

The ten-page glossary is extremely useful, especially because of the special meanings associated with key philosophical terms, such as, for example, infinity, procession, and undiminished bestowal. Readers who have specific arguments and themes they wish to pursue will benefit immeasurably from the 19-page index summing up each chapter. But the delight received from working through Herrera's analysis and reconciliation of kabbalistic contemplation with Luria's doctrine of "the spark of the lights," communicated admirably through Krabbenhoff's clear translation, will bring other rewards as well. The reader might just end up fathoming something about the sefirot or the place of real existence, and momentarily see beyond the unreliable and fleeting, like something glimpsed in a mirror "which really exists in one place but is reflected in another" (471). This book gives the attentive reader a way to follow the trajectory of just such an image back to its source—in every sense of the term.

Walter Stephens. *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. xv + 451 pp. + 16 halftones + 2 diagrams. Cloth \$35.00; Paper \$20.00. Review by WILLIAME. ENGEL.

Walter Stephens has written a truly significant book on the origin of witches and the underlying philosophy giving rise to early modern demonology and skepticism. Owing to his rigorous analysis and painstaking translations of original materials (mostly written between 1430 and 1530), he debunks many lingering scholarly myths. For example, he points out how those who must rely on translations and modern editions of the oft-cited *Malleus maleficarum* (*Hammer of Witches*) receive a skewed view, based on only several (though to be sure, important) sections, thus "distorting their understanding of every aspect of the book, starting with misogyny" (33).

And yet, as Stephens is quick to point out, questions of sex and gender are central to witchcraft, though in ways not generally assumed. Specifically, necromancers were not stereotyped as sex

partners of demons, not simply because they were men but because, being men, they could read. Since most women were illiterate, their sexuality was the only real trait that literate men could imagine bringing them into contact with demons (53). It is this type of careful reasoning that leads him to probe further still, to explain why women, cast in the roles of unwilling “field-workers” for judges and inquisitors, needed to be seen as coming into contact with demons. It concerned, as the subtitle announces, the larger “Crisis of Belief.” For, as he wraps up this point in a detailed analysis of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, only “physical contact with an embodied demon can prove that hell and the soul exist, that the soul is a *substance* that can be bought and sold, contracted away like any other *thing*” (354).

Without the proof of a devil, there can be no proof of God—which was phrased with terrifying lucidity by very late defenders of witch-hunting: *Nullus Deus, sine diabolo* (341). Owing to the necessary belief in the devil then, by a kind of palindromic logic, God’s presence can be inferred even when his works are imperceptible. And so “[t]o deny that devils and witches can cooperate or copulate is to deny that devils can demonstrate their reality and to accept that they must in some sense be imaginary, including the possibility that they are totally nonexistent” (75). Thus the logic of the “witchcraft theorists” (as Stephens astutely terms the inquisitors, jurists, and writers of treatises—to whom he devotes the first six pages of his magisterial twenty-one-page bibliography) followed “the logic inherent in orthodox sacramental theory” (266).

Thus Stephens argues convincingly that early modern witchcraft is less about sexuality and gender *per se*, and more about metaphysics and theology. The men who brought about these legal proceedings are “*metaphysical* voyeurs. They scrutinize bodies hoping to glimpse ‘spirit’” (347). By shifting the ground on the way much witch-scholarship has been conducted, *Demon Lovers* demonstrates, for example, how accusations of witches drinking broth made from babies was seen as, properly speaking, “antisacramental activity” (200). As an interesting side-light, Stephens points out important differences between the presumed

desecration of the host on the part of Jews and of witches: Jews gave voice to the skepticism about the reality of transubstantiation, demonstrating “real presence,” while witches confirmed its truth through topsy-turvy applications in their rites. By “vilifying the Jew, the narrator condemned and atoned for his own doubts, camouflaging the projection with time-honored theologically sanctioned stereotypes and hatreds of Jews” (214).

To be sure though, this anxiety over the Eucharist’s reality was a principal motive for theorists finding demon lovers for witches. But other anxieties are being exorcised as well, such as the unexplained death of children, especially unbaptized infants. This raises important issues (in Chapter Nine, “Witches, Infanticide, and Power”) regarding the need to account for perceived gaps in God’s plan by making special places in purgatory. One of the main theorists examined by Stephens, Bartolomeo Spina, concludes his treatise with the suggestion “that the phenomenon of infant death was the principal stimulus behind the need to believe in the reality of witchcraft” (249).

Throughout, in his recounting of the main theorists’ views, such as those by Kramer whose name is inseparable from the *Malleus*, Stephens judiciously repeats phrases like “assuming he did not invent the entire story” (289). Likewise, since “the dialogue between defendants and prosecutors was governed by an unfair balance of power, particularly where torture was used,” Stephens repeatedly applies the crucial legal question to get to the bottom of things: “Cui bono,” which is to say, “whose interests were best served by a particular confession” (7). In the process, Stephens uncovers some important points of origination relating to and associated with the identification of witches, such as screech-owls, black cats, boiling cauldrons, and flying broom-sticks (transvection), as well as locating subtle shifts in the iconographic portrayal of witches and their otherwise invisible activities.

Stephens’s reasoned approach to the question of why witches appeared on the world stage when they did, from the twelfth century up through the seventeenth, as a class of people to be targeted and questioned, supports his view that a “desire to be convinced of

the reality of spirit was the psychic glue that held the witch myth together This conceptual adhesive accounts for otherwise puzzling resemblances between myths about witches, Jews, necromancers, and heretics" (366). Further, this gives rise to the irony, not lost on Stephens, that "both the skeptic and the witch existed in the mind of the theologian long before they were found in external reality. In fact, the theologian's witch never existed externally, but the skeptic became an increasing real presence."

In the end, then, witchcraft theory was theological damage control. And the legacy is still very much with us, as Stephens points out from entries in the Catholic Encyclopedia, as well as with reference to "modern fundamentalist Christians professing shock and horror at demonic influences in Halloween celebrations or the Harry Potter novels." Furthermore, in "alien abduction, as in witchcraft, the corporality of the alleged encounters is prized as conclusive proof of *reality*, provoking strong emotions and allegedly unshakable beliefs in humans who 'confess' to interviewers" (367-8). To be sure though, the "solitary witches who call themselves alien abductees perform no *maleficia* [deeds of harmful magic] and have their own peculiar breed of kindly inquisitors among specialized psychiatrists."

By bringing us up to the present, Stephens ends with a clarion call to find new answers using the old *Cui bono*: "To what degree does Christian mortality continue to be invoked, even in post-Christian, secularized forms, to reinforce belief in spirits and human immortality?" (371). Tough questions like this one make *Demon Lovers* a landmark in intellectual history. With Stephens as our guide, we can continue to ponder with early theorists, following Aquinas, such questions as: "How can a body that is not real have real sex?" (65). Accordingly, this book will change the way we discuss early modern witchcraft, sex, and the crisis of belief.