge.²⁶ In the last resort, however, he rejected the oracular claims of men like Boreman as unintelligible, and condemned his religious enthusiasm as yet another species of illicit or demonic magic that ultimately subverted the basic tenets of the Christian faith. True magicians, in Defoe's eyes, were a dying species. No one required their help any more because everyone was essentially their own magician: 'we seem to carry on our Correspondence with Hell single handed' (p. 269).

Defoe's proposition that humankind had outstripped the Devil in iniquity is illustrated by his reaction to the *masquerade*. Tales of the supposed witchcraft of old women paled into insignificance, in Defoe's thinking, when compared to the actions of others who went so far as to deny the existence of God and the Devil or flouted social and sexual conventions by attending masquerades. Like other social commentators and moralists of his age he clearly saw a link between the general spread of atheism and a climate of religious indifference on the one hand, and the emergence of new forms of social entertainment such as the masquerade on the other. Defoe was well known as a critic of the stage in general, particularly for its promotion of moral laxity. His severest barbs, however, were reserved for the masquerade, a new form of entertainment, highly popular among the social and cultural elite of early eighteenth-century England. Here, men and women might mingle freely in disguise, engage in loose talk, and commit all manner of sexual misdemeanours. For Defoe, and others, the masquerade thus represented a real threat to social stability and moral probity. But it also acted as a powerful metaphor for the new challenge posed to society by the diabolical ingenuity of mankind. This was evident for moralists like Defoe in the fact that two of the most popular costumes worn by masqueraders were those representing the figures of the witch

²⁶ Defoe's ambivalent response to, and fascination for, Boreman is suggested by his comment that he has searched extensively for the extant papers of the dead doctor (below, p. 230), and that since his death '[t]here have been some Pretenders to the Art who have succeeded the Doctor, but we see nothing of their Performance, *at least not equal to his*' (below, p. 232; my emphasis).

and the Devil. If men and women now freely chose to identify themselves as the Devil incarnate, what use was there for a real Devil?²⁷

What importance should one attach to this aspect of Defoe's supernatural writings? His point is that, in this current age of the world, the old tricks of the Devil, including pacts with magicians, are no longer effective or practical. Instead, he is now 'oblig'd to play quite out of sight and act in Disguise'. As an example he cites the Devil's role in sowing the seeds of confusion prior to the outbreak of the English Civil Wars in the 1640s:

Had it been possible for him to have raised the Flames of Rebellion and War so often in this Nation, as he certainly has done? Could he have agitated the Parties on both Sides, and inflam'd the Spirits of three Nations, if he had appear'd in his own Dress, a meer naked DEVIL? It is not the Devil as a *Devil*, that does the Mischief, but the *Devil* in Masquerade, *Satan* in full Disguise, and acting at the Head of civil Confusion and Distraction.²⁸

Defoe was by no means the only moralist to hold that masquerading and the stage were inherently diabolical. Particularly interesting in this respect is the career and writings of the Anglican clergyman, Arthur Bedford, whose *The Evil and Danger of Stage Plays* (London, 1706) was sent to Defoe by the lawyer William Melmoth in 1706.²⁹ Bedford, a loyal Whig with Low Church sympathies and a nonconformist background, had much in common with Defoe. Like Defoe, he was active in the contemporary campaign for the reformation of manners and morals and was a firm believer in a providential and active God who supervised personally every aspect of his creation. In 1706, Bedford argued that '[t]he Church and playhouse are as contrary to each other as Christ and Belial, light and darkness, heaven and

²⁷ For contemporary discussion of the masquerade as a form of diabolism, one step removed from actual devil worship, see Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations*, pp. 170–8. Among many fascinating points raised by Bostridge is his suggestion that the early eighteenth-century masquerade was the occasion when 'the image of the witch was first really fixed' (p. 170). The image of the Devil in masquerade is further underlined by the illustration accompanying the frontispiece to *A System of Magick* in which the Devil can clearly be seen over the shoulder of the magician in the guise of harlequin, a popular figure in masked balls of the period.

²⁸ Defoe, *A Political History of the Devil* (1726) in *Satire, Fantasy and Writings on the Supernatural*, Vol. 6, ed. John Mullan, pp. 163, 174–5; cf. the view of Henry Hallywell, the author of a demonology published in 1681, that in order to lead man into heresy and religious division 'the great prince of Darkness [now] walks in Masquerade'; H. Hallywell, *Melampronea: or, A Discourse of the Polity and Kingdom of Darkness* (London, 1681), p. 41.

²⁹ See *Letters of Daniel Defoe*, ed. George Harris Healey (Oxford, 1955), p. 139.

hell', and in later works he went on to suggest, in the words of his most recent biographer, that the stage represented nothing less than 'an anti-Christian conspiracy, which all Christians must surely recognize as their most deadly enemy'.³⁰ By 1719, Bedford was convinced that the stage, with its representations of devils and magic, posed a real threat to the stability of the nation and promised to bring about real demonic effects, for it was:

apt to fill the heads of raw and ignorant persons with false and dangerous notions as if the Devil's power and knowledge were much greater than it is, insomuch that they may come in time to think it in their interest to be upon good terms with him, as we hear of many in our own country who hath been so wicked as to make compacts with him.³¹

There can be little doubt that Defoe shared some of the concerns expressed by fellow Christian moralists such as Bedford, and that he incorporated these into his schema for a history of magic and diabolism in works such as *A System of Magick*. In the process, he sought to redefine the threat posed to society by the Devil in his own age by lumping together all those men and women, with their pernicious ideas and practices, who threatened to undermine the sanctity of the godly commonwealth. These included the usual list of suspects – Roman Catholics and Jesuit priests, freethinkers, atheists and deists – as well as a host of new subversives – stock-jobbers, religious enthusiasts and party politicians. In *A System of Magick*, and elsewhere, Defoe could not resist the temptation to pour scorn on, or satirise, what he regarded as the evils of his age. However, as Ian Bostridge has pointed out, both the tone and substance of the later supernatural writings are different from the more earnest views that Defoe expressed on the subject in 1711. In that year, '[t]he content of witchcraft belief, with its emphasis upon real spiritual action in the world, and its role in the combating of atheism, was important'. It retained its appeal 'to both dissenters and churchmen, with their rejection of Whiggish irreligion' and acted as a rallying point for 'all decent, pious men ... to draw together against the sceptics and against witches'. Witchcraft thus acted as 'a marker for the boundaries of a unified Christian society', a goal which Defoe shared with

³⁰ Jonathan Barry, 'Hell upon Earth or the Language of the Playhouse' in Stuart Clark (ed.), *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 139–58; p. 151. Chapter 3 of Arthur Bedford's *A Serious Remonstrance in Behalf of the Christian Religion, Against the Horrid Blasphemies and Impieties which are still used in English Play-Houses* (London, 1719) is entitled 'Witchcraft and Magick encouraged by the stage'.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 152–3.

many others in the period of the 'rage of party'. By the mid-1720s, however, when Defoe began to draft his supernatural trilogy, belief in witchcraft and magic had lost its ideological potency and was no longer considered a potential agent of political and religious unity. According to Bostridge, the triumph of party, reluctantly conceded by Defoe, left its mark on these later writings in their changed tone and more humorous content.³² Serious discussion of the origin and nature of magic and diabolical action in the world gave way to story-telling and frivolous accounts of petty fraud. The 'Real Black Art', according to Defoe, was now 'quite out of Use' (p. 269).

* * * * *

Within ten years of the publication of *A System of Magick*, the Witchcraft Act was repealed. Public reaction was muted, if not silent, on the subject. No learned treatises were produced, either for or against belief in magic and witchcraft. The Enlightenment assault on providential religion, and an active God and Devil, would appear to have won a major victory over the forces of 'superstition' and Christian fundamentalism. Defoe himself was cast on the side of the defeated. Nevertheless, the 'rehabilitation' of his *A System of Magick* has proved fruitful. It reveals a complexity and a development in his attitudes and flexibility in his thinking that was at odds with that of earlier generations of demonologists. Defoe's attempt to define magic in his day as a catch-all category of human behaviour, both real and metaphorical at one and the same time, is noteworthy because it represents part of a wider movement to preserve and revitalise a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith. The fact that he was ultimately fighting a losing battle does not detract from the historical value of such works, which provide a fascinating insight into the complex mind of one of the most influential writers of his age.

³² Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations*, pp. 124, 127; Bostridge, 'Witchcraft Repealed', p. 315. As Bostridge has pointed out, attempts to depict Defoe's defence of the supernatural as paradoxical given his status among literary specialists as a moderniser (the 'prime exponent of the modern fictional genre') flounder 'if we recall the categorical imprecision, the generic uncertainty of Defoe's literary generation'; Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations*, pp. 111–12, citing Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore, 1987).



Eberlein del.

J. Van der Gucht sculp

Original frontispiece to the 1727 Edition. By permission of the British Library.

A
S Y S T E M
OF
M A G I C K;
OR, A
H I S T O R Y
OF THE
B L A C K A R T.
BEING AN

Historical Account of Mankind's most early Dealing
with the Devil; and how the Acquaintance on both
Sides first began.

*Our Magick, Now, commands the Troops of Hell,
The Devil himself submits to Charm and Spell.
The Conj'rer in his Circles and his Rounds
Just whistles up his Spirits, as Men do Hounds.
Th' obsequious Devil, obeys the Sorcerer's Skill,
The Mill turns round the Horse, that first turns round the Mill.*¹

LONDON, Printed: And Sold by J. ROBERTS in
Warwick-Lane. MDCCXXVII.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

P R E F A C E.

To remove a Difficulty in my Title, and that we may not stumble at the Threshold, some Preface to this new Undertaking may be necessary, but it will be very short.

If by A SYSTEM of this terrible thing called Magick, my Readers should expect a Body of the Black Art as a Science, a Book of Rules for Instruction in the Practice, or a Magical Grammar for Introduction to young Beginners, all I can say to such is, that they will be mistaken.

The World has perhaps been imposed upon in nothing more than in their Notions of this dark Practice, as well its antient as its modern State. Most People, when they read of the antient Magicians, think they are reading of old Necromancers and Conjurers, when really at first they were very honest Men; and now, when they read of them in their modern Practice, they take them for honest Fellows when they are generally speaking, meer Juglers, Cheats, Mountebanks, and Posture-masters;² or else, real Wizards and downright Dealers with the Devil.

There is One Sort would fain be called Cunning Men, than which nothing can be a grosser piece of Delusion; and 'tis not their Cunning, but their Clients want of Cunning, that gives them the least Appearance of Common Sense in all their Practice. 'Tis a strange Piece of Art where Fools cheat Fools, and the Blind and the Ignorant, are imposed upon by the Blind and the Ignorant.

All the Discovery I can make by it is, to note what a visible Difference there is between Cunning and Wit; between Slight of Hand, as I may call it, and Understanding. 'Tis evident the Pretenders to Magick at this time are so far from dealing with the Devil, that they must certainly be dealt with by the Devil, that have any thing to do with them.

In the first Ages they were Wise Men; in the middle Age, Madmen; in these latter Ages, Cunning Men: In the earliest Time they were Honest; in the middle Time, Rogues; in these last Times, Fools: At first they dealt with Nature; then with the Devil; and now not with the Devil, or with Nature either: In the first Ages the Magicians were wiser than the People; in the Second Age, wickeder than the People; and in our Age, the People are both wiser and wickeder than the Magicians.

I see no great Harm in our present Pretenders to Magick, if the poor People could but keep their Money in their Pockets; and that they should have their Pockets pick'd

by such an unperforming, unmeaning, ignorant Crew as these are, is the only Magick that I can find in the whole Science.

The best Course that I can think of to cure the People of this Itch of their Brain, the Tarantula³ of the present Age, in running to Cunning Men, as you call them, and the most likely to have Success, is this, of laughing at them: the Satyr has reform'd the Age of many a Folly, which the Solid and the Solemn could never reach: Even general Vice, would the Men of Wit and Men of Quality join in the Attempt, might be hiss'd out of the World, tho' all the Preaching and all the Preachers shou'd prove fruitless and exhausted: Men are to be ridicul'd into good Manners, when they won't be cudgell'd into it.

Your modern Harlequins,⁴ especially so exquisitely contriv'd, and so perfectly well perform'd as those of late by Mr. Rich,⁵ (in which, not to flatter him, we must acknowledge he has out-done all that was before him) have gone farther to expose and run down the Magick I am speaking of, and cure the World of the Hyppo and the Vapours,⁶ than the whole Stage could do before; nay, than all the brightest Dramatick Performances of the last Age could pretend to.

Never was the popular Frenzy better exposed; the Ignorance on one side, and the Impudence on the other, more accurately laid open; the Mimickry is mimick'd to the Life; the Magician made a Fool, the Fool tickl'd into more Wit, and the Devil himself laugh'd out of Countenance.

We leave the Remainder to be compleated by the same Hand; the Success cannot fail, while the Senses and the Passions are to be wrought upon by the Eye-sight: Our Method looks the same Way, only that we bring it up from its Original, and pursue it to the End of its Prospect. Mr. Rich shows you what foolish things you are just now doing; we show you what your Ancestors did before you, and what still worse things the Ages to come are like to do after you.

Let no Man be disgusted at the good Account we give of the Original and Wisdom of the Magi, and then call them Magicians: if we will debauch the Word with a degeneracy of Practice, the Fault is our own. Their Magick was truly Science, whereas ours is neither Magick or Science, but a kind of Devilism, a Practice carry'd on, by Men that would be wicked if they did not want Wit, and are no otherwise Harmless, than as they happen to be Fools.

Even at its best, 'tis a Babel-like Confusion, that speaks several Languages, and none to be understood; a compleat Degeneracy of, or Deviation from, common Sense; a Complication of Negatives, that how many soever you put together, won't make up one Affirmative.

Now, to bring this Nothing from the Something it deriv'd from, tho' it seems a little Difficult, yet 'tis very Necessary, and this is the Reason why I call it a History.

I have trac'd it as far back as Antiquity gives us any Clue to discover it by; it seems to have its Beginning in the Ignorance and Curiosity of the darkest Ages of the World, when Miracle, and something Wonderful, was expected to confirm every

advanc'd Notion; and when the wise Men, having rack'd their Invention to the utmost, call'd in the Devil to their Assistance, for want of better Help; and those that did not run into Satan's Measures, and give themselves up to the Infernal, yet trod so near; and upon the very edge of Hell, that it was hard to distinguish between the Magician and the Devil; and there they have gone on ever since: so that almost all the Dispute between us and the Magicians is, that they say they converse with good Spirits, and we say if they deal with any Spirits it is with the Devil: let the following Sheets determine the Matter.

Hail! *Dangerous Science*, falsly call'd Sublime,
Which treads upon the very brink of Crime.
Hell's Mimick, Satan's Mountebank of State,
Deals with more Devils than Heav'n did e'er create.
The Infernal Juggling-box, *by Hell* design'd,
To put the grand Parade upon Mankind.
The Devil's first Game, which he in *Eden* play'd,
When he harangu'd to *Eve* in Masquerade.

In the first Ages Men mistook thy Face,
Thy Conj'ring past for Wit, thy Gravity for Grace.
By thee the Junior World in Witchcraft grew,
That Witchcraft still the Senior Worlds persue.
Nature's first Usher to induct Mankind,
Prompting wise Arts to his enquiring Mind.
To *Jubal* thou, and *Tubal*, Science brought,
To This his Metals, That his Musick taught.
But born a Cheat, under the Cloak of Grave,
First made him a *Mechanick*, then a *Knave*.⁷