

more so than the World Wide Web ever managed to be in practice. But this book should be judged by what it has rather than what it lacks, and in my opinion that judgment is positive.

The account provided of the developing encroachment of what Vallee calls The Silicon Society will provide few surprises for anyone who has followed the issues in the trade literature. The same can be said for Vallee's suggestions about countermeasures—both collective and individual. But the book's presentation of these is accessible and comprehensible and will probably provide many surprises for the general reader.

Overall I strongly recommend this book for just about anyone interested in our new information-based society, how it came about, and where it might be going, whatever their background.

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Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief by Walter Stephens. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. 371 pp. \$20.00 (paper). ISBN 0-226-77262-4.

The incubus and succubus have haunted the dreams of theologians and occult theorists for centuries. Stephens' outstanding volume is the most thorough historical discussion of the late medieval/early modern tradition. However, this book is about much more than stories of witches having sex with the Devil. It is an all-out intellectual history, a critical examination of the thoughts and philosophies of witchcraft theorists such as Heinrich Kramer, author of the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Thus the title of *Demon Lovers* is somewhat misleading, as Stephens examines multiple layers of European witchcraft theory, not just the incubus. Chapters include discussions of the Sabbat, witches and infanticide, as well as demon possession.

What ties these clearly written chapters together is Stephens' thesis that stories of corporeal interaction with demons, and witchcraft (or *maleficia*) in general, allowed theorists to take comfort in the fact that demonic reality and, by logical connection, all of Christian theology stood firm in objective, experiential evidence. Far from being irrational or even fulfilling supposedly deep hatreds of women, Kramer and others collected testimonies of demons and witches (often through torture) because they confirmed the rationality of the supernatural at a time when skeptical thoughts about spirits began to arise, even in the minds of the witchcraft theorists themselves. For Stephens, Christian authorities coming out of the Scholastic tradition suffered from a deep-seated anxiety about whether their beliefs were really "scientifically" true, and they manifested this nervousness in their works. In fact, Stephens' entire narrative is peppered with terms

such as "anxiety," "uneasiness," and "fear" to describe the motivations of witchcraft experts. While many may agree with Stephens on this latter point, I find it difficult to accept such psychological measurements in total:

Witchcraft theorists did not suppose that their theories corresponded to reality: they were *testing* to discover *whether* a correspondence existed and dreading that it might not. Just because they *claimed* they believed something or that they never doubted something else does not oblige us to take their word for it. (p. 10)

But we can certainly ask the question "why not?" It seems too counter-intuitive, and probably is, to read so much between the lines. Surely many of these writers struggled with degrees of doubt and anxiety about the existence of spiritual forces they wished to believe in, but to imply the majority did not believe what they were saying about incubi and other demonic powers seems to go too far. Such a conclusion leaves no room for the possibility of a "middle ground" (or less pathological) open-minded belief, or tempered skepticism. Whatever the case, despite the tortured logic of witchcraft theorists that Stephens delineates and their barbaric use of physical torture to obtain information, Kramer and others seemed to have held firmly enough to their convictions, unless there is clear evidence they ever changed their positions. After all, as Stephens notes, there was a certain inherent logic in accepting testimonies from witch defendants faced with capital punishment; while insane by today's standards, it made more sense at the time (p. 104).

More importantly, like other modern historians of the occult, Stephens displays a somewhat contradictory attitude toward how to deal with historical accounts of supernatural phenomena. With little argument in the introduction, he accepts the common assumption that "it is not worth asking whether witchcraft theories corresponded with reality" (p. 10). Fair enough, but throughout the book Stephens rightfully decries the poor nature of evidence of witchcraft collected through torture, of second-hand or possibly invented tales, and of the "believe it because I say it" logic of religious theorists. Clearly questions regarding the reality of the supernatural are at least a bit interesting for Stephens. In fact, I believe it is time for more mainstream scholars to accept such issues as legitimate areas of historical inquiry.

Any reader of *Demon Lovers* should have no doubt that Stephens takes the skeptical side of the debate. On occasion (and in conclusion) he connects the illogic of late medieval witchcraft hunters to attempts at legitimizing such controversies as Noah's Flood (pp. 152–253) and alien abductions (pp. 367–369). Perhaps to his dismay, Stephens' angle left me with the lingering question of whether the demon lover tradition has any basis in reality. Not surprisingly, the author does not go there.¹ Yet I was slightly disappointed that he fails to reference David Hufford's oft-cited "experience centered" examination of a phenomenon ostensibly related to the incubus/succubus, the Old Hag. In *The Terror That Comes in the Night*, Hufford (1982) notes the connections between the incubus and the Old Hag in historical and scholarly literature and suggests

that the former may represent a separate (and perhaps more rare) experience requiring the same detailed, phenomenological examination he offers to the latter (pp. 130–131, 255). As far as I am aware, no such study has been completed. Recently, authors who have attempted to deal honestly with the reality of the incubus as well as the Old Hag and alien abduction experiences have lumped them together and returned to the same type of skeptical explanations involving sleep paralysis and culturally shaped hallucinations which Hufford convincingly calls into question² (see, for example, Chambers, 2002; Davies, 2003. For what I feel stands as the best interpretation of Hufford's work, see the introduction in Clark, 1999).

Perhaps these phenomena do share the same or similar explanations, but it remains to be seen if the demonic lovers of Heinrich Kramer's dreams have any basis in a definable anomalous experience apart from the Old Hag. However, the irony of suggesting such work in a review of Stephens' treatise is not lost on me. While he may not be interested in such a study, his thought-provoking book would offer invaluable historical and philosophical background for it. Thus, despite its drawbacks, I thoroughly recommend this book. If anything it is a sound reminder that the need to validate belief can go too far.

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Notes

¹ Recently, Owen Davies did go there in the journal *Folklore* by exploring for manifestations of the "nightmare" experience (or Old Hag, as used herein) in early modern witchcraft accusations. When it comes to the sex-related accounts that the theorists discussed, however, I find myself largely agreeing with his assessment: "It is important to remember, of course, that many confessions of diabolic intercourse were the product of torture and leading questioning, and probably had no basis in actual sleep disturbances. But there are similar confessions, like those already cited, that were not the product of torture, and the nightmare experience can perhaps provide some enlightenment as to their content" (p. 191).

² For the moment, I remain skeptical of claims intimating that sleep paralysis has convincingly solved numerous mysteries simply because "the availability of scientific information concerning sleep paralysis has increased considerably in the past decade" (Davies, 2003: 199).

References

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Shakespeare's Unorthodox Biography: New Evidence of an Authorship Problem by Diana Price. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2001. xvi + 357 pp. \$49.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-313-31202-8.

Orthodoxy at times seems quite impervious to evidence and logic. Only when a bubble finally bursts is its inherent absurdity publicly acknowledged—though usually only briefly, and the lesson is never driven home sufficiently to avoid a recurrence (Galbraith, 1990). Before such a bubble has burst, it may have prevented decipherment of the Mayan language (Coe, 1992); or insisted that Clovis culture represents the first humans in the New World (Adovasio, 2002; Dillehay, 2000); or kept reiterating that all redshifts are measures of speed and distance (Arp, 1998); or denied that anything but HIV is the cause of AIDS (Hodgkinson, 2003); and so on and so forth.

Since orthodoxy controls academe and much of the media, an alert skepticism and pursuit of any hint of unorthodoxy is in order if one is to discern topics on which the conventional wisdom is in hidebound error. One must also be ready to be laughed at and met with incredulity. So it is if one suggests that William Shakespeare of Stratford did not write the plays that have borne his name for nearly four centuries. And yet, if one asks for evidence that the Stratfordian was the author, what one gets is devious double-talk and speculation phrased as fact.

Two points of history are important:

First, in Elizabethan England, "A gentleman of rank could not publish under his own name lest he be suspected of having a profession" (p. xv). So writers of rank circulated their work privately or used pen-names. If Shakespeare was a gentleman of rank, then William Shakespeare could *not* be *his* real name. By contrast, the William Shaksper who was a play-broker, part owner of an acting company, and resident of Stratford as well as London would have been in a good position to use and appropriate work written by an anonymous high-born author.

Second, it appears that Shaksper of Stratford was not much respected (or liked) whereas Shakespeare the author was. However, Elizabethan England had official censorship and strong libel laws, and writers typically veiled criticisms in ambiguities; so the case against Shaksper is circumstantial and excruciatingly intricate. Price navigates it in great detail in this book.

The chief anti-Stratfordian points are perhaps these:

- The first attribution of authorship to Shaksper came 7 years after his death.
- Shaksper is identified by contemporary documents as a money-lender, play-broker, wheeler-dealer, social climber, and sometime actor. There