sumption that religious practice was a domestic and private affair in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that women’s religious writings were ephemeral to intellectual and sociopolitical cultures. … It is, however, a mistake to regard these writings as safe, acceptable, or marginal. Reformation religion was inherently the religion of the book, and it is now well recognized that a number of sixteenth-century women became ‘influential agents of religious and political change’ through their textual and interpretative activities” (11-12, qtg Femke Molekamp). Indeed, despite the problematic sense of English Renais-
sance women emerging out of nothing, Ross’s focus on the book as a material manuscript directs our attention toward a new perspective that includes manuscript material alongside printed works. Such a wider ground from which to work gives us a renewed perspective: “If we are going to understand women’s emergence as published political poets of state in the mid-seventeenth century, we need to read poetic genre differently – or, rather, we need to read different poetic genres” (17).


This collection of essays provides a rich discussion of Western witchcraft and magic, focusing mainly on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but often extending both forward into the present and back into the ancient past. It provides a reasonable overview, while at the same time includes detailed evidence and examples that help it avoid a sense of the over-generalized. Many chapters are accompanied by good quality images, as one would expect in a volume of this sort. The collection begins, after a short foreword, with Peter Maxwell-Stuart’s chapter on magic in the ancient world. He provides a definition of magic as “a constellation of what are officially regarded as deviant ritualistic or ritualized ways of dealing with an individual’s immediate problems” (1). What follows is a survey of magic or ritualistic texts under the subheadings of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Jewish magic, Greeks, and Romans (early Christians and magic are included briefly under this sub-heading). A number of practices are described and the
contribution of magic in creating a stable culture is touched upon. Greater clarity concerning the relationship between magic and religious practice would be useful here, as a great deal of overlap is noted. Sophie Page’s chapter on medieval magic begins again with a definition of magic: “magic was thought to strengthen or sever relationships between people, to overcome material obstacles, and spread good or evil” (29). She describes magic as rituals and practices that were not Christian, but also acknowledges that these were derived from other religious belief systems. The chapter explores medieval attempts to define magic, referring to Isodore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*, and notes the medieval connection of magic with the supernatural world of the demonic. Page also discusses the relationship between “philosophy, magic, and spiritual inspiration” (34). Particular attention is paid to the increasing traffic of magical texts between Europe and the Middle East and the contributions of Arabic texts to occult sciences and magic.

James Sharpe begins his chapter on demonology texts by emphasizing the sophistication of early modern writers of this material. Sharpe poses the question, “Why was a science of demons necessary?” (65), and uses this question to open up a discussion on the widespread acceptance and historical depths of belief in the intervention of demonic spirits. The intersection between this aspect of magic and religious beliefs of the period is considered with reference to biblical texts and other textual authorities circulating widely. The importance of the specific as a catalyst for writing on demonology is noted. The chapter provides a general overview of the development of demonological systems (71-82), citing important works including *Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of Witches) written in response to increasing numbers of witch trials in the fifteenth century. The decline of demonology is also charted, with reference to Reginald Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft* and a connection between anti-papal sentiment and the association of witchcraft with ‘erroneous papist writing’ (89). The dialogue between the sceptical tracts of the early seventeenth century and challenges to these are discussed, including the work of Balthasar Bekker. Sharpe ends his essay with an acknowledgement that the rejection of the possibility of the demonic required “a major intellectual break” that could result in “accusations of atheism and, by extension, of subverting the social order” (95).
Rita Volmer’s chapter discusses early modern witch trials. This chapter starts with a definition of concepts, in this case that of the “witch trial,” though acknowledges that “different languages throw up different definitions” (97). Volmer notes that “witch trials targeted women in greater numbers than men” and that accusations against women made up “75-80 per cent” of all witch trials (99). This chapter usefully includes a series of tables listing European countries, territories, dates, numbers of trials, and numbers of executions. Here it would be useful to know the source of the figures that are provided. The discussion provides a general overview of the cultural environment where witch trials took place and the practical ambiguity which surrounded many trials, noting that “in dealing with the crime of witchcraft, clear evidence...was hard to find” (112). The role of torture in prosecutions is discussed, again emphasizing the ambiguity of this practice within the legal systems of several European countries. The chapter also discusses the role of scribal recording and the influence of the reportage of witch trials on cultural reception. Volmer attributes the decline in witch trials in the eighteenth century to more centralized and close supervision of local courts and the repeal of a number of witchcraft laws, though she ends on a rather chilling note: that today beliefs in witchcraft continue, and that “the African period of witch trials seemingly has just begun” (133).

Charles Zika engages with the visual heritage related to witchcraft and magic in European art. He rightly notes the importance of printing in circulating and promoting a sense of the diabolic in fifteenth-century Europe. Zika suggests that images such as Hans Baldung’s *The Witches Preparing for the Sabbath* and Dürer’s *Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat* became influential in defining the diabolic visually. Within this discussion is the relationship between religious iconography and the diabolic, and also the way in which the representation of the diabolic changed from earlier medieval imagery, noting that in early modern imagery “this new scourge of witchcraft not only involved individual women and men, but was as *group* activity, and one orchestrated by the Devil” (140). Zika suggests that representations of the diabolic emerged as a sense of the social threat through magic heightened in the early seventeenth century and cites the centre for this iconography in northern Europe. This is a rich chapter that
surveys important individuals and sites of visual reproduction of the demonic. This discussion is accompanied by several full and half page images (many in color), which provide useful exempla for the discussion. It also follows this imagery in to the nineteenth century, as well as including more modern imagery that draws upon an earlier representational heritage.

The popularity of magic evidenced in the visual record is more fully discussed in Owen Davies chapter on popular magic. Davies explains that, “while witchcraft was largely an imaginary crime in terms of what those executed were accused of doing, there is ample evidence for the use of harmful magic in popular culture” (169). Several examples of the use of harmful magic by members of the public for specific purposes such as revenge, spite, and influencing the behavior of others are provided. The defensive nature of popular magic is also discussed, including the hiding of objects within the structures of homes. The hiding of children’s shoes is a particularly intriguing example. The chapter explores the rationale behind beliefs in the operational effectiveness of magical practice and interestingly suggests a connection with humoral theory, and here we recognize the close relationship between the magical and natural philosophy. Davies also suggests that the popularity of magic was connected to “the sense that anyone could perform it, the knowledge being widespread orally and transmitted through generations of families” (174). The chapter discusses the way in which popular magic responded to social change, and even to enlightenment science, and takes this discussion into the twentieth century. The chapter provides a strong rationale for the continuation of occult practices through the centuries and its influence on twentieth-century occult practices.

Robert J. Wallis also engages with occult practices from the perspective especially of the twentieth century. His chapter describes the influence of anthropology on modern views of witchcraft. He places this within the historical context beginning with sixteenth-century accounts of indigenous practices in the Americas. These “early ethnographic accounts” (227) are presented as mainly descriptive, though colored by religious perspective and identified as diabolic. A description of the development of anthropology is provided before returning to European anthropological interest in indigenous com-
munities. A number of twentieth-century approaches are discussed, including Malinowski’s structural functionalism, Levi-Strauss’s use of semiotics, and Victor Turner’s ideas of ritualism as social drama. The chapter also includes a discussion of the shift in anthropological methodology in the late twentieth century, with a new emphasis on participant observation, which Wallis describes as an “experimental approach [that] facilitated a remarkable ethnography which would otherwise have been impossible” (242). Wallis explores the work of a number of “insider’ and auto-ethnographies” of western witchcraft including the work of Jenny Blain on Norse culture and mythology. Wallis ends with a discussion of the use of auto-ethnography in current anthropological research into the occult. This chapter provides a useful lens for modern readers to consider witchcraft in a more nuanced manner.

The book ends with Willem de Blécourt’s chapter discussing on-screen witches. The chapter opens with an acknowledgement of the Harry Potter phenomenon, and Blécourt challenges readers to look beyond the ubiquitous boy wizard. He usefully identifies the “absence of any explicit references to religion or demonology” (255) in the Harry Potter films. Blécourt usefully identifies Western witches as “internal others” (256) and provides a historically based definition of Western witches similar to previous definitions in earlier chapters. The presence of “ancestral” witch-related imagery in the representation of contemporary on-screen witches is noted. The role of the Wizard of Oz for future depictions of witches in twentieth-century cinema is described as significant, as is contemporary imagery of members of the Wiccan movement. The chapter discusses housewife witches, including the long influence of sixties series Bewitched on American screen depictions of witches. In his final section he engages with issues of male anxiety, female power, and the efforts of these screen depictions to domesticate female power or eradicate it. He ends the chapter with a return to the Harry Potter films, noting the gender bias of the film towards powerful male witches, which “marginalized the gender issue” (280).

This collection of essays provides the reader with a detailed and nuanced discussion of (mainly) Western magic and witchcraft, and the long social engagement with these ideas. The collection could use
a more developed introduction in place of the short foreword at the beginning. This would have been a useful place to provide a definition of witchcraft and magic that is fairly consistent across the essays and thus save each author from having to include an often repetitive definition. This would also have been a good place to do some work regarding the relationship of religion with magic, again saving individual authors from repeating work which appears in places throughout the book. The collection of essays is accessible and provides a good starting point for readers interested in the ubiquitous discourse of witchcraft and magic still prevalent in our culture.


On 2 September 1666, an improperly extinguished fire in Thomas Farriner’s Bakery shop on Pudding Lane caught the structure on fire. This fire, aided by a variety of elements including a long dry summer, the medieval and crowded layout of the City of London, and the fact that most structures were made of wood, quickly spread. Over the next three days, the City of London burned as its inhabitants fled.

This fire, an important seventeenth-century event for both the city and for England, as one-sixth of the total population lived there, is the subject of Jacob F. Field’s work. While the story of the fire is well known, Field adds to our understanding by exploring the fire beyond the City of London and by effectively utilizing a variety of records to expand our knowledge of the demographic and economic consequences of the fire. The short, but insightful, work is divided into two parts with part one exploring the events of the fire and the attempts to rebuild, while the second part works to understand the demographic and economic consequences.

If one just wants to know the story of the fire, part one is an excellent place to find it. Here, Field has constructed an engaging narrative that explains the start of the fire, the reasons why the fire spread so rapidly, why it spread to some areas and not others, and how the city