

it remained a principle in defiance, and in excess, of the rational, a power beyond the reach of reason" (291).

In the book's coda, Lobis leaves us with close readings of the relation of natural and moral sympathy in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which he presents as a study in "the failure of sympathy" (315), and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, in which a mystical sympathy is inscribed in a more positive and powerful sense. The coda reveals, as does the rest of the volume, Lobis's commitment to exposing the rich complexity of the tensions and strains that define the history of sympathy. Taking both a diachronic and synchronic approach, the study makes a monumental contribution to our knowledge of sympathy and its transformation over time. It is at once a model study in the history of ideas and a compelling piece of literary criticism.

Marcus Harmes and Victoria Bladen, eds., *Supernatural and Secular Power in Early Modern England*. Routledge, 2015. x + 237 pp. + \$127.00. Review by JESSICA L. MALAY, UNIVERSITY OF HUDDERSFIELD.

This collection of essays engages with on-going discussions concerning the nature of the supernatural and cultural responses to it in the early modern period. Several essays consider the intersections of the political and the activities of the supernatural. Particularly fruitful are discussions concerning perceived threats from a Catholicism that was believed capable of employing the supernatural to threaten Protestant England. This collection also considers the way in which the discourse of the supernatural informed discussions of transgressive social behaviour. More fundamentally these essays explore the relationship of individuals with wider social relations.

Glyn Parry's opening essay convincingly portrays the centrality of alchemical, prophetic and other occult practices in Elizabethan politics. An interest in Joachim prophecies of the Last Emperor was convincingly inserted into the contemporary political scene by John Dee and others, including key members of the Court like William Cecil, Lord Burghley and Robert Dudley, Earl Leicester. The essay discusses the tensions between those interested in aligning the political with the apocalyptic, and those more conservative political forces that

worked to suppress the expressions of the prophetic that positioned Elizabeth as the Last World Empress with its expectations that she would be involved in the Netherland political conflict. Whitgift and later Bancroft, are shown to make use of literary satire in drama and poetry to undermine the political claims of those associated with Dee and others, drawn from supernatural practices.

Pierre Kapitaniak's essay considers Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* within the politically charged atmosphere of the 1580s. He suggests that Scot's motivation was not simply to discount a particular social belief but was much more politically motivated. By drawing a connection between witches and Catholics Scot could then impute Catholics and their political machinations as "mere juggling and deceit, not any kind of 'real' magic" (53). He also suggests that the witchcraft legislation of the 1580s (like that of 1563 discussed by Devine below) was intended to suppress a solidly secular Catholic political risk rather than a more ephemeral supernatural malaise.

Michael Devine explores the relationship between the political tensions of the early years of Elizabeth I's reign and the 1563 acts against witchcraft and prophesy. Devine argues that this legislation was a response to continued concerns that Catholic sympathisers attempted to use witchcraft to influence the political in this highly unstable period, and the inability of the ecclesiastical courts to effectively deal with politically charged supernatural acts. However Devine goes beyond this by exploring the role of William Cecil in stratagems that included exploiting incidents of political witchcraft and prophesy in order to strengthen his own position. Devine meticulously details a web of conspiracy that was political and supernatural in nature in the early years of Elizabeth's reign. He explores activities by the Poles and other eminent Catholics, who pitted themselves supernaturally and actively against William Cecil and his view of a particularly Protestant Elizabethan monarchy.

Victoria Bladen engages with the tensions present in *The Witch of Edmonton*, a play which she convincingly argues "offers a powerful critique of the construct of the witch" (97) created at the local level, that she suggests was often the result of poverty and social ostracism. And while this insight is not new, Bladen's discussion convincingly places this play within the wide-ranging discussions concerning the

nature of witches in the secular world. She identifies the way in which social labelling can be sited in the intersections between the social and supernatural in this play. Bladen makes clear that the play acknowledges the social dynamic in the labelling (and prosecution) of witches, while at the same time giving voice to the widespread belief in the supernatural.

Fiona Martin examines the representation of suicide and the supernatural and considers the act of self-slaughter in relation to secular and ecclesiastical authority. This essay focuses on William Sampson's the *Vow Breaker* (1636) and its weaving together of a variety of socially condemned acts: suicide, infidelity, and revenge which become manifest and supercharged in the supernatural. She notes in the play that "spiritually charged events take place ... in a strangely secular context" (119). She also identifies the relationship between this play and *Hamlet*, especially in relation to supernatural interaction and the act of suicide.

Catherine Stevens examines Ludwig Lavater's *Of Ghosts and Spirits* (1569) in a detailed discussion of his examination of the spectral placed within an "authoritative Protestant perspective" (141). She explores the problems that emerge from Lavater's attempt to impose a logic on a subject that becomes "subject to the illogic that underpins them" (143). She identifies Lavater's emphatic insistence that the habitations of living and the dead cannot overlap as problematic to his argument, noting that the philosophical arguments upon which he draws are not quite robust enough to support this key element of his argument. The essay reasonably suggests that Lavater's text itself is "haunted" with "every attempt to deny their presence" making ghosts more present. In this way the essay challenges those that would too easily dismiss the real impact of the supernatural upon the social in early modern culture.

The relationship between supernatural representations in *Paradise Lost* and post Restoration political realities are examined by Martin Dawes. Here Dawes considers the way in which a variety of political philosophies are played out in the cosmography of the poem. For example he contends that "This political debate over the nature and direction of divine governance demands of the angels a decision" (167), and argues that the position of the angels was similar to the decisions

individuals, including Milton himself, had to make in the emerging political realities of the Restoration. This essay sits rather uncomfortably with the other essays in the volume, but provides another perspective on the supernatural in the later part of the seventeenth century.

Marcus Harmes introduces us to the world of dispossessing ministers, Catholic exorcists and their threat to episcopal authority. He places a number of witch and sorcery prosecutions within a climate of dissatisfaction with episcopal activities. Harmes reasonably suggests that the episcopacy's motivation in debunking a number of supposed successful dispossessions by unlicensed ministers was to uphold episcopal authority, rather than to support and absolve victims of witchcraft accusations. The use of Catholic exorcisms were similarly challenged as the bishops sought to affirm their "spiritual jurisdiction over English people" which included the performance of supernatural functions and sacramental power (191).

The sexualized nature of English witchcraft drawn from witchcraft pamphlets is explored by Charlotte-Rose Millar in the final essay of this collection. In her examination of these pamphlets she notes that forty-six percent portray sexual activities, which leads her to contend that these pamphlets educated the public in the sexualized and diabolical nature of English witchcraft and by extension particular sexual acts most often associated with diabolic sexual intercourse. The pamphlets, then, reveal cultural anxieties about potentially destabilizing sexual activity.

This collection provides a number of perspectives that focus in on particular issues within the wider discussion of the supernatural in the period and as such provides valuable insights into areas that continue to be of interest. The supernatural was in many ways the natural in early modern England and the challenge scholars face when seeking to examine this pervasive aspect of culture is to take seriously the concerns these beliefs reveal while at the same time interrogating these in ways that illuminate complex cultural issues. The essays in this collection are successful in this, drawing upon both primary sources and the rich scholarly work on this subject to present essays that are both engaging and illuminating. They avoid reproducing existing scholarship, and instead use this scholarship to provide additional insight into early modern engagement with the supernatural.