

Magic, Astrology, and Reputation in Seventeenth-Century England

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the reputations of astrologers, cunning folk, and magical practitioners in seventeenth-century England, identifying key features of these reputations, their significance, and the means by which they were constructed, maintained, and propagated.

The importance of reputation in early modern England has been long acknowledged, especially by social and economic historians, and the profusion of magic and magical practitioners in seventeenth-century society is likewise well established. But the study of reputations has focused primarily on economic credit and some other areas such as sexual morality, rarely extending into other areas of life. Few scholars have considered reputation as a relevant category in studies of magic, especially outside of the context of witchcraft accusations. Likewise, magic has very rarely been one of the social, cultural, or economic activities given consideration by studies of reputation.

This thesis will address this gap with an examination of magical reputations and their holders, further grounding magic and astrology in their social context, as well as broadening conceptions of reputation and its components. This will be done using a mix of cases and methodologies. The first half uses archival methods to reconstruct elements of the reputations of 'ordinary' practitioners, and the second half focuses on case studies of high-profile magical practitioners, whose reputations are the subjects of a diverse range of sources.

Magical reputations emerge as complex and varied, but with certain important themes throughout, particularly trust and truthfulness, the interconnection of reputations, and scales of fame, notoriety, and celebrity available to magical practitioners.

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

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Introduction

Magic was ubiquitous in seventeenth-century England. In villages, towns, and cities, people engaged in a wide range of magical practices, often as a paid service and often for the most commonplace of purposes. These practitioners, known by many names – cunning folk, conjurers, wizards, wise men and women, and many more – were people known to their prospective and actual clients, people seen to hold some measure of supernatural knowledge and power, known to make them available to those who required them. And this business of knowing – knowing who to go to, what they could do, where to find them, and so on – and of being known – being known as a cunning man or wise woman, a conjurer, fortune-teller, or charmer – was essential to the working of magic in society. This thesis will use a range of archival and printed materials to examine the reputations of some of these magical practitioners from the locally known to the nationally famous. By reconstructing what was said and thought about them by themselves and others, the reach of these ideas and their means of circulation, and the authorities and structures with which they interacted, it will be possible to better understand the place of magical practitioners in their society.

The notion of the early modern world as a ‘magical universe’ is well established. Stephen Wilson used the term in 2000, building on earlier works of history, anthropology, and folklore studies to establish a continuity of magical belief in premodern Europe, and over the past several decades scholars have built our understanding of what magic was and what it meant to early modern people who not only feared magic in the form of witchcraft, but made frequent recourse to it in its helpful and defensive forms.¹ Bengt Ankarloo, Stuart Clark, and William Monter in the fourth volume of *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, wrote of the “commanding place” of witchcraft and magic in the historiography of the early modern period, suggesting that “it is no longer clear... whether we are only making better sense of witchcraft and magic by looking at them ‘through’ early modern history. We may, in addition, be making better sense of early modern history by looking at it through them”.² This still holds true, but even so there is no shortage of ground still to cover in the context and meaning of magic.

This thesis aims to contribute to this ongoing work with a study of reputation, one of the animating energies of early modern society, described by Keith Thomas as “a primary determinant of human behaviour” in early modern England, and an area with which the history of magic has not always been

¹ Stephen Wilson, *The Magical Universe: Everyday Ritual and Magic in Pre-Modern Europe* (London: Hambledon and London, 2000).

² Bengt Ankarloo, Stuart Clark, and William Monter, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. Vol. 4, The Period of the Witch Trials* (London: Athlone Press, 2002), vii, ix.

in contact.³ This contact has a great deal to offer. Magical practitioners, like seventeenth-century people involved in all manner of social, cultural, and economic activities (and magic could be all three of these and more), were in many senses defined by their reputations – cunning folk (from the Anglo Saxon *cunnan*, ‘to know’) were those who knew things, but more than this they were people who were *known* to know things, those whose claims to special knowledge and capabilities were believed and upheld by their neighbours.⁴ It is reputation that describes the quality of knowing and being known, and the reputations of magical practitioners were constituted by their practices and identities, as well as their interactions with neighbours, clients, authorities, and each other. My intention here is to begin to reconstruct these reputations of magical practitioners and the means by which they operated. What was known, said, and thought about magical practitioners (as individuals and as a group) by themselves and by others? How did they attract clients or interact with their neighbours? How did they deal with sources of authority and officialdom? By what means or media did ideas about these people and their practices circulate? Questions such as these go a long way to establishing what it meant to be a magical practitioner in seventeenth-century England, and what it might mean to deal with one. The scholarship on magic and the people who practised it comprises a vibrant field, and the picture that is now available of magic in seventeenth-century England is increasingly complex and detailed. By considering magical practice and practitioners through the lens of reputation, I aim to demonstrate that magic was socially embedded through its interactions with institutions of authority, through the different media deployed by practitioners and those who discussed them, and through the degrees to which magical reputations could reach across both distance and time.

Just as analysis of how magic was subject to and part of reputations aids our understanding of the place of magic in society, so does the reconstruction of reputations of magical practitioners contribute to our understanding of early modern reputations. The importance of good name, credit, reputation, and related concepts has been demonstrated in a wide range of settings. Considering these factors in the arena of magic adds another aspect to the world of reputation, demonstrating how this system of interconnecting judgements and ideas could contribute to the creation of the ‘magical universe’ of early modern life. This will be done over four chapters separated into two parts. The first part will deal with practitioners whose reputations were primarily local and short-lived, whose historical footprint is largely limited to the records of institutions with which they interacted – the courts of quarter sessions and the College of Physicians of London. The second part will focus on two case studies – first the

³ Keith Thomas, *The Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfilment in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 147.

⁴ Owen Davies, *Popular Magic: Cunning-folk in English History* (London: Hambledon, 2007), viii.

infamous conjurer John Lambe (1545/6-1628) in Chapter 3, and in Chapter 4 the famous astrologer William Lilly (1602-1681).

This introduction will begin with a summary of the key concepts and terms that will be used and a review of the relevant literature on magic, reputation, and their intersection. The chronology of the thesis will then be framed, and finally, the methodology and sources will be introduced and the four chapters set out in summary.

Key Concepts and Historiography

Magic and Astrology

To begin to approach magic and magical practitioners, a working definition and terms of reference are essential. The term ‘magic’, of course, has a massive range of meanings not only for the modern reader but in different times and places. What is undoubtedly magic to one observer might, to another, be superstition, religion, or a natural operation. Many scholars have attempted to provide a concrete definition of magic, beginning in antiquity and continuing with medieval, early modern, and modern writers.⁵ Definitions provided by learned magical practitioners themselves are typically specific to the individuals’ practice and context, meaning while they are important in the history of magical thought or in studies of the relevant individuals, they are not necessarily useful as guidelines for historians. Current discourses on the definition(s) of magic can mostly be traced to the work of twentieth century anthropologists, which has been developed and disputed by historians and scholars of western esotericism. But even concerted efforts to define ‘magic’ for the purposes of study often do not arrive at anything that could be called concrete.

Théorie de la magie, written by Marcel Mauss and Henri Humbert in 1902, republished by Mauss in 1950, and translated as *A General Theory of Magic* in 2001, provided an influential anthropological account of what is and is not magic, with the goal of determining the extent to which magic can be called a social phenomenon – whether or not it, like religion, is “a product of collective activities”.⁶ Mauss and Humbert make clear that magic, in their view, “not only forms a distinct class of phenomena but that it is also susceptible to clear definition”.⁷ They approach this problem not by analysing specific activities, but by considering features of activities and attempting to distinguish which are features of magical as opposed to religious rites, emphasising that the distinction is not in the structure of rites,

⁵ Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg, ‘Introduction’ in *Defining Magic: A Reader*, ed. Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg (Equinox, 2013).

⁶ Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic; Translated by Robert Brain; with a Foreword by D.F. Pocock* (London: Routledge, 2001), 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

but “the circumstances in which these rites occur, which in turn determine the place they occupy in the totality of social customs”.⁸ So while they identify important features of magical rites such as a requirement that they be thought to “do things” (emphasis original) – that is, the rite must be expected to produce an effect *sui generis* – the definition arrived at is that “[a] magical rite is *any rite which does not play a part in organized cults*—it is private, secret, mysterious and approaches the limit of a prohibited rite” (emphasis original).⁹ Notably, while the relevant chapter is titled “A Definition of Magic”, the definition itself is more restricted in scope, defining ‘magical rites’ – acts or operations – rather than ‘magic’ as a broader descriptive category.

More recently, Ronald Hutton and Tabitha Stanmore have offered somewhat similar but more refined definitions. Hutton defines magic as “any formalized practices by human beings designed to achieve particular ends by the control, manipulation and direction of supernatural power or of spiritual power concealed within the natural world”, distinguishing this from religion, which he defines as “belief in the existence of spiritual beings or forces which are in some measure responsible for the cosmos, and in the need of human beings to retain relationships with them in which they are accorded respect”.¹⁰ Stanmore’s modified formulation defines magic as “ritualised practices performed by humans, to achieve a defined outcome not normally possible through nature and simple human agency”, with practices deemed by contemporaries to be purely religious excluded rather in the interests of preserving contemporary perspectives than by definitive distinctions.¹¹ Here the focus is shifted somewhat from the means (“control, manipulation, and direction of supernatural power”) to the ends (“a defined outcome not normally possible...”), which may counteract some of the difficulties in accessing the thinking behind much magic (we do not necessarily know, for example, *how* cunning folk’s spells were thought to work), but opens up further problems in that determining whether an outcome is “normally possible” can be challenging. In particular, Stanmore notes that this sorting should be done with reference to contemporary beliefs and knowledge systems, excluding practices that would not now be considered natural or logical but were in their own intellectual contexts, including, for example, most forms of astrology.¹² But of course, this qualification could be and often was contentious in its own time – some (but not all) of astrology’s seventeenth-century detractors attacked the practice as magical, and the lines between the natural and supernatural were often blurred as will be seen particularly in Chapter 2. In both cases, these definitions cover similar bases to

⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 23; 25; 30.

¹⁰ Ronald Hutton, *Witches, Druids, and King Arthur* (London: Hambledon/Continuum, 2006), 106.

¹¹ Tabitha Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure: Service Magic in England from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 8-9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 9.

that offered by Mauss and Humbert, but seem to focus at least as much on the content or structure of the practices – both the means and the ends – as on the social circumstances. Hutton and Stanmore do not, for instance, follow Mauss in suggesting that magic must be forbidden or even secretive.

Bernd-Christian Otto and Michael Stausberg, in *Defining Magic: A Reader* do not offer a single-line definition of this kind.¹³ They identify the not-insignificant problems inherent in using the term ‘magic’ in scholarship at all. Briefly, they argue that the term risks being seen as a “cross-cultural given”, used uncritically to refer to a very large “family” of phenomena.¹⁴ They note the “fuzziness” of the discourse, with the semantic overlap between witchcraft, magic, and sorcery (which they identify as meaningfully distinct) not always being reflected in the separate historiographies of the subjects.¹⁵ They criticise the “unholy constellation” of the “magic-science-religion triangle” – a looming presence in Mauss’ work and still a feature in more recent definitions – which defines magic in terms of the negatives of religion and science.¹⁶ And finally, relatedly, they point out the risk of ethnocentrism inherent in the use of the term ‘magic’, especially in light of the “magic-science-religion triangle”; the triangle is formed from Western history and concepts, and the idea of discovering magic “out there” is then risking universalising Western categories.¹⁷ By the same logic, we might note a certain presentism in some uses of the term. Rather than attempting to resolve all of these challenges into a single definition, Otto and Stausberg suggest moving away from the use of ‘magic’ and instead – so as not to deprive scholars of a way to discuss observations on a subject which “refuses to disappear” – instead discussing “patterns of magicity”.¹⁸ This would mean splitting up the “family” of phenomena grouped under ‘magic’ and focusing scholarly attention on specific cross-culturally attested observations, for instance the “pattern” of the ritual use of words seen to have direct efficacy.

This is an elegant solution to the challenges identified by Otto and Stausberg, but these ‘patterns of magicity’ remain somewhat challenging to use outside of fairly narrow (or specific) lines of inquiry. Otto’s own work insists that magic *can* be defined through a “discourse-theoretical” approach, but puts this into practice in a study of ‘Western Learned Magic’, which Otto identifies as a coherent textual and ritual tradition.¹⁹ Otto is able to delineate ‘Western Learned Magic’ fairly sharply, but this is – while Otto does not always acknowledge it – a fairly small corner of all that might be described as magic(al) in the places and periods concerned, and is in a sense pre-defined at the outset; if one focuses only on

¹³ Otto and Stausberg, *Defining Magic*.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁹ Bernd-Christian Otto, “Historicising ‘Western Learned Magic’: Preliminary Remarks,” *Aries* 16, no. 2 (2016): 162-164.

magic deriving from a given textual lineage, one is more likely to identify a coherent definition of that magic. This is somewhat more challenging for magic outside of textual learned traditions; can, for instance, thief detection be historicised in the way Otto suggests when its relevant source materials are not circulated texts? Would it be possible to historicise in this way terms like ‘cunning folk’ which are certainly *historical*, but which might not be best defined by their textual lineage?

As the goal of this thesis is not to map the intellectual or philosophical underpinnings of magic *per se*, but rather to gain insight into how magic and magicians operated in a social context, the most stringent or technical definition is not necessarily the best one. Mauss and Humbert are sharply dismissive of the idea that ‘magic’ could be defined in terms of what was or is described as magic by “the actors themselves or observers” as “[t]he points of view of such people are subjective, hence not necessarily scientific”.²⁰ But something like this – magic as defined by contemporaries – is an appealing definition for a historian. This is more easily said than done, however – even allowing for shifts in definitions and categories over time and in different religious and social contexts, the category of magic can be (and was often) disputed even between individuals. Mauss and Humbert’s position that “magic should be used to refer to those things which society as a whole considers magical and not those qualified as such by a single segment of society only” would seem almost impossibly exclusive.²¹ This approach can be particularly problematic because, as Stuart Clark notes, the label of ‘magic’ is typically not applied to one’s own beliefs or practices, but to beliefs and practices to which one objects – often, ‘magic’ has been defined as an inferior other.²² Michael Bailey acknowledges this and considers it in addressing the challenge of definition.²³ He notes certain through-lines such as a degree of marginality and otherness to ‘magic’, which he argues was commonly – though not invariably – deployed as a category of condescension or condemnation.²⁴ Importantly, Bailey makes the case that pre-modern people did not necessarily have clear and stable ideas about the boundaries of magic and superstition, but that these categories were instead changeable and contested.²⁵ To a certain degree, every author quoted so far in this section of the introduction would seem to agree that magic is and was *not* a constant or essential category, and that any definition of the term should acknowledge this. Bailey accepts this complexity and takes a broad approach, judging inclusion in his study on “whether a society or some significant segment within it – usually but not necessarily intellectually or judicially powerful elites

²⁰ Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 22.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Stuart Clark, “Witchcraft and Magic in Early Modern Culture,” in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. Vol. 4, The Period of the Witch Trials*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo, Stuart Clark, and William Monter (London: Athlone Press, 2002), 105.

²³ Michael David Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe: a concise history from antiquity to the present* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

bent on condemning – would have considered a given set of beliefs or practices to be magical or superstitious”.²⁶

While an intellectual history of magic might demand stricter qualifications, this looser approach has merit for a consideration of magic in its social context. If a practitioner and/or a significant group of their neighbours, clients, detractors, or observers considered a practice to be magical, that practitioner and their activities may be considered relevant to the concerns of this thesis. But this determination is made with the understanding that no inclusion (or exclusion) is necessarily above reproach and that the varieties of ‘magic’ covered here do not necessarily account for all possible others. It might be more accurate to specify a subset of magic; to discuss ‘popular magic’ or ‘service magic’. But to introduce another term would be to open another definitional challenge. Instead, a brief account of the major inclusions and exclusions will provide a sense of the boundaries of the thesis.

Like most historians of magic, I will exclude most explicitly religious practices, even when those practices were cast as magical by detractors (for instance in Protestant polemic around Catholic devotional practices). In part, this is with respect to the distinctions drawn by Hutton and others, but also out of necessity given the scope of the thesis. I will also not be dealing with most ritual, ceremonial, or ‘learned’ magic, except where it relates to other case studies. While the distinction between ‘learned’ and ‘popular’ magic is perhaps a blurred one, for these purposes I am referring to ritual magic to describe magic pursued primarily as an intellectual endeavour, as for instance by Renaissance Neoplatonists and other self-defined natural magicians. Broadly speaking, this kind of magic was a radically different kind of activity to the fortune-telling, magical healing, thief detection, and love magic that form the main concerns of this thesis. Magic as an intellectual (and indeed spiritual) endeavour and magic as a useful and accessible tool or service relate to very different forms of reputation, and to speak coherently about the reputation of a travelling fortune-teller and a highly educated natural magician would pose a significant challenge.

Similarly, witchcraft will be excluded from this analysis except where accusations of witchcraft were relevant to practitioners of helpful kinds of magic. While the definition of ‘witch’ can be challenging in itself, I am here referring to what Hutton calls the most common and general usage, to describe a worker of harmful magic.²⁷ While workers of other kinds of magic were at times ascribed the ability to harm as well as to help, witchcraft was not *typically* offered as a service, and reputed witches were not (typically) the prime movers in creating those reputations. Insofar as witchcraft can be called an activity

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Ronald Hutton, *The Witch: a History of Fear, from Ancient Times to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), x.

– unlike other forms of magic, the vast majority of reputed or accused witches did not practise what they were accused of – it was a different kind of activity from those commonly and widely available as services. Witchcraft, while not completely unrelated to other forms of magic, occupied a radically different place in the social imagination of the seventeenth century, and so did the people reputed to practise it. Witchcraft and dangerous uses of magic will be discussed only where they were relevant to the reputations of magical practitioners, particularly in Chapter 3. For similar reasons operating in reverse, I will include astrology and astrologers in my analysis alongside magic. ‘Astrology’ can be more easily defined than ‘magic’, having a more precise meaning and scope; in short, astrology refers to the study of the effects of the movements of heavenly bodies on things in the terrestrial or sublunary sphere. In the seventeenth century, the term could be further divided into ‘natural’ and ‘judicial’ astrology, the former referring to planetary influences on physiology, weather, and the like, and the latter referring to advice and predictions for the benefit of individuals.²⁸ Judicial astrology included the practices of nativities (drawing up a horoscope for the moment of an individual’s birth), elections (using an individual’s nativity to identify propitious times for important undertakings like journeys, business ventures, and marriage), and horary (answering questions based on a horoscope drawn up for the moment of asking).²⁹

The inclusion of astrology alongside magic could fairly be challenged. In principle, astrology was generally accepted through the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century; the notion that the motion of the planets had effects on the world was fairly uncontroversial, forming “but one example of the many links and correspondences which were thought to bind the physical universe together”.³⁰ At least some aspects of astrology could fit certain definitions of magic. For instance, Stanmore’s definition “ritualised practices performed by humans, to achieve a defined outcome not normally possible through nature and simple human agency”.³¹ But as Stanmore notes, such categorisations must be done with an understanding of contemporary categories, so while astrology’s outcomes would likely not be deemed “normally possible” by most modern observers, they would have been so for many in the seventeenth century.³² Some historians adopt broad definitions of astrology that do not necessarily distinguish it from magic; for instance, Patrick Curry’s influential work discusses astrological beliefs “defined pragmatically as those systematically relating earthly to cosmic events”, but others are more stringent.³³ Ann Geneva works assiduously to establish the boundaries of astrology as “only itself: a

²⁸ Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the popular press: English almanacs, 1500-1800* (London: Faber, 1979), 16-17.

²⁹ *Ibid.*; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 286.

³⁰ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 285.

³¹ Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 8-9.

³² *Ibid.*, 9.

³³ Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: astrology in early modern England* (Oxford: Polity P, 1989), 4.

unique divinatory and prognostic art embodying centuries of accreted methodology and tradition”, *not* magic, science, religion, or any other form of knowledge and practice.³⁴ Geneva’s aim is to better historicise astrology, deploying understanding of the discipline’s techniques and language in order to better understand the world of astrologers (specifically the political world of William Lilly, who is the subject of Chapter 4 of this thesis). But as with magic, the strictest definitions – while vital for understanding technical and intellectual aspects of the kinds Geneva explores, can obscure the real ‘fuzziness’ of disciplines like astrology as they were practised and engaged with.

While the mid-seventeenth century has been considered the heyday of astrology as a respectable discipline in Europe, even in the early decades of the century (and increasingly so) it was not without detractors, who often objected to specific elements of judicial astrology.³⁵ These detractors attacked astrology variously as impious, superstitious, fraudulent, or magical, often either explicitly or implicitly branding astrologers as magicians or witches, or identifying them with cunning folk. For instance, John Raunce, who identified himself as “*Sometime a practitioner of Astrologie, and Student in the Magick Art*” (emphasis original) listed the “Names and Titles of the professors of this said *Art of Judicial Astrologie*” as “*Astrologers, Prognosticators, Almanack-makers, Figure-flingers, Wise-men, Cunning-men, Wizards, Magicians, Starre-gazers*” besides other Latin names, and quoted Cornelius Agrippa to the effect that “*Magick and Astrologie cannot be separated: for... there is such affinity and agreement, between these two Arts... [t]hat as Magick cannot be performed without Astrologie; so Astrologie cannot have its end and perfection without Magick. So then the differences is not much, whether we call these predictions Magicall, or Astrologicall predictions.*”³⁶ While many attacks on astrology in print involved less astrological and magical education than Raunce’s, the tenor of his claims – that astrologers were impious magicians – was common. Astrologers for their part were aware of this line of attack, and often at pains to defend astrology from this association, notwithstanding the considerable overlap between astrologers and magical practitioners. William Lilly, one of the most famous seventeenth-century English astrologers and a magical practitioner, wrote in the dedicatory epistle to his book *Christian Astrology*, of his desire to “lay down the whole... natural grounds of the Art, in a fit Method: that there-by I may undeceive those, who misled by some Pedling Divines, have upon no better credit then their bare words, conceived Astrology

³⁴ Ann Geneva, *Astrology and the seventeenth century mind: William Lilly and the language of the stars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 9.

³⁵ Patrick Curry, “Astrology in early modern England: the making of a vulgar knowledge”, in *Science, Culture, and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Stephen Pumfrey, Paolo Rossi and Maurice Slawinski, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 275.

³⁶ John Raunce, *Astrologia accusata pariter & condemnata. Or The diabolical art of judicial astrologie, receiving the definitive sentence of final condemnation* (London, 1650), 4, 25.

to consist upon Diabolically Principles".³⁷ In its contentious and contested state, astrology begins to resemble forms of magic in some key ways; it had a textual and intellectual history like learned magic, but more importantly for this thesis it was often treated similarly to forms of service magic. Unlike the 'magic and superstition' discussed by Bailey, it was a self-defined and self-identified label, but like them it was treated with condemnation by significant and influential sections of contemporary society, who labelled it superstitious or magical and othered it from acceptable belief.³⁸

The boundaries between magic and astrology were at best highly porous from the perspectives of many practitioners, clients, and detractors. Astrology was always a central feature of the toolkit of English cunning folk, and I would argue that when it came to divination and healing the roles of astrology and magic were in many cases effectively interchangeable; the demands placed on both could be the same, the procedures involved similar, and the practitioners identical.³⁹ Magic was, as historians of the subject agree, highly practical, eclectic, and results-focused, and I would suggest this was the case for practitioners and clients alike. To those seeking supernatural aid to resolve uncertainties, the difference between an astrologer and a cunning person or fortune teller appears often to have been less than obvious and perhaps largely irrelevant. Many astrologers were also associated with explicitly magical practices, and for many astrology was part of a magical occupation. The individuals derided by sceptics and divines alike as 'figure-flingers' or 'fortune-tellers' might just as well be astrologers, cunning folk, or both. Astrology was *not* magic strictly defined, and must often be called out as distinct (as in the title of this thesis), but this blurring of boundaries and the similarities in the ways astrologers and magical practitioners practised and operated is sufficient to warrant their inclusion in a study of magical reputations.

In summary then, this thesis will deal with 'magic and astrology', taking a broad view to encompass practices that were considered magical by at least some contemporaries, and/or treated as such. The practices in question will primarily be those that Ronald Hutton describes as 'service magic' – magic performed as a duty or for payment, with functional service-oriented goals such as healing and divination.⁴⁰ 'Service magic', as a descriptive label, is perhaps less loaded than other terms such as 'popular magic', which divides functional magic like thief detection and love magic from 'elite' or 'learned' magic. As such, where a distinction is needed, 'service magic' will be used unless that distinction is specifically between 'learned' and 'popular' magic, though not without recognition that both of these adjectives remain loaded and contentious.

³⁷ William Lilly, *Christian Astrology Modestly Treated of in three Books* (London, 1647), A5-A6.

³⁸ Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe*, 9-11.

³⁹ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 69.

⁴⁰ Hutton, *The Witch: A History of Fear*, xi.

As to the practitioners themselves, this thesis will deal with a wide variety, and so the most common term will be the catch-all 'magical practitioners'. As Hutton notes, this term is broader than his preferred one, 'service magician', applying as it does to anyone who practised any form of magic, including those outside the terms of this thesis.⁴¹ But conversely, 'service magician' may be limiting in the sense that it begs the question of whether a 'service magician' is still so when they engage in other magical practices, or when they are not performing their 'service magic' as a service (for instance, performing divinations to guide their own decisions). That being the case, with the understanding that one can discuss 'magical practitioners' without discussing every magical practitioner, that term will be used as a general catch-all, with more specific terms like 'service magician' deployed where appropriate. Other specific terms will be used with more discrimination. 'Cunning folk' for instance is one of the most common labels for practitioners of service magic in England both in the period and in modern scholarship, but while this label covers a wide range of magical practices, Owen Davies points to a distinction between cunning folk, who offered a range of services for money or favours, and other types of practitioner, like charmers and blessers who performed specific types of magic and did not charge for them.⁴² 'Conjurer', similarly, while sometimes referring to one who conjured 'spirits', was used for all manner of male magical practitioners often without an obvious definition – it will therefore be used only for individuals actually described as such. 'Witch', understood as a practitioner of harmful magic particularly, will also only be used where it has been used by contemporaries. Other terms dealing with specific practices will be used only for those recorded as engaged with those practices, and finally terms such as 'white witch' which have some modern currency but which were rare and localised in the seventeenth century will not be used.⁴³

The concept of magic in society as something self-consciously practised and sought out began to be established by the seminal twentieth-century works of the history of magic and witchcraft such as those by Ewen, Kittredge, Notestein, and Thorndike.⁴⁴ Many of these works were characterised by what Ankarloo, Clark, and Monter describe as an uncomfortable rationalism, which gave way in the 1970s to more explanatory approaches.⁴⁵ This proved a major development in the historiography of magic and witchcraft, with the anthropologically-influenced works of Alan Macfarlane, Keith Thomas,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Davies, *Popular Magic*, 83.

⁴³ *Ibid.* viii.

⁴⁴ C. L'Estrange Ewen, *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials: The Indictments for Witchcraft from the Records of the 1373 Assizes Held for the Home Circuit, A.D. 1559-1736* (London: Muller, 1971).; George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1956).; Wallace Notestein, *A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1718* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965).; Lynn Thorndike, *A history of magic and experimental science*. 8 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1923-58).

⁴⁵ Ankarloo, Clark, and Monter, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*. Vol. 4, vii-viii.

and others still important points of reference.⁴⁶ Aside from their significant contributions to the history of witchcraft and witch trials in England, Thomas' *Religion and the Decline of Magic* and Macfarlane's *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* established the existence of cunning folk as a staple of village life, with Thomas comprehensively documenting different common magical practices in England and Macfarlane listing and plotting the locations of Essex cunning folk in relation to witch trials. While these works still adopted a somewhat present-centric view that treated 'superstition' as a flaw which western civilisation eventually grew out of, they nonetheless considered it a flaw worthy of serious consideration and sought to place magical beliefs in their context. Stephen Wilson's *The Magical Universe*, though not published until some decades later, was also begun in this period and Wilson acknowledges an intellectual debt to Thomas and anthropology, as well as to the *Annales* school.⁴⁷ Like Thomas, Wilson sought to illuminate the wider role of magic (beyond witchcraft) in pre-modern society, arguing that the same magical worldview persisted in Europe for many centuries, fading only when the societies in which it existed – that is, 'traditional' agricultural ones – did.⁴⁸

As the quest for grand explanations fell out of favour not only in the history of magic but in the discipline more generally, work on magic and witchcraft has increasingly emphasised interpretation, placing them in what Ankarloo, Clark, and Monter call "the broadest sense of culture".⁴⁹ Work like Clark's own has built on and gone beyond the explanation-focused context of earlier scholarship to begin to reconstruct premodern magical thought as a coherent worldview in its own right – Clark argues that historians of witchcraft must break from the once-dominant realist model of knowledge in favour of an understanding of reality as constituted by language.⁵⁰ Under this approach, it becomes unnecessary to seek hidden 'real' causes behind magical beliefs, to the general benefit of our understanding. Most scholarly work on the history of magic and witchcraft now proceeds from more past-centric starting points like this. While witchcraft has continued to dominate the field, more and more work has been done on other forms of magic. Owen Davies' *Popular Magic: Cunning Folk in English History* was, in 2003 and perhaps still is the most comprehensive work on cunning folk in particular. Davies establishes estimates about their prevalence in the population and geographic reach, their practices, their fees, their legal status, and the demographics of practitioners and their clients and positions cunning folk as a "professional type" integral to English life.⁵¹ More recently, Tabitha

⁴⁶ Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A regional and comparative study* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970).; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*.

⁴⁷ Wilson, *The Magical Universe*, xxx.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* xxix.

⁴⁹ Ankarloo, Clark, and Monter, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. Vol. 4*, viii.

⁵⁰ Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: the idea of witchcraft in early modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3-6.

⁵¹ Davies, *Popular Magic*, vii.

Stanmore's *Love Spells and Lost Treasure: Service Magic in England from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era* offers a comprehensive survey of the practices of service magicians of many kinds with an eye to establishing the social embeddedness of magic in English society across the later medieval and early modern periods.⁵² By increasing our understanding of the reputations of magical practitioners in a society where reputation was of such importance, this thesis will further contribute to this picture of magic and its practitioners as integral to and embedded in early modern life.

Astrology has frequently been studied alongside magic often for the same reasons as it will be included in this thesis; the social role of practitioners of both was often the same (indeed often the same people practised both), and the lines between the two were often blurred if not entirely absent. Also like magic, astrology has often been studied with a degree of presentist derision, as a now-debunked pseudoscience taken to be emblematic of a 'superstitious' pre-modern past. This approach has, however, been steadily replaced by a more past-centric approach taking seriously the early modern knowledge systems of which astrology was at times an important part. Much of this work has been done in the context of the history of science, and while this of course has significance for astrology as a practice, my chief concern is not with the intellectual pedigree of the discipline *per se*. Debates on the discipline itself will be discussed only insofar as ideas about the worth of astrology and astrologers affected (and were affected by) these shifting intellectual currents. Most of my focus then will be on the more social side of this historiography. Keith Thomas devoted three chapters of *Religion and the Decline of Magic* to astrology, highlighting the adaptability of the discipline and its "intellectually demanding" quality as compared with the other practices covered by his book.⁵³ Still though Thomas' concern was to explain "why this was so" (and later, why it ceased to be so).⁵⁴

As with magic, later works on astrology slowly began to move away from this explanatory project. Bernard Capp's *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs, 1500-1800*, while now referenced as frequently for its appendix of three centuries of printed almanacs, represented a significant shift in the treatment of astrology by scholars.⁵⁵ Capp aimed to better contextualise astrological almanacs and prognostications in social and political terms, and in so doing demonstrated their value as sources for the history of popular attitudes. Most importantly for this thesis, Capp took note of the power of individual astrologers' names and reputations as an aspect of the genre or form of the almanac, which will be relevant particularly for Chapter 4.⁵⁶ More recently, Phebe Jensen's work on calendars and almanacs has done much to build on this and to demonstrate the importance of these texts in early

⁵² Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*.

⁵³ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 283.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* ix.

⁵⁵ Capp, *Astrology and the popular press*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

modern society and culture.⁵⁷ A few years after Capp, Patrick Curry's *Prophecy and Power: astrology in early modern England* marked another important shift in the history of astrology, rejecting (or perhaps reformulating) the common view, seen in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* and still popular up to the present, of an astrology discredited and destroyed by the rise of modern science to focus instead on its longevity and resilience, focusing not on why people would believe such things, but on why they ceased to in such large numbers after the Restoration.⁵⁸ Curry's approach to this question was political, presenting the marginalisation of astrology as the result of an elite culture which rejected the discipline despite its enduring role in popular culture.⁵⁹ The political conditions around astrology and its decline have been a popular theme in the historiography – Ann Geneva, for instance, dramatically overturned the historical interpretation of William Lilly by taking astrology and his practice of it seriously, allowing her to 'decode' the political significance of his prognostications and other works.⁶⁰ Some more recent works on astrology, giving more nuanced accounts of the 'decline' of the discipline from the perspective of astrologers, provide useful bases for thinking about the reputations of practitioners. For instance, Vittoria Feola's work positioning astrology and antiquarianism in the history of science demonstrates some of the ways in which astrologers could be fashioned as "grandeess", providing a useful point of reference for thinking about the reputations of astrologers and magical practitioners.⁶¹ Michelle Pfeffer situates astrology in the broader 'disenchantment' narrative and discusses seventeenth-century thinking on all manner of supernatural phenomena as well as on the phenomenon of belief itself.⁶² Pfeffer's work on the Society of Astrologers and its ideological defence of astrology as a discipline is particularly relevant to the study of reputation; the contemporary debate about the status of astrology had important implications for the reputations of its practitioners, as will be seen in Chapter 4.⁶³

The theme of astrology's 'decline', or fall from a position of respectability to one of derision or obscurity has developed largely hand in hand with the debate around the 'decline of magic'. For many historians, studying early modern magic and astrology poses no question so urgently as 'what happened to

⁵⁷ Phebe Jensen, *Astrology, Almanacs, and the Early Modern English Calendar* (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020).

⁵⁸ Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: astrology in early modern England* (Oxford: Polity P, 1989).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 52. See also Curry "Astrology in early modern England".

⁶⁰ Geneva, *Astrology and the seventeenth century mind*.

⁶¹ Vittoria Feola, "Elias Ashmole's Collections and Views About John Dee," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 43, no. 3 (2012): 530–38.; Vittoria Feola, "Antiquarianism, Astrology, and the Press in William Lilly's Network (?)" in *Antiquarianism and Science in Early Modern Urban Networks*, ed. Vittoria Feola (Paris: Blanchard, 2014), 185-203.

⁶² Michelle Pfeffer, "The Contribution of the Early Modern Humanities to 'Disenchantment'," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 16, no. 3 (2021): 398–405.

⁶³ Michelle Pfeffer, "The Society of Astrologers (C.1647–1684): Sermons, Feasts and the Resuscitation of Astrology in Seventeenth-Century London," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 54, no. 2 (2021): 133–53.

them?’ The debate began with (or at least often takes place in the shadow of) Max Weber, who argued in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that the Protestant Reformation was a vital step in what he later termed “*Entzauberung der Welt*” - “disenchantment of the world” – a historical process in which the development of religion replaced superstition with rationalism and brought on the age of secularisation and modernity.⁶⁴ *Religion and the Decline of Magic* picked up this theme, presenting the Reformation as part of the process that eroded magical thinking in favour of rationalism.⁶⁵ This remained a popular interpretation until the 1990s, when Robert Scribner, Ulinka Rublack, and others began to reject and revise this narrative.⁶⁶ Works by Jonathan Barry, Owen Davies, Roy Porter, and many others further dismantled the notion of a Reformation-era ‘disenchantment’ by critiquing Thomas’ functionalist approach and by extending the history of magic into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (and beyond).⁶⁷ In particular, Davies makes use of folkloric sources alongside more documentary evidence to demonstrate that the continuing significance of magical healers has been overlooked largely as a result of the limitations of the sources used.⁶⁸ Alexandra Walsham’s 2008 article “The Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed” presented what might be called the post-revisionist perspective, acknowledging a role for Protestant ideas in what she characterises as “desacralization” rather than “secularization”, but suggesting “cycles of desacralization and resacralization”, in which both ideas and events had agency, as a corrective to the distorting linear narrative of ‘progress’.⁶⁹

The rise of ‘science’ has also often been cited as the cause of magic’s decline, including by Keith Thomas.⁷⁰ Michael Hunter rejected the notion that magic had been tested and disproven by scientists, and also took issue with the political interpretation offered up by Ian Bostridge (which shared much with similar arguments regarding astrology, suggesting that as the “polite classes” in England turned

⁶⁴ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (Routledge Classics Series 2nd Edition. London: Routledge, 2001) 61, 71.

⁶⁵ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 58.

⁶⁶ Robert W. Scribner, “The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the “Disenchantment of the World”,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 3 (1993): 475–94.; Ulinka Rublack, *Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁶⁷ Jonathan Barry, “Introduction” in *Witchcraft in early modern Europe: studies in culture and belief* ed. Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-45.; Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Culture 1736-1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999).; Owen Davies, “Cunning-Folk in the Medical Market-Place During the Nineteenth Century,” *Medical History* no. 43 (1999): 55–73.; Roy Porter, “The People’s Health in Georgian England,” in *Popular Culture in England, c.1500-1850*, ed. Timothy Harris (Palgrave: London, 1995).

⁶⁸ Davies, “Cunning-Folk in the Medical Marketplace,” 55.

⁶⁹ Alexandra Walsham, “The Reformation and ‘The Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed,” *The Historical Journal* 51 no.2. (2008): 499.

⁷⁰ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 770.

away from popular diabolism and belief in witchcraft, magical beliefs lost their ideological roots).⁷¹ Hunter emphasised the continuation of elite belief in the supernatural into the early 18th century, and popular belief long after that. In lieu of any grand theory, Hunter concluded essentially that scepticism grew due to a complex of overlapping causes, that there was in fact no direct process of ‘disenchantment’, and that in large part these developments are rendered inaccessible by their orality.

This thesis does not set out to offer a definitive explanation for the ‘decline’ of either magic or astrology or the ‘disenchantment of the world’; in some senses, the question itself is a problematic one. Narratives of disenchantment and decline can obscure the significant degree of continuity beyond the bounds of the seventeenth century, and too great a focus on the ‘end’ of magic risks detracting from our understanding of what magic was and the role it played for early modern people who engaged with it on their own terms, rather than with the expectation the age of magic would shortly come to a close and the modern era begin. While the reputations of magical practitioners and astrologers were certainly tied to the changing intellectual contexts in which they operated, the focus of this thesis will primarily be on the reputations of practitioners in their own contexts rather than over a longer period.

Reputation

‘Reputation’ is a complex term describing a number of related concepts. In everyday modern usage, reputation might refer to an unelaborated value judgement (a ‘good reputation’, a ‘bad reputation’), or to specific qualities, behaviours, or capabilities (a reputation for fairness, a reputation for tardiness). It might also refer more generally to all that is generally known (or thought) about the holder, such that it is possible to know a stranger ‘by reputation’, meaning to be aware of their existence and the pertinent facts about them. All of these concepts fall under the umbrella term of ‘reputation’ for the purposes of the thesis. But there are also more specifically early modern aspects to reputation and related concepts that must be considered.

The word ‘reputation’ was one of many used in the early modern period to describe moral judgements about a person’s standing. Used without qualifiers, it could refer to the sexual reputation of a woman, that is, her reputation for chastity or promiscuity, but it could also be used more generally.⁷² Also

⁷¹ Michael Hunter, “The Decline of Magic: Challenge and Response in Early Enlightenment England,” *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 2 (2012): 400.; Michael Hunter, *The decline of magic: Britain in the Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 4.; Ian Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations, c.1650-c.1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 3.

⁷² Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 113.; Garthine Walker, “Expanding the Boundaries of Female Honour,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996): 235-245 demonstrates that the sexual aspect of women’s gendered reputations was only one part of the broader conception of their reputations.

commonly used were 'name' (or 'good name') and 'fame'.⁷³ 'Good name' was used in broadly the same sense as we might use it today, an overarching impression of a person's moral qualities and good behaviour.⁷⁴ 'Fame' in this context descends from the Latin concept of *fama*, a common term in the late medieval period defined by Fenster and Smail as "a general impression that is inseparable from its embodiment in talk" and "the public talk that continually adjusts honor and assigns rank or standing as the individual grows up...".⁷⁵ 'Honour' was also a key term in its own right, used more often with reference to the gentry and nobility to describe their acknowledged status and virtue (while groups and individuals lower in the social hierarchy also had concepts of honour, the word itself was less commonly applied to them).⁷⁶ Magic and its practice had ramifications for all of these related forms of social judgement, and they in turn had ramifications for magic. Historians of magic have begun to approach this relationship but often without explicitly analysing it; for instance, much work has been done, beginning with MacFarlane's Essex case study, on the distances cunning folks' clients would travel to consult them.⁷⁷ This is interesting in terms of the logistics of early modern economic activity and travel, but it can also be considered through the lens of reputation; to note that a given magical practitioner attracted clients from several miles away, and that clients might travel further than necessary to visit a practitioner other than their nearest one implicitly suggests many things about how the reputations of those practitioners functioned. The geographical reach of magical reputations and the ways clients interacted with practitioners will emerge as important elements throughout the thesis, particularly in Chapter 1 where the distances between practitioners and clients are plotted.

Perhaps the most influential term of reference in this cluster of related concepts, however, is 'credit'. Craig Muldrew's *The Economy of Obligation* established that early modern discourse around credit was not straightforwardly economic, but part of an "ethical tradition concerned with credit, honesty and reputation".⁷⁸ Credit, as "a public means of social communication and circulating judgement about the value of other members of communities" emerges as a central organising principle of early modern society, and has become a touchstone for social and economic histories of the period.⁷⁹ Alexandra Shepard's work on worth and status has provided a highly nuanced picture of the role of credit in social life but, like Muldrew, Shepard is concerned primarily with credit as an economic concept, relating

⁷³ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 113; Thomas, *The Ends of Life*, 163.

⁷⁴ Thomas, *The Ends of Life*, 163.

⁷⁵ Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail, "Introduction," in *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 3.

⁷⁶ Thomas, *The Ends of Life*, 163.

⁷⁷ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 121.

⁷⁸ Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

questions of identity and social status back to economic activity and values.⁸⁰ Though concepts of credit have been built upon and expanded into many areas of early modern history, and economic aspects of magic (such as practitioners' fees) have been explored, the relationship between credit and magic has not been explicitly studied.⁸¹ By examining and reconstructing practitioners' reputations in economic and social-moral senses, this thesis will situate magic and its practitioners in this context, as well as beyond the essentially economic focus of works like those of Muldrew and Shepard. By focusing less on credit in transactions, this project expands reputation to other areas, considering variations of fame and the reach of reputations in geographical and social terms.

To this, I will also add considerations of trust and truth as aspects of reputation. Steven Shapin's *A Social History of Truth* sought to address the question of how the new experimental philosophy of Robert Boyle and those like him attained such intellectual dominance.⁸² Shapin came to the conclusion that in large part, this was due to trust as an essential precondition for truth – the truth claims of Boyle and others were accepted and believed in because they were made by gentlemen and supported by the codes of gentility and the trust placed in them.⁸³ More broadly, Shapin argued that “the identification of trustworthy agents is necessary to the constitution of any body of knowledge” – knowledge-making is a social process directed by trust and judgements of trustworthiness.⁸⁴ Though the focus of the book was on the history of science, Shapin's conclusions can be applied to magic, too; belief and ‘truth’ were predicated on value judgements about trustworthiness, and we must consider the processes whereby magical practitioners sought to be (and were) deemed trustworthy such that their claims to special knowledge and capabilities would be believed. In Chapter 4 particularly, it will become clear that the qualities of truthfulness and trustworthiness were important aspects in the weighing of magical reputations and the judging of magic and astrology, inherently tied into thoughts about the reliability of practitioners and their claims to special knowledge.

Finally, this thesis will consider reputation as ‘fame’ in the modern sense – that is, of renown, or of being widely- or well-known. By studying a range of magical practitioners from those who appear in a single court document to those like William Lilly who left substantial historical footprints, it is possible to treat fame as one of the distinguishing features of different practitioners and even to a degree to

⁸⁰ Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2015.; Alexandra Shepard, “Manhood, Credit and Patriarchy in Early Modern England c.1580-1640,” *Past and Present* 167 (2000): 75–106.; Alexandra Shepard, “Crediting Women in the Early Modern English Economy,” *History Workshop Journal* 79, no. 79 (2015): 1–24.

⁸¹ For a recent discussion of practitioners' fees see Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 93-98.

⁸² Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, xxvi.

sort them on this basis. The vast majority were not ‘famous’ beyond their local community and a few miles around, but some drew clients from further afield. Some were famous enough that groups like the College of Physicians – the royally chartered organisation with the ostensible monopoly on the practice of physic in London – despaired of their renown. Some were written about and written to from across the country and the world, to the extent that they were perhaps almost ‘household names’. This in turn invites consideration of more forms of reputation. ‘Celebrity’ is a phenomenon often traced to the later eighteenth century, with the emergence of London-based actresses and as some of the first celebrities.⁸⁵ It is a term also variously defined. Kurzman *et al.* describe celebrity as “status on speed”, conferring short term honour and continuously demanding new ‘recruits’ rather than standing as an exclusive status, and clarify that while fame has long existed, celebrity is recent.⁸⁶ They refer to Daniel Boorstin’s description of celebrities as those who are known for being known.⁸⁷ Most historians have tended to use the term somewhat less restrictively, however. Laura Engel centres “narrative possibilities” in making a person a celebrity, while Kate de Rycker argues that the fictional public persona of Martin Marprelate attained a kind of celebrity in the fifteenth century, distinct from the ‘fame’ that would have proceeded from achievements or accolades.⁸⁸ Like de Rycker, Mark Aune argues for pre-eighteenth-century concepts of celebrity, suggesting that the reputation of the Elizabethan travel-writer Thomas Coryate’s self-promotion as well as its appropriation and parody by John Taylor ‘the Water Poet’ produced an early form of media celebrity.⁸⁹ Ulinka Rublack offers a range of potential early modern ‘celebrities’, such as “star scholar[s]” like Erasmus, artists like Dürer, merchants like Jakob Fugger, and other figures of interest like Martin Guerre, a peasant who left his wife and subsequently returned to find her living with another man claiming to be him.⁹⁰ Rublack’s definition of celebrity is perhaps the broadest – “a person whose image is significantly marketed in a broad public sphere”, encompassing a wide range of individuals but making the distinction based on

⁸⁵ See for instance Kevin Bourque, “Heady Similitudes: Kitty Fisher, Mezzotint Culture, and Material Narratives of Celebrity, ca. 1750,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 54, no. 2 (2021): 307–336.; Laura Engel, *Fashioning Celebrity: Eighteenth-Century British Actresses and Strategies for Image Making* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011).; Aparna Gollapudi, “Selling Celebrity: Actors’ Portraits in Bell’s Shakespeare and Bell’s British Theatre,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 36, no. 1 (2012): 54–81.; Ulinka Rublack, “Celebrity as Concept,” *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 3 (2011): 399–403 discusses the theory of celebrity, the proposed link to the eighteenth century, and perspectives from earlier periods that complicate this link.

⁸⁶ Charles Kurzman, Chelise Anderson, Clinton Key, Youn Ok Lee, Mairead Moloney, Alexis Silver, and Maria W Van Ryn, “Celebrity Status,” *Sociological Theory* 25, no. 4 (2007): 363.

⁸⁷ Daniel J Boorstin, *The Image: or, What Happened to the American Dream* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1963), 59. Quoted in Kurzman et al., “Celebrity Status,” 352.

⁸⁸ Laura Engel, *Fashioning Celebrity*, 2.; Kate de Rycker, “The Political Function of Elizabethan Literary Celebrity,” *Celebrity Studies* 8, no. 1 (2017): 157–61.

⁸⁹ De Rycker, “The Political Function of Elizabethan Literary Celebrity”; M.G. Aune, “Thomas Coryate versus John Taylor: The Emergence of the Early Modern Celebrity,” *Cahiers élisabéthains* 101, no. 1 (2020): 85–104.

⁹⁰ Rublack, “Celebrity as Concept,” 400–401.

the ways in which people relate to the reputation in question.⁹¹ By this definition, many kinds of reputations might constitute ‘celebrity’ if those reputations are “marketed in a broad public sphere”. Considerations of ‘celebrity’ and the applicability of these definitions will feature particularly in Part II of the thesis.

The intention here is to offer a broader view of early modern reputation, beyond only credit or even good name, to embrace concepts of truth and honesty, renown or fame, news and the emergence of celebrity. This range of concepts feeds into an overarching definition of ‘reputation’ that describes all that was said and thought about a person or group; the social, moral, and economic judgements that were continuously made of them and which assigned to them a certain status and position, whether good or bad. This will also mean considering reputation, as far as we can reconstruct it, in the oral and interpersonal sphere, but also on paper. The roles of manuscript transmission and print will be a theme underlying much of the analysis here; from paper ‘tickets’ prepared by astrologers and paper charms offered by cunning folk and healers to monthly printed almanacs, paper and text were frequently essential components in reputation-building and media for reputation transmission.

Magic, Astrology, and Reputation

Some important work has been done which highlights the relevance of reputation for the study of magic and astrology. In particular, it has been demonstrated that most accused witches were those with pre-established reputations, and so ill-repute has been a feature of many studies of witchcraft. Keith Thomas described as ‘the making of the witch’ the process whereby certain individuals – particularly poor elderly women – came to accrue sinister reputations and so came readily to mind when a suspect was needed to explain misfortune.⁹² Others, like Robin Briggs, have expanded on and added nuance to this process of labelling, describing how certain behaviours or dynamics, relationships to other accused witches, and the testimony of the convicted might contribute to being labelled a witch, and the great difficulty of escaping such a reputation before it caused the holder to be associated with a misfortune.⁹³ Importantly for this thesis, Diane Purkiss argues that the ‘labelling’ of women as witches must be seen as something other or more than something that *happened to* the women in question.⁹⁴ In *The Witch in History*, Purkiss seeks to restate the agency of women who were very much involved in the struggle over the meaning of their identities, noting those who actively sought reputations as workers of magic, those who accepted and reinterpreted the label of ‘witch’

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁹² Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 599-607.

⁹³ Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 137-139.

⁹⁴ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: early modern and twentieth-century representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 145.

attributed to them by others, and those who created stories about themselves using the “cultural materials” of magic.⁹⁵ Much of this work has been highly influential on the study of witchcraft and particularly in contextualising witches and witchcraft accusations socially. However, these processes of labelling and ‘becoming witch’ have not typically been identified as in conversation with broader concepts of credit, honour, and reputation.

Similarly, some of the literature on magical practitioners treats questions of reputation, but these have rarely been a major point of analysis. Davies’ *Popular Magic*, for instance, in building a general profile of cunning folk, establishes some important considerations about their reputations such as the geographical extent of their client base, the bases on which they were able to claim supernatural power (innate gifts, book learning, tutelage from others, and so on), and discusses some of the means by which they appealed to clients and made names for themselves.⁹⁶ Detailed studies of practitioners’ reputations can be found in works on specific accounts and individuals that analyse the transmission of stories and the meanings attached to individuals, for instance Jonathan Barry’s *Raising Spirits*, which traces the dissemination and interpretation of a story of spirit-conjuring, and Alec Ryrie’s *The Sorcerer’s Tale*, which recounts the history of the conjurer Gregory Wisdom and his interaction with the gentleman Henry Neville.⁹⁷ Judith Bonzol’s work on the Dorset cunning woman Joan Guppie and fictional representations of cunning women illustrates the ambiguity of some magical reputations, with cunning women relying on the perceived value of their services to secure them the protection of their community from attempts to characterise them as witches.⁹⁸ This discussion can be taken further by extending it to other magical practitioners and to other kinds of undesirable reputation. Lauren Kassell’s work on the astrologer and magician Simon Forman (1552-1611), in reconstructing her subject’s practices and ideas, does not centre reputation but is one of the most detailed studies of an individual practitioner’s career and social position.⁹⁹ Elements of Kassell’s approach will inform the work of this thesis, particular in Part II. By picking up themes and details identified in more general works on magical practitioners, and by taking some cues from this work on thinking, knowing, and identifying such individuals, it will be possible to bridge the gap between this and the wider literature

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁹⁶ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 67-74, 112-118.

⁹⁷ Jonathan Barry, *Raising Spirits: How a Conjuror’s Tale Was Transmitted Across the Enlightenment* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013).; Alec Ryrie, *The Sorcerer’s Tale: Faith and Fraud in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁹⁸ Judith Bonzol, ““In Good Reporte and Honest Estimacion amongst Her Neighbours”: Cunning Women in the Star Chamber and on the Stage in Early Modern England”, in *Magical Transformations on the Early Modern English Stage*, ed. Lisa Hopkins and Helen Ostovich (Ashgate: Farnham, 2014), 169–184.

⁹⁹ Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman: astrologer, alchemist, and physician* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2005).

around reputation, to begin to present magic and its practitioners as constitutive of and constituted by reputations as were so many other features of life in early modern England.

Chronology

This thesis will cover the period c.1600 to c.1700, sometimes extending beyond this date to discuss the longer-term survival of reputations. In European history, the chronological seventeenth century is frequently subsumed into a long eighteenth century, or else split roughly between the eighteenth century and a more decidedly early modern sixteenth century. There are good reasons for this when one considers the major cultural, political, and economic shifts that took place over the course of the century. But in the context of magic and reputation this thesis will demonstrate the value of considering this period in its entirety, in a departure from some previous histories, by straddling the 'early modern' early period and the 'long eighteenth century' later period, and dealing with the early Stuart period, the civil wars and Commonwealth, and the Restoration together. This is not to suggest that no distinction is to be drawn between the 1600s and the 1690s; fundamentally, of course, the 'seventeenth century' is no more than a date. But the changes and transitions that affected the social position of magic over the course of the seventeenth century will be shown alongside several important continuities, contributing to an overview of magic and reputation over this 'turning point' century.

But for the constraints of time, this study might easily have been continued into the eighteenth century (and beyond) or begun in the sixteenth century or earlier. It could also have been bookended by legal developments, regnal years, or broad political developments, but none of these (with the possible exception of a legal framework) would necessarily have provided more insight, with 'high politics' rarely a direct concern for this analysis. To have used a legal framework, beginning with the Witchcraft Acts of 1542, 1563, or 1604 and ending with the Act of 1735 (which treated the activities of magical practitioners as fraudulent rather than supernatural) would necessarily have structured the analysis somewhat around laws and statutes, and would have extended the period under consideration significantly.¹⁰⁰ To have continued the analysis into 1735 would have demanded a detailed consideration of the intensifying debates about the reality of magic and other supernatural debates which began at the end of the seventeenth century and continued into the eighteenth, associated often with the rise of coffee-house culture and periodical print. While both the sceptical 'wits' and the 'anti-Sadducees' who attempted to defend the reality of witchcraft, spirits, and the like had much to say about magical practitioners, to do justice to their debates unfortunately would outgrow the

¹⁰⁰ For a further discussion of the 'Witchcraft Acts' see Chapter 1.

available space in a thesis aiming to balance breadth and depth in case studies. With so much of the scholarship on magic focusing on the 'decline' of magical beliefs, the seventeenth century has often been treated explicitly or implicitly as a period of decline, sometimes as a prelude to the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment, or some other marker. Setting aside the rise of scepticism and avoiding ending the thesis on such a note will also allow the analysis to better focus on magical reputations without becoming preoccupied by questions of magic's 'decline' or overly narrativizing the fate of magic over the century.¹⁰¹ With the recognition then that the numerical bounds of a century are largely arbitrary, the thesis will focus on the years 1600 to 1700, with material from after that date generally dealing with the reputations of individuals by then deceased. This will allow a sufficiently rich body of sources and case studies, and discussions where relevant of the significant changes over the course of the century.

Methodology and Structure

Given the broad conception (or cluster of conceptions) of reputation under discussion, the aim of this thesis is to build up a picture of the reputations of different practitioners and types of practitioners in seventeenth-century England by using specifically selected illuminating examples. That being the case, the thesis is in two parts, divided along methodological lines and thematic lines and according to the objects of analysis.

Part I

Part I, comprising Chapters 1 and 2, focuses on archival sources generated by the interactions of magical practitioners with bodies of authority. These offer the best means to begin reconstructing the reputations of 'unexceptional', or 'ordinary' magical practitioners, which is to say the largely anonymous majority of practitioners whose reputations primarily operated on smaller, more local scales. The documents created when these 'ordinary' practitioners interacted with authorities provide insights into their practices, their relationships with their clients and neighbours and with authorities, and the conditions under which they operated.

In Chapter 1, these sources are taken from the Somerset quarter sessions, using one English county as a case study for provincial magical practice. At the quarter sessions, many magical practitioners appear in a range of interpersonal disputes ranging from the reputational damage commonly touched on in the church courts to disputes over the business practices and effectiveness of service magicians. These conflicts reveal some of the issues that could arise between magical practitioners and their neighbours

¹⁰¹ Hunter, "The Decline of Magic" (2012), 401.

and where the line could be between a reputable and disreputable practitioner. More broadly, the wealth of incidental detail can provide a good degree of information about how these reputations functioned – how widely known the practitioners in question were, how far their clients travelled to consult them, what their clients thought and knew about the services they were procuring, and the means by which service magicians went about and promoted their business.

Chapter 2 shifts the focus to the College of Physicians of London, a body which had the legal authority to monopolise medical practice in and around the City of London and examine those who practised without a licence. This makes the Annals of the College a rich source for the study of the magical healers who came to the College's attention. As in Chapter 1, these interactions with authority can tell us more about the practices and relationships of magical practitioners, this time in the densely urban setting of London and the more limited context of healing, and some of the criteria by which they were judged by the College to be ignorant or malicious. The College's specific approach to magical healers demonstrates their embeddedness in London life and the 'medical marketplace', and highlights some of the issues at stake when the claims of magical healers to supernatural power were evaluated or disputed. In this set of sources, we also begin to see a handful of practitioners whose reputations, rooted in the dense and populous capital, had broader reach than those of most provincial practitioners, leading into the central concerns of Part II.

Making use of these sources requires close reading of the material, with the understanding that court records and similar documents are not neutral windows into the past. Recognising the fictive aspects of the stories told in these documents, as well as the 'voice' of the people and institutions involved in creating and retaining them makes the fullest use of the sources. This approach also means that these chapters will also give consideration to the ways in which institutions of authority interacted with magical practitioners and their reputations.

Part II

Part II, comprising Chapters 3 and 4, will narrow the focus to individual case studies. Working from the foundations built up in Part I, these chapters will reconstruct the reputations of magical practitioners who can fairly be called 'famous'; whose names, deeds, and faces were known and discussed well beyond their own communities. For these individuals, a wider range of sources, including a range of printed material, is available, allowing for a more detailed analysis of the qualities that comprised their reputations and how these were constructed by the practitioners themselves as well as by various others. The intent here is not to engage in 'great man' history, but to make use of these uncommonly far-reaching and well-documented reputations to engage in narrower and deeper analysis of what was thought and said about those who claimed supernatural power.

The first of these case studies, in Chapter 3, will be that of John Lambe (1545/6-1628), a conjurer best known to historians as a favourite or ally of George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham, and a target of collective violence. This chapter aims to consider Lambe as a magical practitioner in his own right, rather than simply as a political symbol, and consider more fully the content and context of his widespread ill-repute taken together with his highly successful magical career. This will involve a comprehensive consideration of the printed sources around Lambe's life, death, and literary afterlife, as well as the scattered manuscript references to news about him, and his own brushes with the College of Physicians and the law. Lambe's reputation invites consideration about the place of magic and magical practitioners in the popular imagination and the position of individuals like Lambe among the London courtly elite. In particular, reconciling the universal opprobrium recorded in the sources with the exorbitant fees he was able to charge for his services and the great interest his magic generated opens the question of the ambivalent moral status of magic and the range of responses to it as everything from spiritual threat to light entertainment.

Following Lambe, Chapter 4 focuses on William Lilly (1602-1681), probably the most famous English astrologer of the seventeenth century (and a practitioner of a range of magic). While he is most associated with (and has been primarily and productively studied in the context of) parliamentarian propaganda, Lilly serves as a case study and point of entry into debates about astrology and the supernatural in the mid-seventeenth century, and the qualities associated with good and bad practice in his fields. Like Lambe, Lilly's name was widely known, and he was the subject of discussions, correspondence, reference, and satire in his life and after his death. Unlike Lambe, however, Lilly had many vocal supporters who constructed his reputation in admiring and heroic terms. Not least among these was Lilly himself who, with a large body of printed works to his name, including an autobiographical account of his life and work, has left behind a detailed record of his proactive self-representation. Lilly's widespread fame and prolific publishing allow for the deepest examination perhaps of any seventeenth-century English magical reputation, as Chapter 4 considers the means by which his name and fame were constructed, and the qualities and components that he and others sought to attach to them.

The approach used in these chapters involves gathering a wide selection of sources for the individuals in question to build up a more comprehensive picture of their reputations. These chapters make use of printed works by and about Lambe and Lilly, as well as diaries, letters, libel verses, ballads, plays, and a handful of legal documents. Making use of this wide range of source material provides a nuanced view, and here again close reading helps to contextualise many of the insights derived from these sources. In Chapter 3 in particular, care will be used to read historical documents 'against the grain' as the vast majority of sources discussing Lambe are hostile and insights about Lambe as an active magical

practitioner must sometimes be inferred. This is in contrast to Chapter 4, where many of the sources used are authored by Lilly himself or by those favourable to him. This is extremely useful in building a sense of the reputation he sought to construct for himself, but some more hostile sources help to avoid the impression that his reputation was simple or uncontroversial.

Conclusions

Magical reputations were complex and varied. Their geographical reach could be limited to a few miles or stretch across the country and beyond, and their temporal reach was similarly diverse. Across the sources and case studies used in this work, it is possible to make out a general 'hierarchy' of reputations in terms of the reach of their fame. The vast and largely anonymous majority of practitioners were known within a few miles of their homes, others drew clients from twenty miles or more. Some practitioners, especially in London, were more widely known, sufficiently familiar to be referenced or parodied on stage, and to cause concern for the physicians with whom they competed as healers. The most famous (or infamous) practitioners like Lambe and Lilly had complex and far-reaching reputations with associations and relevance beyond the living individuals themselves. They were, in a sense, magical celebrities – Lilly in particular had a reputation that was readily accessible and comprehensible to both his admirers and detractors, similar in many ways to those of his less famous peers, but markedly more public and more 'marketed'.

The media of spoken word, manuscript, and print (as well as other less concrete 'media' like spectacle) could all be put to use in establishing and propagating magical reputations, and the media so employed could have a significant impact on the reputation so established. Magical practitioners had clear ideas about how they wanted to be perceived and with what qualities they wished to be associated – qualities which could, in a vacuum, be either positive or negative – and were sensitive to context in making these associations.

Magical reputations emerge as significantly interconnected; a magical practitioner's name was associated not only with the individual, but with former clients, notable patrons, and fellow practitioners be they colleagues, (alleged or actual) instructors, pupils, friends, or rivals. It is perhaps redundant to note that reputations are relational; by definition, a person's reputation is meaningless (or rather, non-existent) without other people to judge and engage with it. But the reputations of magical practitioners usefully illustrate how an individual reputation could incorporate beliefs, knowledge, and judgements about people other than the individual holder.

In various settings, practitioners were also obliged to contend with institutions and authorities that may have been largely alien to the 'normal' workings of their lives and relationships with their clients.

Here, practitioners were judged according to the standards of the institutions – secular law, for instance, or the orthodox medical understanding of the College of Physicians – rather than necessarily in line with the reputations they built for themselves.

By studying magic through the lens of reputation and assembling these aspects and trends, it is possible to build an image of magical practitioners in seventeenth-century England that is more firmly grounded in contemporary society. Like so many social, cultural, and economic activities in the period, the practice of service magic was intimately associated with questions of reputation. Establishing the complexity and diversity of magical reputations then directs us to a more complex understanding of magic.

Part 1

Chapter 1. Magical Reputations in the Somerset Quarter Sessions

Introduction

The total number of magical practitioners and astrologers in seventeenth-century England is impossible to know for certain, but historians can be confident that it was very high when compared to the handful of individuals whose presence in the historical record matches William Lilly's or John Lambe's. As will be seen in the second part of this thesis, the reputations of these especially high-profile practitioners can be studied through their printed works, their correspondence, and the range of sources discussing them from second- and third-party perspectives. But for the vast majority of those who practiced magic and astrology in the period, textual remains are more limited. The vast majority of these practitioners were not elites, with people of artisanal backgrounds and other 'middling sorts' perhaps making up the largest share of those working as cunning folk.¹ Surviving evidence of their lives can be difficult to come by, and considering that the activities of magical practitioners were often marginal and illicit, a degree of secrecy or at least discretion must be added to the usual obstacles to documentary evidence. The result is that the predominant primary source for the lives of popular magic practitioners has always been court documents, encounters with the law representing one of the most common sites of record creation and preservation.

Just as witchcraft history has gleaned much from the records of the courts of assizes where witchcraft cases were most often heard, studies of popular magic have often relied on the records created by church courts and the courts of quarter sessions, which tried spiritual matters and less serious offences respectively.² This, then, is an established source of evidence for the practices of cunning folk and the experiences of their clients, but one which has not been read with the reputations of practitioners as a primary concern.³

¹ Owen Davies, *Popular Magic: Cunning-folk in English History* (London: Hambledon, 2007), 69.

² Keith Thomas, for instance, makes extensive use of both archival diocesan records and published editions of Quarter Sessions records: Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Penguin Books, 1973).

³ Some legal sources have been used for studies of reputation, for instance Laura K. Deal, "Widows and Reputation in the Diocese of Chester, England, 1560-1650," *Journal of Family History* 23, no.4 (1998): 382-392.

For most of the seventeenth century, the relevant laws for magical practitioners were laid down in the 1604 Act 'against Conjuraton, Witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits', a modified version of the 'Witchcraft Act' of 1563 to place greater emphasis on malefic witchcraft as opposed to activities such as thief detection and treasure seeking.⁴ Davies argues, however, that the 1604 Act as well as its sixteenth-century predecessors were aimed as much at cunning folk and conjurors as against witches.⁵ Under the 1604 Act, treasure divining, thief detection, and love magic were punishable by death but only on the second conviction, and other magical crimes new to this statute like the theft of corpses for magical purposes, were capital crimes even on the first offence – a change seen to reflect King James' position on all forms of witchcraft and magic.⁶ In practice, with magical crimes and all others tried at the Quarter Sessions, justices exercised considerable latitude in sentencing, and it was very rare for cunning folk to be hanged.⁷ Some of the magical practitioners referred to in court records were indicted under the witchcraft statutes, but others were mentioned or questioned in connection with other alleged crimes having little or nothing to do with magic *per se*. For instance, examinations regarding thefts sometimes name or refer to cunning folk and astrologers who were consulted to identify thieves or locate lost and stolen goods.

The quarter sessions were, as the name suggests, held (in theory) four times a year for a given county. They were presided over by Justices of the Peace, who were prominent local figures, particularly members of the gentry, with a range of administrative and legal powers most particularly concentrated in their role in the quarter sessions.⁸ Defendants could find themselves in court in several ways – their accusers could report them, they could be presented by a local constable, or they could be presented by a Justice based on his knowledge of their supposed misconduct.⁹ Cases were first examined by a Grand Jury, which decided simply whether the accusation merited further discussion in court, in theory winnowing out frivolous or baseless accusations. If the Grand Jury was satisfied, the result was a *billa vera* or 'true bill'. If not, the bill would be returned *ignoramus*, 'we do not know'. True bills would be heard at the next sessions, with the accuser, the accused, and the witnesses (called by the accuser – the accused did not have the right to call witnesses) being bound to appear and be examined.¹⁰

⁴ An Act against Conjuraton, Witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked Spirits, 1604, 1 Jas. 1. c.12.; An Act Against Conjurations, Enchantments and Witchcrafts, 1563, 5 Eliz. 1. c. 16.

⁵ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷ Cynthia Herrup, *The Common Peace: Participation and the Criminal Law in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5.

⁸ Norma Landau, "The Changing Persona of the Justices and their Quarter Sessions", in *The Oxford Handbook of English Law and Literature, 1500-1700*, ed. Lorna Hutson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 240-241.

⁹ Herrup, *The Common Peace*, 68.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

The seventeenth century was a period of significant change for the quarter sessions and the justices who presided over it. Norma Landau finds that it was over the course of the early modern period, culminating in the later seventeenth century, that the commission of the peace came to embody what had been its traditional depiction, a body dominated by local gentry operating less as Westminster's agents in the counties and more as a form of local government.¹¹ While the laws the quarter sessions were meant to enforce were Westminster's then, it is important not to see the courts as wholly alien to or imposed upon the counties. Perhaps more importantly than the justices, those responsible for earlier stages in litigation were also local people. Officeholders like constables were drawn from the parishes in which they worked, sometimes part of what Sharpe called "a loose oligarchy" in their parishes, and even these were in some ways less influential on the incidence of court cases than the alleged wronged parties.¹² More important even than these were the individual accusers themselves. While constables and other officeholders had their roles in responding to disturbances and controlling bad behaviour, in the seventeenth century public accusations brought by individuals were the most common way for cases to be brought to trial, with ordinary people and communities taking on much of the responsibility for the detection and investigation of crimes.¹³ Indeed, the role of English courts was not to initiate prosecutions but to resolve disputes brought to them by others.¹⁴ While bringing a neighbour before the quarter sessions meant appealing to an authority outside the parish and in some sense outside the county, legal action was as Sharpe found "essentially the outcome of personal decisions by persons offended against".¹⁵ In most cases, the prime movers of these cases were those who felt themselves wronged.

Such people had several options at their disposal in dealing with local disputes. The litigiousness of early modern England has been remarked upon by historians, and Sharpe suggests that most men (and possibly women) "of moderate property" were involved in civil litigation in some fashion in their lifetimes.¹⁶ But many in the period saw the recourse to law as a regrettable occurrence best avoided; the implied violence of the application of the law and the acrimony that proceeded from it was seen as a violation of the norms of neighbourliness and Christian charity.¹⁷ Good Christian neighbours, it was felt, should resolve their disputes peaceably within the community, rather than going to law.

¹¹ Landau, "The Changing Persona of the Justices and their Quarter Sessions," 239-240.

¹² James Sharpe, "Law Enforcement and the Local Community," in *The Oxford Handbook of English Law and Literature, 1500-1700*, ed. Lorna Hutson (Oxford University Press, 2017), 226.

¹³ Herrup, *The Common Peace*, 68-70.

¹⁴ J.H. Baker, "Criminal Courts and Procedure at Common Law 1550-1800," in *Crime in England 1550-1800*, ed. J.S. Cockburn (Methuen, 1977), 17.

¹⁵ Sharpe, "Law Enforcement and the Local Community," 108.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 224.

¹⁷ Martin Ingram, "Communities and Courts: Law and Disorder in Early-Seventeenth-Century Wiltshire," in *Crime in England 1550-1800*, ed. J.S. Cockburn (Methuen, 1977), 167-168.

Though they generated far fewer records than did court cases, forms of mediation and arbitration within the community were common in the period, as were other forms of seeking redress personally or with community backing.¹⁸ But prosecuting perceived wrongdoers through the quarter sessions (to say nothing of the other secular and ecclesiastical courts) was an option available to those who felt themselves wronged, and not an uncommon one. Quarter sessions records then give insights into only a subset of local disputes. One party had to seek redress at law rather than by some other means, and a grand jury had to find their accusations worthy of consideration. All this of course to say nothing of document survival. But these records do provide insight into communities, individuals, and their disputes, and so by consequence into the reputations of those involved.

This chapter will consider the reputation of 'ordinary' popular magic practitioners using quarter sessions records. 'Ordinary' is a potentially loaded term here used as a contrast to 'extraordinary' – meaning those practitioners who, like most of their peers, were not widely known or very well documented. Primarily, case studies will be drawn from the sessions rolls from the Somerset Heritage Centre with some supporting insights from Lancashire and Yorkshire. South-west England has not been entirely neglected by historians of magic – Jonathan Barry's *Witchcraft and Demonology in South-West England, 1640-1789* is based on six case studies from the region, and major works on magic in England have drawn examples from the south west alongside other parts of the country.¹⁹ But for an archival study of this kind, Somerset represents an ideal location for a non-London-centric case study, with a wealth of quarter sessions material that so far remains relatively unexplored. Barry makes the case for south-west England as, at least, no less representative than any other region with regards to provincial culture in general and witchcraft and magic in particular.²⁰ The region was, contrary to later stereotypes "not a sleepy rural backwater", having in the seventeenth century a strong cloth industry, pastoral and arable economy, and a growing mining sector. It likewise experienced, Barry argues, all of the major ideological, social, and political developments of the mid to late seventeenth century as intensely as any other region and was somewhat early to the development of some features of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, for instance being home to some of the earliest provincial newspapers. Insofar as a region can be 'typical' then, Somerset is an appropriate example of provincial England in the period. Barry also notes that while the poor rates of survival of Western Circuit assize records means the records of ecclesiastical courts and borough and county sessions are the only legal sources for the region for much of the period, no systematic research into these records had yet been

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 125-127.

¹⁹ Jonathan Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology in South-West England, 1640-1789* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 8.

²⁰ Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology in South-West England*, 8.

conducted at the time of publication in 2011.²¹ Barry himself references several items from the Somerset quarter sessions and other archival materials from the south-west, but focuses his attention on case studies of literary sources rather than systematically examining legal sources. While published order books and other Somerset records have been referenced by historians, and despite the interest of several prominent historians of witchcraft and magic in the region, Barry's assessment remains essentially accurate, making the present work the first to make systematic use of this body of sources in a study of magic.²² The Somerset quarter sessions then also represent a largely untapped body of sources as compared with those from other regions. While the following chapters focus primarily on material from London, this chapter aims to use this rich and underused Somerset quarter sessions material, supported where relevant by cases from elsewhere, to build up a picture of magical reputations outside of the capital, providing a broader and more balanced picture of the situation around the country.

The Somerset Heritage Centre in Taunton holds sessions rolls "more or less completely" for 1607-39, 1642, 1644-5, 1647-66, 1668-1721, and 1725-1971.²³ This chapter is primarily based on research into rolls 2 to 203, covering the period 1608 to 1699. The rolls contain examinations taken before Justices, draft orders, memoranda, presentments, and other documents such as certificates, informations, and recognizances. The examinations and informations are typically the most useful for the study of magic and reputation as it is in these documents that those examined typically relate their encounters with magical practitioners. By consulting the catalogue for the sessions rolls and the Somerset Record Society's editions of the Order Books, between 1600 and 1700 I have identified sixteen cases involving individuals believed to or accused of practising astrology or some form of magic other than malicious witchcraft, and a total of nineteen such individuals.²⁴ These individuals were in some cases only briefly mentioned and tangentially related to the case at hand – for instance, it was noted that Mary Elm, accused of indecent behaviour towards John Blagdon, was said to have "went to a woman of Cholwell... who is supposed to be a cunninge woman" to learn who her husband would be – and in others were themselves accused of criminal behaviour and central to the case.²⁵ In total I have identified twenty-eight instances of practitioners consulting with clients or performing magic, but this should be considered a rough figure. Some cases refer to discrete events and the people involved, but others refer to a general pattern of behaviour (e.g. that Margaret Sergeant's father "did professe the telling

²¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²² E.H. Bates Harbin and M.C.B. Dawes, ed., *Quarter Sessions Records for the County of Somerset* (Frome: Somerset Record Society, 1907).

²³ South West Heritage Trust, "Sessions Rolls", *Somerset Archive Catalogue*, accessed June 6, 2022, <https://somerset-cat.swheritage.org.uk/records/Q/SR>

²⁴ Harbin, *Quarter Sessions Records*.

²⁵ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/38/5

of peoples fortunes”) implying multiple such events. I have also included in this number three consultations that never occurred – two occasions on which the client’s chosen practitioner could not be consulted (being either away from home or dead, respectively) and another was approached instead, and one in which the prospective client offered to go to a “conjurer” but seemingly never did.

In eight cases, one practitioner and one of their clients are identified. For five of the practitioners (Jasper Bale, John Mortemer, Austian Whoorham, Francklet Spraten, and the anonymous physician approached by Giles Carter to unbewitch two Keynsham residents), multiple clients are named.²⁶ In three cases, the clients were connected to two different practitioners - Christopher Harvy consulted both Austian Whoorham and Francklet Spraten; Mary Lansdon sent Thomas Willis to consult Mr Galloppe but he met with Edward Banbury instead; John and Guye Mores similarly tried to consult Mr Windle about their livestock but instead had to see Mr Gallup.²⁷ One practitioner, Edward Banbury, appears in two separate cases, one in 1653 for Mary Lansdon and one in 1657 for Susan Baker.²⁸ In the latter case, Baker actually consulted Banbury twice – first sending Edward Pavy and then sending Humfrey Upham to confirm the judgement Banbury had given. In one case, two sisters – Rachell and Elizabeth Joanes – were accused of telling the fortunes of two different men.²⁹

Further cases which use the term “witch” but do not give any details of the individual’s alleged activities (like Anne Moore who was “doubted of, and suspected that she hath skill in witchcraft, sorcery or such like”) could refer to suspected or actual magical practitioners, but equally could be witchcraft accusations not involving avowed magical practitioners and so have not been counted here.³⁰ One edge case exists in Thomas Bartlett of Kingsdon, who claimed to have been accused of witchcraft by a neighbour who also threatened to burn his “conjuring books”.³¹ This could be a reference to magical or astrological books Bartlett actually owned, but equally the suspicion that he had “conjuring books” might just have been part of the witchcraft accusation. As no other records relating to the case elaborate on the books or any practises of Bartlett, he has conservatively not been counted as a practitioner. Several other series held at the Somerset Heritage Centre also deal with the quarter sessions in this period; petitions, recognizance, process books, and order books all exist, but often the survivals are less complete than for sessions rolls and the condition worse. Following thorough searches, I have been able to identify only a handful of references in the other series to the people or cases referred to here.

²⁶ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/91/117-121; Q SR/21/9-10; Q SR/64/160-161; Q SR/2/108, 114, 117

²⁷ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/64/160-161; Q SR/86/175-176; Q SR/72/20-21

²⁸ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/86/175-176; Q/SR/95/93

²⁹ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/203/5-7

³⁰ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/20/121

³¹ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/96/113

Of course, it is important to bear in mind that archival materials like these have a history of their own. While they are useful sources of information about people who lived in the past, they are not only or unproblematically that. Natalie Zemon Davis points to the “fictive” and “literary” qualities of documents like pardon tales, arguing that far from attempting to “peel away” these qualities to access “the real facts”, historians should work to understand the ways in which their subjects told their stories.³² Furthermore, the work that emerged from the ‘archival turn’ has demonstrated the importance of accounting for and seeking to understand the contingent and partial nature of records and archives themselves. In particular, Alexandra Walsham argues that historians must examine the historical specificity and contingency of archives and treat them as a subject of enquiry rather than merely as an object.³³ While the focus of this chapter remains on the practitioners and clients mentioned in these records, a measure of ‘reading against the grain’ will help to avoid the impression of the sources as transparent, and consideration will be given to the role of the quarter sessions themselves in the matter at hand, that is the construction of magical reputations.

The first part of this chapter will reconstruct some key aspects of the business of magic and how it was conducted. This will involve a consideration of the magical services that were sought and offered; demographic details, where possible, of the practitioners; indications of fees; the expectations of clients and the situations that could sour a practitioner’s reputation; and finally a consideration of the client-practitioner relationship, and the relative agency of each participant. Next, the chapter will consider the distances between clients and practitioners, and the differences between cases where clients and practitioners travelled, building from this a picture of the geography of magical reputations. The third section will turn from space and distance to the media by which reputations bridged them, considering the ways the names and reputations of magical practitioners circulated by word of mouth and on paper. The final section of the chapter will examine the role of the quarter sessions themselves in the reputations of magical practitioners.

I. Practitioners and Their Business

Before discussing the specifics of reputation, it is worthwhile to build up a sense of who the practitioners were, how they did business, and how the relationship between them and their clients functioned. This will help to ground the Somerset cases in the history of magic, as well as revealing

³² Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), 3.

³³ Alexandra Walsham, “The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe,” *Past & Present* 230, no. suppl 11 (2016): 10.

some of the factors that could sour a practitioner's reputation and result in their appearing before or being mentioned at the quarter sessions.

There is not enough biographical detail for the vast majority of the individuals identified in the Somerset quarter sessions records to build much of a profile of the practitioners; the sessions rolls themselves record very little biographical detail, and though in a handful of cases other references to the individuals in question can be found in parish records, protestation returns, or similar records, for the most part there is little else to go on. Nonetheless, some biographical detail can be found. Of the seventeen suspected practitioners who can be identified, ten are identified by their full names. "Mr Windle", "Mr Galloppe" of West Lydford and "Mr Gallup" of Glastonbury are given a title and last name; Margaret Sergeant's father is known only by his relationship to the Margaret who was examined; "Illary" is identified only by one name, presumably a surname; and two are completely anonymous.³⁴ Four of the seventeen are identified as women and eleven as men. Given the common practice of the period, Illary is most likely a man being referred to by a surname, and as the individual who prescribed counter-magic in the case of Agnes Hatton was referred to as a "physicion", this was most likely a man also.³⁵ While this is a small sample, this would make about three quarters of the practitioners in these sources men, perhaps a little more than average; Davies estimates that roughly two thirds of cunning folk were men.³⁶

Though most magical practitioners also had a non-magical occupation, at least in theory, no occupation is attached to most of the practitioners in the Somerset sources. There are five exceptions, most of whom professed or were identified with trades in the medical field. Firstly, the Joanes sisters, Rachel and Elizabeth, testified in year that they had come to England from Monmouthshire to sell "Flaning & Stockings" in several towns across the southwest.³⁷ Giles Carter visited an unnamed physician regarding several cases of bewitchment around 1607; John Mortemer, a surgeon, was also accused of practising magic to unbewitch goods and to procure love in 1614 and 1615; John Howell, who unbewitched people and livestock, was described as a tooth drawer in 1618; Edward Banbury, active in 1653 and 1655, was an apothecary and barber who used astrology to locate lost and stolen goods; "Mr Galloppe" of West Lydford has been identified with a licensed physician and surgeon by the Early

³⁴ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/72/20; Q SR/86/175-176; Q SR/93/135; Q SR/81/12; it is possible that Mr Galloppe of West Lydford and Mr Gallup of Glastonbury are two references to the same thief-detecting cunning man, but with a distance of eighteen years and eight miles between the two references this cannot be known for certain.

³⁵ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/81/12; Q SR/2/117

³⁶ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 69.

³⁷ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q/SR/203/5-7

Modern Practitioners project.³⁸ Stanmore finds that across the later Middle Ages and early modern period, medicine was the second most common occupation for service magicians after the church, which may account for these four practitioners, though no clerics can be identified in these sources.³⁹ Generally speaking, historians have found that magical practitioners tended to be of middling status, drawn from among those with some access to education, but this of course can only tell us so much about the conditions in which practitioners actually lived.⁴⁰ Banbury was seemingly established as an apothecary in Glastonbury. He charged fairly small fees and refunded those who were disappointed.⁴¹ Other practitioners associated with the medical field may have lived in less comfort, however; John Howell the tooth drawer found himself many miles from home unable to afford better lodging than a barn.⁴²

Services

The range of magical practices recorded in the Quarter Sessions records agrees with those found to be common across early modern Europe by historians like Stanmore.⁴³ Most of the common forms of service magic appear in these sources.⁴⁴ Perhaps the most familiar practice of cunning folk to historians was the ‘unwitching’ of people, livestock, and goods.⁴⁵ While some physicians undertook to treat the bewitched by natural means, cunning folk were commonly consulted for this purpose and it was for this that they were often best known.⁴⁶ In the Somerset sessions rolls for this period, unwitching was the second most commonly reported practice, with five individual practitioners being mentioned and seven clients. A sixth individual is referred to as a “physicion”, but as their prescription for the bewitched was a common counter-magical operation they may be tentatively counted alongside the others on the basis of their practices in the case – the label of physician, after all, should not be seen to preclude the practice of popular magic. Just as some physicians diagnosed and treated witchcraft, magical healing was available for natural ailments, but only a few incidences of this – or at least of

³⁸ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/2/117; Q SR/21/9-10; Q SR/29/48; Q SR/86/176; Q SR/72/21; Jonathan Barry, Peter Elmer, Alun Withey, Justin Colson, John Cunningham, Ismini Pells, “County Studies,” *Early Modern Practitioners*, N.D., Accessed Jan 06, 2025, <https://practitioners.exeter.ac.uk/sample-data/>; The Early Modern Practitioners project aims to develop a database of medical practitioners active in England, Wales, and Ireland c.1500-1715. As will be shown in the following chapter, magical practitioners were an integral part of the provision of medical services in the seventeenth century, so a number of magical practitioners are recorded by the project.

³⁹ Tabitha Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure: Service Magic in England from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 85.

⁴⁰ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 75.

⁴¹ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/86/176.

⁴² Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/29/48.

⁴³ Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*

⁴⁴ Tabitha Stanmore, “Magic as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *History* 106, no. 370 (2021): 200, 205.

⁴⁵ Davies, *Popular Magic*, VII.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, X.

healing without specific reference to witchcraft – appear in this set of cases.⁴⁷ John Howell “sett the head” of his client Mrs Steed in 1618, and some time around 1631 Francklet Spraten told Christopher Harvey’s wife that he had “saved her father’s life”.⁴⁸

Even more common in these sources than ‘unwitching’ is thief detection or the finding of lost or stolen goods, with seven practitioners and nine clients. This was among the most common services offered by cunning folk across England.⁴⁹ On this basis, Davies finds that thief detection was likely a magical practice of particular concern to the authorities, but its prevalence in the courts might also in part reflect the fact that it necessarily interacted with criminality and the law.⁵⁰ Interestingly, while there are no cases of magic relating to lost or stolen goods in these sources prior to 1635, after this date these practices account for all but one of the seven cases. This type of magic is particularly interesting for the study of magical reputations, as it dealt so intimately with the reputations of multiple parties; if the judgement of the practitioner was deemed credible, thief-detection could condemn or exonerate a suspected thief in the eyes of their neighbours, as will be shown later in this section.

Four practitioners were reported to have told fortunes. Only two cases, that against Frances Younge in 1625, and Elizabeth Joanes in 1696, record the substance of the predictions (that John Joanes would come into considerable wealth of gold, silver, rings, and spoons, and that Jeffrey Caple would discover a princely fortune in goods and silver), and ‘fortune-telling’ was a broad category.⁵¹ Evidently, though, it was one that made sense to contemporary people. Also of note is that those reported to have told fortunes appear to have been itinerant, giving places of origin far from Somerset and reporting having travelled to other places. The reputations of these itinerant fortune-tellers were notably distinct from those of the sedentary cunning folk who dominate the history of magic, giving an indication of the importance of geography to reputation.

One final common type of popular magic was love magic. Taken broadly, this encompassed magic to procure love and divination of whom the client would or should marry, aphrodisiacs, and charms relating to sex and love. In the Somerset sessions rolls there are three examples of what could be described as love magic; John Mortemer offered to procure love in 1614, Mary Elm consulted a cunning woman to know whom she would marry in 1621, and in an uncommon variation on the usual theme

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁴⁸ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/29/48; Q SR/64/161.

⁴⁹ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 253.; Davies, *Popular Magic*, 11.; Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 51.

⁵⁰ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 2.

⁵¹ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/53/74; Q/SR/203/7

in 1612, Agnes Pillis of Frome was offered money by Mary George to *prevent* George's daughter from marrying William Cheppman.⁵²

While there are a few examples of magical practices in the sessions rolls outside of common forms of service magic or malefic witchcraft – for instance John Mortemer's claim that he could give Katherine Sawcer a drink "to make her follow hime where he listed" – the general impression of the magical practices in these sources appears largely representative of the established understanding of popular magic in England.⁵³ As legal sources, the quarter sessions records influence the prominence of certain practices; the preponderance of thief-detection, for instance, may be partly accounted for by the fact that the problem it offered to solve was already a criminal matter. Similarly, unbewitching was required only when the crime of witchcraft was suspected. Cases of theft and suspected bewitchment were more likely than, for instance, frustrated romance to lead to legal actions.

Fees

In the majority of cases, the practitioners' fees are not recorded. Those that are vary significantly. Stanmore argues that the main factor in fees for service magic was the means of the client, with some services tending to be more expensive than others, and with a considerable diversity of price for any given service. The Somerset sources support this impression, with most recorded fees between a few pence and a few shillings.

Broadly speaking, fortune-telling was the cheapest service – Frances Younge charged eighteen pence in 1624.⁵⁴ This may reflect the status of this practice. Unlike most forms of service magic, fortune-telling typically did not meet a specific need. Instead, it appealed to generalised curiosities about the future or a desire to be entertained. Fortune-tellers might offer the promise of future wealth, but the suggestion of future good fortune should be seen as distinct from efforts to claim or reclaim real wealth in the form of lost or stolen goods, for instance. The low price of fortune-telling may also reflect the status of the practitioners who offered it; the fortune-tellers recorded in these sources were itinerant and treated as vagabonds or vagrants by English law. It is perhaps not unreasonable to expect that whatever their services were, they might charge less for them than would a practitioner with greater financial resources and more secure social standing.

The most expensive fee offered – though it was neither requested or accepted by a practitioner – in these sources was the three pounds offered to Anne Browne by the children of Anne Francis in 1614

⁵² Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/21/9-10; Q SR/38/5; Q SR/15/2-3

⁵³ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/21/10

⁵⁴ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/53/74

to make their mother well again.⁵⁵ Browne was suspected of having bewitched Francis after allegedly offering her magical healing, and the offer of money came alongside coercion to induce her to undo her own witchcraft.⁵⁶ This, then, was not a typical service magic exchange, but the unusually large sum that Francis' children offered reflects the urgency of their situation; their mother was seriously ill, and compelling Browne to undo her own magic seemed to them to be their only recourse. A more typical example of unbewitching comes from Susan Thomas who was told by John Mortemer that Widow Huett had paid him ten shillings to unbewitch her livestock in 1613.⁵⁷ Mortemer's unbewitching was then one of the more expensive services to appear in this body of sources, perhaps reflecting the relative urgency and the value of the livestock.

The most common service in the sources, the detection of lost and stolen goods, varied significantly in price. The most expensive Somerset example was six shillings, and the cheapest was four pence, but all of the prices given for this service in the sessions rolls came from two practitioners (Jasper Bale and Edward Banbury), and most were between two and five shillings.⁵⁸ Most likely, the range of prices was influenced by the value of the goods in question and the means of the questioner; Edward Banbury charged two shillings when questioned about a lost apron in 1653, and only four pence when questioned about a missing twenty pence in 1655. Similarly, in 1655, Jasper Bale charged two shillings and six pence (just a little more than Banbury charged regarding the apron) regarding Jane Scadden's missing wool, but he asked for five shillings when it came to William Norton's coat. Though there were no hard and fast rules to the price of magic, Stanmore finds that the detection of lost and stolen goods typically cost a shilling or more, and that adjusting prices relative to the value of the goods was likely common.⁵⁹ Evidently there was some negotiation in this pricing process; Bale asked William Seager for eight shillings, but Seager would not pay so much and offered six. Bale agreed as long as he received three shillings up front, with the rest to follow when his work was completed the following Saturday. He asked Andrew Smyth for nine shillings and six pence to find his unspecified stolen goods, but Smyth reported that he only paid five shillings.⁶⁰

The common theme here is degrees of urgency or need. If magic was provided as a service and/or used as a tool, the most pressing applications of that tool were also the most valuable. Saving human lives and those of valuable livestock from witchcraft was more expensive; recovering lost and stolen goods differed in value according to the value of the goods and thus the financial urgency of recovery;

⁵⁵ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/21/117

⁵⁶ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/20/31-34; Q SR/20/46-47; Q SR/21/117-118

⁵⁷ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/21/9

⁵⁸ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/86/175-176; Q SR/91/118-121; Q SR/95/93

⁵⁹ Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 90.

⁶⁰ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/91/118-121

idle entertainment from a fortune-teller was cheaper. It is possible that other unrecorded aspects of the interaction were as or more important in determining price, but the impression here is that the cost of magic depended on how important or urgent the service was. What made it valuable to clients was not any consideration on the practitioner's side (the complexity of the operation, for instance) but the pragmatic consideration of the client's need.

'Bad' Practice and the Expectations of Clients

The legal setting that created these sources also means that in most (but not all) cases, the magical practitioner in question had in some way displeased a client or third party. By considering what upset clients and others, we can build a picture of what clients wanted from practitioners and of what behaviours could mark a 'bad' practitioner. In these Quarter Sessions records, three main sources of complaint against practitioners can be found. Firstly, there were clients who had been disappointed by their practitioner's performance. Secondly, there were those who felt or suspected a practitioner had directly harmed them through their practice. And finally, there were some individuals who complained that they had been harmed indirectly by practitioners, for instance through the loss of their reputations. A consideration of these grievances gives a sense of the priorities of clients and concerns of others when it came to magical practitioners operating in their communities. In particular, these sources demonstrate the results-focused outlook of clients, and the occasional anxieties that the power of magical could harm as well as help.

Some of the clients in these sources – most notably those of Jasper Bale – appeared at the quarter sessions because they had been disappointed with the service provided by a practitioner. All four of the clients who gave information on Bale's practices related their experiences of meeting and dealing with Bale and the predictions he gave them, and affirmed that they had never recovered the goods they were missing.⁶¹ It is perhaps worth noting that in none of his recorded predictions did Bale offer a guarantee that the goods would be recovered – his ticket told Jane Scadden "I doe hope it will be had againe in these 7 or 8 dayes; but if you have it not in that [^]time it will hardly be had any more", while William Norton's told him to "be content his coat was lost and not to be found again". When giving this last pessimistic prediction, Bale instructed Norton not to open the ticket until the next day. Since his other clients do not report any such requirement, it seems the goal may have been to ensure Bale was not present when Norton received the bad news; Norton had already proven himself a difficult client, accusing Bale of cozening people and insisting he should pay for the missing coat if Norton did not recover it. Though it may seem obvious that a client would be displeased or disappointed by a

⁶¹ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/91/118-121

prediction that did not come true, this example demonstrates that clients' concerns were primarily with the utility of the outcomes. They went to Bale because they wished to recover their goods and so, notwithstanding Bale's equivocal or even negative assessments of their chances, they were displeased not to recover them. Edward Banbury, who also used astrology to attempt to locate lost and stolen goods, testified in 1653 that it was his usual practice to refund any payment in the event that the client did not recover their goods, and Stanmore identifies other examples of this practice among magical practitioners.⁶² If Bale offered any such a guarantee, his clients did not report it – instead, they seemingly had a pre-existing conception of how practitioners like him did business and so an expectation about what they would get from the interaction. All participants in the transaction were aware that the client's goal was not simply to learn more about their own losses, but to recover their goods; in the case of Jasper Bale, his clients were displeased because he had failed to deliver the results they expected or to refund their payment in accordance with common practice.

Other complaints about magical practitioners were perhaps more serious, coming from individuals who claimed they had been directly harmed by practitioners. John Mortemer, a surgeon from North Newton, came to the attention of the justices in 1615 seemingly on suspicion of poisoning.⁶³ An association between poison and witchcraft was not uncommon. For instance, in his *Astrological practice of physick* Joseph Blagrave described what he called "Sorcery" and identified as the most common form of witchcraft: "by the help of the Devil some poysonous matter is prepared, and mixt with some blood and vital spirit of the Witch, and so by smell or taste infused into the body of man or beast bewitched, or rather by which they are infected".⁶⁴ Poisoning was a particularly prevalent element of 'elite' witchcraft cases in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when concerns about sorcerous treason and conspiracies were elevated.⁶⁵ But concerns about poison and magic were not exclusively the preserve of court intrigues.

In Mortemer's case, this association was perhaps part of the process whereby his reputation as a cunning man risked becoming a dangerous reputation as a witch. Like the cunning women – real and fictional – studied by Judith Bonzol, Mortemer's reputation as a cunning man and his position in local society came into conflict with an alternative representation of him as a dangerous witch or poisoner, and unlike Bonzol's case study, Joan Guppie, Mortemer appears not to have enjoyed the community

⁶² Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/86/176; Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 172-173.

⁶³ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/21/9-10

⁶⁴ Joseph Blagrave, *Blagraves astrological practice of physick discovering the true way to cure all kinds of diseases and infirmities* (London, 1671), 151.

⁶⁵ Alastair Bellany, "The Murder of John Lambe: Crowd Violence, Court Scandal and Popular Politics in Early Seventeenth-Century England", *Past & Present* 200, no.1 (2008): 59.

support needed to ensure the perception of him as helpful and useful won out.⁶⁶ Austin and several others testified to the effect that Mortemer had given Austin a drink laced with a potion meant to make her fall in love with his alleged client, Martin Berye, and that soon after she had fallen ill. With Austin falling sick after taking the love potion, an easy jump could be made between Mortemer's love magic and witchcraft. The examination of Robert Austin suggests Mortemer was aware of this risk; he deposed simply that a few months previously he had heard Mortemer say "that he could unwitch but Could not witch". While the most detailed aspect of the case is the alleged poisoning of Philippa Austin with a love potion, many of the witnesses examined seem to have been called to prove more generally that Mortemer was a man who had or claimed preternatural capabilities; they had heard from him or from others what he could or could not do. Evidently, Robert Austin and others involved in the case were interested in the question of whether Mortemer's established reputation as a magical practitioner meant that he was more likely able to bewitch Philippa Austin, and Mortemer himself had been heard taking a position on the matter. While the once-popular notion of witches as persecuted healers has been revised by historians of witchcraft and magic, in Mortemer's case at least it is possible to see the operation of a kind of reputational slippage.⁶⁷ Mortemer evidently had striven to make himself known as a man of preternatural capabilities, but with Philippa Austin seemingly falling ill as a result of his practices, all of his claims to magical power – not only those that pertained to Austin's poisoning but also, for instance, his claim to Joan Bande that he could unbewitch her goods – became pertinent evidence in the case of Austin's illness.

Magical practitioners might also be deemed harmful in more mundane ways; if they were reputed to be able to identify thieves and the like, that reputation gave them the power to seriously damage the reputations of their neighbours. On 13th June 1631, following his examination in February 1630/1, Christopher Harvy was ordered by Ralfe Hopton, the JP who examined him, to stand up in church after evening prayer and confess that he had wronged John Robins "by usinge many scandalous speaches and evill reports, of him the said John Robins in accusinge him of witchcrafte and of theft".⁶⁸ Given that in his examination, Harvy had testified that he had used countermagical procedures prescribed to him by two magical practitioners in order to identify the person who had bewitched his cattle, it seems likely that his "scandalous speeches" against John Robins were the result of, or at least connected to, his following the practitioners' advice. Though there are no examples in the Somerset records, sources from other parts of the country show that some of these neighbours turned to the courts of quarter

⁶⁶ Judith Bonzol, "'In Good Reporte and Honest Estimacion amongst Her Neighbours': Cunning Women in the Star Chamber and on the Stage in Early Modern England", in *Magical Transformations on the Early Modern English Stage*, ed. Lisa Hopkins and Helen Ostovich (Ashgate: Farnham, 2014), pp. 169–84.

⁶⁷ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 12.

⁶⁸ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/66/138

sessions in despair at the ill name they had gained at the practitioners' hands. In 1672 William Hike of Goldthorpe in West Yorkshire complained at the quarter sessions that Mary Hoggley and Lydia Willington had been to Sheffield (a distance of about 13 miles from their home of Bolton upon Dearne) to see "a man that is accounted to be a wizzard" to find out who had stolen some cloth from Richard Sharpe. Presumably, the wizzard had given Hoggley and Willington reason to suspect Hike because on their return from Sheffield they accused him of the crime, "whereby they have taken my good name from me".⁶⁹ Specifically, he complained that "I being a tradsman I have since ... they scandalized me losted great part of my Custome". Similarly, but perhaps even more seriously, in 1634, Lewis and William Rigby of Upholland, Lancashire, petitioned the quarter sessions for restitution after a cunning man implicated them in a murder.⁷⁰ Homfray Morecroft, they explained, had hidden one night, causing "a great stirre and uproare... in the country in searching of pitts where the friends of the said Morecroft thought him to be murthered and throwne in (as by report they were informed by one John Garnett now prisoner at Lancaster for suspition of witchcraft, to whom they sought to knowe what was becomen of him)". As Morecroft's friends charged the Rigbys with the crime, they had spent a week watched as felons by the constable "to their great discredit (being true poore men)" and to their material loss as they were "much hindred in the same tyme where they might have been employed in working in marlepitts". In both of these cases, the complainants found themselves accused of serious crimes at least partly due to the words of a magical practitioner and felt that these accusations had seriously damaged their reputations in the community. In the Rigbys case, given that Morecroft was eventually found *not* to have been murdered, and that Garnett had been imprisoned "for suspition of witchcraft" – their petition may have been concerned primarily with the seven days' wages they had lost to the unjust suspicion. For Hike though, the damage to his reputation was clearly felt to be lasting and ongoing – the two women had "taken [his] good name" and he had lost his customers. Whether it was the "wizzard" of Sheffield or his clients Hoggley and Willington who enjoyed the trust of Hike's neighbours and customers, he seemingly felt the court of quarter sessions was his best chance to repair his reputation.

In Somerset (and elsewhere) there is evidence of this same logic operating in reverse; for some actual or prospective clients, it was this power over reputation, more than magical services *per se* that appealed. Just as some had their reputations damaged by the judgements of magical practitioners, some people suspected as thieves turned to magic in order to absolve themselves. In Wells in 1649, Judith Hobbs visited the shop of John Savidge, who soon thereafter noticed that a green say (a type of

⁶⁹ West Yorkshire Archive Services QS1/11/5/6/1

⁷⁰ Lancashire Archives QSB/1/138/59

cloth, in this case to be used for an apron) had gone missing from his window.⁷¹ As he knew Hobbs to be “an idle pilferinge wench”, he immediately suspected and confronted her. She denied having stolen the say, and offered to go to “Illary (who is reputed a witch or Coniurer) for yt”. In 1655, Susan Baker was suspected of stealing 20s. from her mistress, Abigail Symes of West Monkton.⁷² She paid Edward Pavy to travel to Glastonbury to consult Banbury “who is accounted to be a conjurer” to find out what had become of the money, and when she was told the conjurer had described the thief as one of Symes’ maidservants, paid a second man to repeat the exercise in the hopes of a different outcome. In 1659 Joan Wight, accused of stealing a silver spoon from her mistress, went to “Robert Chester of Wells Conjurer” who told her the spoon was still in the house, confirming Wight’s suspicion that her mistress had framed her for theft as, Wight claimed, she had done once before.⁷³ This dynamic also appears in a brief survey of other Quarter Sessions materials. In 1677 in West Yorkshire Margaret Reyner brought her son – also accused of stealing a silver spoon – to Michael Woodhouse, who told her “hee believed itt was an Elder p[er]son that had taken thee spoon”.⁷⁴ In Reyner’s case, it may be that she actually wished to know if her son was guilty or not, as she asked Woodhouse not who had taken the spoon but “whether her sonne was guilty”, but the three Somerset examples all show women accused of theft (two of them from their mistresses) resorting to (or offering to resort to) a magical practitioner whom they believed would exonerate them. These clients too were concerned with results, but the problems they wished to solve were in the arena of reputation; they were willing to pay a magical practitioner to use their particular skills to protect their good names. Just as in the reverse cases, that magical practitioners were or were seen to be capable of clearing a person of suspicion indicates the strength of their own reputations. It would have been a pointless exercise to attempt to defend one’s reputation by recourse to a magical practitioner in whom one’s neighbours put no stock. Of course, this is not to say that this was a foolproof method of avoiding suspicion; in at least Judith Hobbs’ case, the offer of consulting Illary the conjurer evidently did little to resolve Savidge’s suspicions against her.

The impression that comes from these complaints then is that clients sought results – specifically they wanted solutions to the fairly mundane problems that drove them to magical practitioners, for instance the return of their lost or stolen goods. Their concerns when it came to practitioners was that the practitioner they chose and paid could deliver these desired results. This is consonant with understandings of service magic as a technology, and of its practitioners as useful individuals. People went to cunning folk and other magical practitioners to resolve ‘real life’ problems, and cunning folk

⁷¹ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/81/12

⁷² Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/95/93

⁷³ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/97/55

⁷⁴ West Yorkshire Archive Service QS1/16/10/3/1

continued to exist and make a living in their communities because, notwithstanding opposition from religious writers and secular law, they were held to be useful and helpful. But this status, of course, could be challenged, and for those not actively engaged with practitioners as clients, the chief concern was that they would cease to be useful or helpful and instead become a nuisance or a harm; the notion that they could magically help opened up the possibility that they could magically harm and, that aside, the fact that their judgements could influence the beliefs of their clients and others meant that these judgements could do serious damage to the reputations of third parties.

The Client-Practitioner Relationship

The journeys undertaken (and not undertaken) by practitioners and clients can tell us more about the relationships between the two parties in a service magic transaction. Much of the literature around service magic and its provision, as well as much of the contemporary commentary, focuses on practitioners who were sedentary and clients who travelled to consult them. This very much appears to have been the norm in Somerset as elsewhere; as has been shown, there are far more cases in the Somerset evidence of clients going to practitioners than vice versa. It is, however, worth noting that sedentary practitioners were likely rather easier to prosecute than those who travelled. But as has also been shown, examples do exist of practitioners seeking out clients far from home. In these different dynamics, it is possible to see the workings of reputation in the client-practitioner relationship.

In selecting and seeking out practitioners, clients exercised agency in their use of magical services. Some proved highly discriminating and seem to have had or felt they had a degree of ‘magical literacy’ that influenced their encounters. On the twenty-third of February 1630/31, Christopher Harvy of Evercreech reported that “having received many strang losses in his Cattll” two years previously, he had gone to Austian Whoorham in East Pennard (about four miles distant) “for remydy”.⁷⁵ Whoorham told Harvy to burn balls of his cattle’s hair, telling him they were “strongly bewitched”. Seemingly, this was not enough for Harvy, however, as afterwards (Harvy did not specify if he meant after his visit to East Pennard or after he burned the hair), he “cassed the said whoorham to come to see his Cattll”. Just as the literature on the medical marketplace has demonstrated that patients intervened in their treatments, choosing and requesting cures and courses of action of their medical practitioners, Harvy evidently felt Whoorham needed to see the cattle, and Whoorham was evidently happy to oblige. When Whoorham came to see the afflicted animals, one of Harvy’s neighbours passed by and Whoorham asked “what man that was” and told Harvy “this is the man that have done this mischeife to your Cattll”.

⁷⁵ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/64/160

Harvy did not name the man in his examination, nor expand on what came of Whoorham's identifying him as the witch, but he evidently continued to resort to cunning men, as he deposed that over a year after his encounter with Whoorham (around seven months before his examination), he "went to one Francklet Spraten of Mounttigen beyound Ilvechester hearing that he was a cunning man".⁷⁶ "Mounttigen beyound Ilvechester" can be tentatively identified with the village of Montacute, about 19 miles from Evercreech – significantly further than Harvy had gone to see Whoorham.⁷⁷ As before, he told the cunning man that he had sick cattle and also, perhaps remembering Whoorham's prescription, brought with him some of his cattle's hair. Spraten prescribed two more procedures more complex than Whoorham's, First he was to "take [^]of the watter of the sicke Cattll and nine bord Nayles and laye the Nayles into a brasen vessell all the topes of the Nayles togeather one to the other and power in the watter of the sicke Cattll and lett it [^]boyle all that daie and that would make them that hurt his Cattll in as bad a taking as his Cattll were". He was then to create a kind of witch bottle – "take a penny pott Juge fassion and fill it with the watter of the sicke Cattl and putt into it seven spanish needles and boyle it a daie together and bury the poott a foot under ground in his house and that then they that bewiched his Cattll would cum to his house".⁷⁸ Soon after, a neighbour's daughter came to the house "whome thereupon he suspected".

Harvy clearly took an active interest in the magical remedies he sought for his cattle. He had travelled four miles to consult Whoorham, who advised a simple operation of burning hair, and had brought the cunning man under his own initiative to look at the animals. He did not give any indication as to how much faith he placed in Whoorham's methods or his findings – he did not state that he "thereupon suspected" the man pointed out by Whoorham. But two years later he travelled over three times as far to consult Spraten. He remembered that Whoorham's methods had required hair from the cattle, so he brought some along. Spraten prescribed two complex procedures with similar but distinct features and Harvy carried these out with obvious attention to detail, remembering them with enough precision to recount them during his examination some seven months later. He did not say what became of his cattle, or of his suspicions towards his neighbour's daughter, but confirmed that he

⁷⁶ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/64/160

⁷⁷ The orthographic relationship between "Mounttigen" and "Montacute" is perhaps a little strained. The other similar placename in Somerset would be Shepton Montague, which is much closer to Evercreech (about 6 miles), but from Evercreech Shepton Montague could by no means be described as "beyound Ilvechester" [i.e. Ilchester]. Montacute, on the other hand, is a few miles further from Evercreech than Ilchester is, in very much the same direction.

⁷⁸ For recent treatments of 'witch bottles' see Brian Hoggard, *Magical House Protection: the Archaeology of Counter-Witchcraft* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2019).; and Annie Thwaite, "What Is a "Witch Bottle"? Assembling the Textual Evidence from Early Modern England," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 15, no. 2 (2020): 227–51.

suspected her of witchcraft because she came to his house after performing the countermagic, as Spraten had told him the witch would.⁷⁹

In other cases, the practitioners were more active than their clients, identifying or creating a need for their services. This was true of some sedentary practitioners. According to Martin Berye, he visited John Mortemer in the latter's capacity as a surgeon (to have a tooth pulled), and it was Mortemer who asserted that Berye needed help to "obtain" Philippa Austin and that he, Mortemer, could provide it.⁸⁰ Other clients of Mortemer's also claimed that he approached them with an unsolicited diagnosis and offer of cure; Joan Bande did not, apparently, have any sense that her goods were bewitched until Mortemer told her that he could unbewitch them.

But this kind of interaction was much more characteristic of itinerant practitioners and those far from home, who more often sought clients and 'pushed' their services, sometimes quite aggressively. This may have been the case for Anne Browne of Whitchurch, Dorset. In 1615, Browne visited her old acquaintance Anne Francis in Yeovil (a distance of about twenty-three miles).⁸¹ She inquired as to Francis' health, who told her she was well, but for a sore on her hand. Browne, however, was not satisfied with this answer according to Francis, and insisted repeatedly that "thou art a foll you dwellest amongst bad neighbors said shee if thou dost not seeke helpe thou diest". In her statement (likely one made ahead of the sessions bringing the case to the attention of the Justice or Grand Jury), Francis related how she resolutely disbelieved all of this, rejecting Browne's diagnosis of bewitchment and refusing her offer of aid. She insisted not only that she did not believe herself to be bewitched, but that she did not believe in the power of "bad howers" at all, nor that one's enemy could "course one in that powere wch hath powere to doe one harme". Browne, according to Francis, was insistent almost to the point of being aggressive, repeating over and over that Francis was a fool, and would die without her help, until finally Francis acquiesced to her treatment of herbs and prayers, after which she fell ill. The next day, Browne visited, and explained that Francis' illness was part of the process – she must suffer a little before she would get better, and Browne herself was "as sike and siker".⁸² She left Francis

⁷⁹ As discussed above, it seems likely that John Robins, whom Harvy was said to have defamed, was either the man identified by Whoorham, the neighbour whose daughter he suspected, or both. (Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/66/138). However, eleven days after Harvy's examination, John Perry testified that last Thursday he had spoken with Harvy about "the business between him and John George", and a clearly frustrated Harvy replied that "he did not knowe where it was ended... nor did not care... for the most that hee could doe was but only to bring him to Gaole". So a dispute with George seems also to have been part of the reason for his examination. (Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/64/161).

⁸⁰ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/21/9-10

⁸¹ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/20/31-34

⁸² The transference of suffering from the sick person to a healer (and thence to an animal) was one of the magical methods employed by some cunning folk – see Judith Bonzol, "The Death of the Fifth Earl of Derby: Cunning Folk and Medicine in Early Modern England", *Renaissance and Reformation* 33, no.2 (2010): 84-85.

still ill, and when she returned to Yeovil, Francis' family and friends went to fetch her. Francis deposed that Browne prevailed upon her to cut or bite Browne's thumb, enacting a common form of countermagic wherein drawing the blood of the witch was believed to cure the victim.⁸³ Again, Francis insisted she was reluctant and sceptical, but eventually acquiesced. According to Francis, Browne had found her in generally good health, but insisted she was in need of magical assistance which had in fact made her far more ill.

However, Anne Browne's examination gives an alternative interpretation of events.⁸⁴ Unfortunately, Browne was not examined on the events of her first meeting with Francis, or if she was, the records do not survive. Instead, she gave evidence of her subsequent visit to Francis' house – while she too reported that she had been offered money to heal Francis' illness, she claimed that she was trapped in the house for several hours, and far from insisting that Francis draw her blood, was taken to the bedside and pricked by force. That Browne was not examined as to her first visit, when Francis claimed she insistently offered her unlooked-for aid, suggests that the Justice may have been more concerned with the Browne's alleged imprisonment and assault. In that case, it would certainly seem to behove Francis to argue that Browne had coerced her into accepting the magical remedy that made her sick and precipitated her need to prick her old acquaintance.

John Howell of Cannington, "Toothe drawer" also appears to have actively sought clients and 'sold' his services to them, likely due in part to his reduced circumstances far from home and without money. In 1618 he was even further from home than Anne Browne, having come from a fair in Norton St Philip to Lullington (about forty miles from Cannington), and spent the night in a barn there "because he could not gett any better lodginge for his money".⁸⁵ As he passed William Steed's house, he saw Steed's wife "standinge by his waye weeping, & demanded of her what she ayled, whether shee were troubled w[i]th Cornes or w[i]th any other disease". Seemingly Howell had identified a prospective client and looked to present himself as a solution to her trouble. Steed replied that she had a sick cow, and wished she was "as neare deade as her Cowe", to which Howell, pivoting quickly from corns, replied "in gods name let me see thy Cowe". Steed duly did so, and Howell cut some of the cow's hair, and brought it into the house where he burnt it, telling Steed "yf you thincke yo[ur] Cowe be ov[er]seene, the p[ar]tie that is guyltie thereof will come in hyther". Like Mortemer perceiving lovesickness in Berye's looking out of the window, Howell saw the weeping Steed and offered his services, eventually diagnosing witchcraft and proceeding with a countermagical treatment. Steed may have already suspected her cow was bewitched, but if she told Howell so he did not see fit to report

⁸³ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 634.

⁸⁴ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/20/46-7

⁸⁵ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/29/48

this in his examination. In any case, he gained her custom not because she was familiar with him as a person who could cure the bewitched or even because she sought such a person, but because he was able to persuade her that he was such a person and that she had need of his services. Far from home, he identified or created a demand for his services and put himself forward to provide them. He seemingly also treated Steed herself for some ailment – after burning the hair he reported that he “sett the head of the saide Steeds wyfe”, and Joan Francis deposed that when she stopped to visit Steed’s house “hearinge that his wife was sick” she found “a Strange man there pynninge of a kerchyf” who told her “the head of the saide Steeds wife was flowen, and that he had sett yt agayn”. Howell’s is a relatively rare case (certainly among the Somerset sessions rolls) of the magical practitioner being examined and expounding on their own magical practices. He was quite candid about having encountered Steed, questioned her, and proceeded with his remedy, and gave a detailed account of what he did. While Mortemer and Browne were portrayed as ‘pushing’ their services by their prospective clients, Howell admitted freely to having done so.

In these cases, the practitioners in question appear to have used persuasive techniques emphasising the good their services could do and/or the harm of failing to engage them. In most of these cases the erstwhile ‘clients’ would have had an interest in demonstrating that they were not willing participants in the cunning folks’ actions. In moral tracts, those who resorted to sorcerers were denounced as strongly as the practitioners themselves, so they may have wished to avoid such stigmas. Perkins, for instance, described those who resorted to the “good Witch” as “ignorant and superstitious people”, entangled in “the bands of errour, ignorance, and false faith”.⁸⁶ They may also have wished to avoid being seen as complicit in or guilty of crimes themselves – Martin Berye, for instance, if he really did offer Mortemer money to slip Austin the love potion that had poisoned her, clearly would not have wished this to be known. But in some cases it seems clear that magical practitioners could and did seek out prospective clients and impress upon them the necessity of magical aid. Given that Howell was forty miles from home and fresh from a night spent in a barn because he could afford nothing better, it might be speculated that a more ‘aggressive’ approach was appealing or necessary when the practitioner was not known or not yet known in the local area, and that having clients seek one out and travel miles for consultations was a luxury available only to better-established cunning folk.

Practitioners and Their Business

From these sources then we can develop some sense of how the business of magic was conducted and by whom. The practitioners in Somerset were much like those elsewhere in terms of demographics

⁸⁶ William Perkins, *A discourse of the damned art of witchcraft so farre forth as it is reuealed in the Scriptures, and manifest by true experience* (Cambridge, 1610), 176-177.

and the services they offered. Their fees, where recorded, varied significantly and according to the services on offer. The range of fees can be mapped loosely onto concerns of urgency; serious matters, dealing with expensive goods or human or animal wellbeing, were valued more highly than idle entertainments or the detection of less costly goods. The theme of utility and needfulness can also be identified in the complaints people made about magical practitioners. Some objected to a perceived failure of the practitioner to deliver the promised results, while others were concerned because magic had ceased to be useful and instead become harmful. Some of this harm was not itself magical, however, but reputational, and this reflected another important aspect of the role of magical practitioners, particularly those engaged in thief detection; by magical means, it was expected and desired by many that practitioners could identify both the guilty and the innocent. In this way their magical reputations, by which it was understood that their operations could provide truthful information, were leveraged to make or break the more ordinary reputations of those suspected or accused of crimes. Finally, the Quarter Sessions records demonstrate the different ways that client-practitioner relationships could function; while it was perhaps most usual for clients to 'shop around' and approach practitioners when they felt they needed their services, it was also not uncommon for practitioners to actively and even aggressively seek out clients and impress upon them their perhaps unrecognised need for magical assistance. This practitioner-led approach was largely, but not exclusively, that of practitioners far from home, operating without an established local reputation or outside the reach of whatever reputation they enjoyed at 'home'.

II. Geographies of Reputation

The differences in the client-practitioner relationship discussed above appear to line up imperfectly with the differences in where practitioners were and who – they or their clients – was on their 'home turf'. This gives an indication of the importance of geography – of distance and place – for magical reputations. These reputations were partly tied to places – they had a spatial reach, and a practitioner outside of the reach of any localised reputation they might hold were obliged to act differently to secure clients.

Travelling Clients

Taking into account the distances between magical practitioners and their clients can be a valuable means of understanding more about the reputations of those practitioners; we can begin to understand the availability of magic, as well as the geographical reach of magical reputations and their localised or place-based aspects. The foundation of this work has been laid by some of the major works on the history of cunning folk in England, which have built up a picture of the geographical spread of

cunning folk and their clients' access to them. Alan Macfarlane's *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* determined that cunning folk could be found across the county ("nowhere in Essex was there a village more than ten miles from a known cunning man") and that people readily travelled five miles or more to consult them, in some cases travelling twenty miles or more.⁸⁷ Owen Davies has reinforced these impressions, suggesting based on the temporal spread of Macfarlane's data that on average, the nearest cunning man or woman was likely five or six miles away.⁸⁸ Both historians have also noted that clients often did not visit their nearest practitioner, suggesting that clients were selective, and willing to go out of their way to consult the 'right' person for the job. As the sessions rolls are much less expansive than the records of the Home Circuit Assizes used by Macfarlane and others, it is harder to map the provision of magical services across Somerset. But most cases do provide a 'home' location for the client and practitioner, as well as recording where the consultation or act of magic took place. From this it is possible to draw conclusions about the distances travelled by practitioners and clients and the peculiar position of itinerant practitioners. Building on Section I above, this geography gives a sense of the importance of place for magical reputations and their spatial reach.

Much of the discussion around geography in the history of magic centres on the distances travelled by clients and their representatives to consult practitioners. This information can be usefully compared with work on other types of journeys people made in the period – to attend markets or fairs, for instance, or to consult physicians and other medical practitioners. Of the seventeen practitioners identified in the sessions rolls, the significant majority (fourteen) were seemingly visited by clients at or near the places given as their homes in the court documents. John Mortemer mostly appears to have received his clients, but on one occasion was seen at his work in John Bande's alehouse, cutting crosses into sticks to help Bande's beer.⁸⁹ Austian Whoorham also received his client Christopher Harvy, but later at Harvy's insistence travelled to see his bewitched cattle in person.⁹⁰ The clients who travelled to visit practitioners travelled on average about thirteen miles, with some going only a few miles to the next village or nearest town, and others travelling twenty miles or more. The greatest distance travelled by a client was around thirty-seven miles, a journey undertaken by Giles Carter of Keynsham to seek advice from "a physicion" in Gloucester regarding the suspected bewitchment of several of his neighbours. Nine client journeys (including those of Jasper Bale's four Pitminster clients) travelled less than five miles, and another six journeys (including two different men sent by Susan

⁸⁷ Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A regional and comparative study* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970), 120.

⁸⁸ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 67. Macfarlane's estimates regarding distance are based on mapping thirty-four practitioners found in his sources – Davies notes that these were not all contemporary with each other, but also that the figure excludes practitioners not mentioned in court records to arrive at a more precise estimate.

⁸⁹ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/21/9-10

⁹⁰ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/64/160

Baker to Edward Banbury) were between ten and twenty miles. These numbers agree very closely with those given by Macfarlane for Essex; people readily travelled five miles or more, and sometimes travelled as many as twenty. Whatever the differences between Essex and Somerset as counties, it would appear that people in England in the period were fairly consistent in what they considered a reasonable or a necessary journey to consult a magical practitioner. It is difficult to say with certainty how many of these practitioners were the nearest available to the clients, but it seems probable that this was not always the case. For instance, in 1655 Susan Baker of West Monkton sent two men nineteen miles to consult Edward Banbury in Glastonbury, while that same year Jane Scadden, Andrew Smyth, William Norton, and William Seager had sought the same service from Jasper Bale in Taunton, about four miles from West Monkton.⁹¹

Work done on journeys taken to markets can give further context for this, as well as providing a more regionally specific point of comparison. Alan Everitt finds that across England and Wales in the seventeenth century, people travelled on average seven miles to markets, with some travelling less than one mile and others more than one hundred.⁹² In England as a whole, the most common distance travelled per these figures was between one and five and a half miles, with this distance bracket accounting for 39% of people. In the west of England, the mode was higher than for the country as a whole, with 35% travelling from six to nine and a half miles. In terms of distance travelled to markets, the West of England was then slightly above average, with much shorter market trips than in the North and much longer ones than in the East. So, people in seventeenth-century Somerset would have been accustomed to walking several miles to attend markets, and it should not be surprising to find that they would travel similar distances in search of magic. The Quarter Sessions material suggests that often a suitable magical practitioner was closer to hand than a suitable market (with 43% of the clients in these sources travelling no more than five and half miles) but that in many cases clients were willing to travel much further than that; 38% of these clients travelled ten miles or more to find a practitioner, while 40% of people in the region travelled such distances to markets. If nothing else, this is further evidence for the contention, raised by numerous historians of magic since Thomas and Macfarlane, that magic was readily available in early modern England; in terms of distance, magic was no more difficult to access than were markets.

A closer analogy might be found in the literature on medical practitioners who, like magical practitioners, were individuals with specific expertise offering necessary services to their clients.

⁹¹ Somerset Q SR/95/93; Q SR/91/118-121. Bale's home of Cheddon Fitzpaine was only about two miles from West Monkton, but he worked out of alehouses in Taunton.

⁹² Alan Everitt, "The Marketing of Agricultural Produce," in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol 4 – 1500-1640*, ed. Joan Thirsk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 499.

Reconstructing the ‘medical marketplace’ of rural England, Ian Mortimer finds that medical practitioners were readily available in towns across the country, and argues that rural dwellers could not be called “medically remote” when they were willing and able to travel several miles to avail themselves of town-based medical services.⁹³ Here again similar figures emerge for distances; Mortimer finds that in his case study of Kent, few people lived more than seven miles from an established medical practitioner, and that people travelled for medical services as readily and as far as they did for markets.⁹⁴ Occupationally-defined medical practitioners were rarely based in rural parishes in the period, and residents of those parishes were served by town-based practitioners. To a lesser extent, the same may have been true of magical practitioners in Somerset; several of those in the sessions rolls were located in rural parishes – John Mortemer in North Newton and the unnamed cunning woman of Cholwell, for instance – but about half of those who received clients rather than visiting them were based in towns or in villages less than three miles from towns. The average distance travelled by clients to these town-based practitioners was also significantly higher – approximately seventeen miles versus ten miles for the more rural practitioners. Giles Carter’s thirty-seven-mile journey from Keynsham to Gloucester does skew this figure significantly, however; excluding this outlier the average distance travelled to a town-based practitioner was about thirteen miles, just slightly higher than the average distance travelled to a rural practitioner.⁹⁵ But this suggests that like medical expertise, if to a lesser extent, magical expertise was in large part concentrated in towns, and it was town-based practitioners who in large part provided services to rural people. It also suggests that the reputations of practitioners located in or near towns may have enjoyed a somewhat greater reach. As with other services, the importance of towns as centres of population and hubs for services and travel might be expected to contribute to the reach of a town-based practitioner’s reputation.

These comparisons should, of course, be taken with caution; the sample of clients from these sources is far smaller than the those used in quantitative studies of markets and medicine (and in the case of medicine those sources are limited to southeast England), and for most of the Somerset magical practitioners we have information on only a single client. But these figures do give a sense of the availability of magic; magical practitioners were often as close by as markets or closer, and even when clients travelled long distances, practitioners were most likely within what the client might reasonably have considered a travelable distance. Furthermore, they make it possible to give a rough figure for

⁹³ Ian Mortimer, *The Dying and the Doctors: the Medical Revolution in Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), 40.

⁹⁴ Ian Mortimer, "The Rural Medical Marketplace in Southern England c. 1570–1720," in *Medicine and the Market in England and Its Colonies, C. 1450- C. 1850*, ed. Mark Jenner and Patrick Wallis (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 74.

⁹⁵ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/2/117

the spatial reach of a magical reputation; while most clients travelled short distances to a ‘local’ practitioner less than six miles away, a practitioner might reasonably be known and draw clients from ten to twenty miles, but rarely more than that. Urban practitioners appear to have had somewhat wider-reaching reputations; the furthest any client travelled in these sources was the thirty-seven miles from Keynsham to Gloucester, to seek help for the bewitched from a physician, and other long trips were made to consult Edward Banbury and Mr Gallup in Glastonbury.⁹⁶ Conversely, many but not all of the shorter trips were to villages like North Newton and East Pennard. Jasper Bale, who saw clients in Taunton, skews these figures slightly as four of his clients, all from the village of Pitminster (about four miles away) appear in the court records. The distance travelled by clients and the reach of practitioners’ reputations cannot be said to be identical – it is certainly possible that would-be clients were aware of practitioners they deemed too far distant to visit, and some of these more long-distance reputations will be considered in later chapters. But practitioners’ reputations appear to have reached at least as far as their client base would normally travel – potentially many miles.

Travelling and Itinerant Practitioners

Less frequently, practitioners were the ones who travelled. When they did so, they were typically much further from home than were travelling clients. When Anne Brown visited Anne Francis in Yeovil, she was twenty-three miles from her own home in Whitchurch, Dorset.⁹⁷ John Howell, who had been to a fair in Norton St Philip, was forty miles from his home in Cannington when he offered his services to William Steed’s wife.⁹⁸ Being away from home, these practitioners were beyond the reach of whatever local reputation they might otherwise have relied on and often had to ‘push’ their services more actively than was perhaps the norm.

Furthest from home were those practitioners who appear to have been largely itinerant, with home parishes far from Somerset. Practitioners like this account for three cases – Frances Younge, the father of Margaret Sergeant, and the Joanes sisters.⁹⁹ Younge and her husband claimed to have been born in Penzance, Cornwall, and had last been resident in Rochester, Kent. Sergeant and her father were “late of Newington in the County of Surrey” and had also been in Devon. In discussing the geography of reputations, these itinerant practitioners require a special consideration. They cannot be simply identified with other practitioners who encountered clients away from home or who travelled to visit clients (like Anne Browne); travel was part of their lifestyle, and this influenced the kind of magical services they provided and the ways they were seen and understood by prospective and actual clients.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*; Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/86/175-176; Q SR/95/93

⁹⁷ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/20/31-34; Q SR/20/46-47; Q SR/21/117-118

⁹⁸ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/29/48

⁹⁹ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/53/75; Q SR/93/135

John Howell, a “tooth drawer”, may have been habitually itinerant if most or all of his work was done at fairs like the one in Norton St Philip, but as this cannot be established with any degree of certainty, the focus will be on the two cases where the practitioners’ itinerant lifestyles are more clearly attested.¹⁰⁰

The first of these cases was that of Frances and John Younge in 1625. Two witnesses, William Feaver and John Joanes alias Keynor, both of Queen Camel, were examined the 16th of July.¹⁰¹ Feaver deposed that “hee will affirme upon his oath... that the abovesaid Frances Younge (who now saith that shee hath not lyved out of the towne of Rochester for the space of Nyne yeares last paste) was wandringe in this countrey aboute a yeare since, and tellinge of fortune”. He also reported that she was “like to have cut or picked the purse of Rebecca Thatcher of Camell... as shee was tellinge her fortune”. This would seem to suggest that the charge against Younge was for robbing Rebecca Thatcher, perhaps in the space of time when she denied having been outside of Rochester. John Joanes, however, said nothing of Thatcher’s purse, only reporting that Younge had told his fortune the previous Tuesday. Specifically, he deposed that she had come into the barn where he was threshing, and offered to tell his fortune, for which he gave her eighteen pence. She told him he would “have it... againe that daie fortnight” as well as “greate stoare of goolde and silver, twoe goold ringes and xii silver spoones”. He added that “comminge to the Justice of peace w[i]th the said Frances”, she returned the money he had paid her; clearly Younge was in trouble for fortune-telling as well as the suspected theft, and sought to ameliorate her situation by refunding the obviously displeased client who was bringing her before the Justice.

However, when they were examined the following day, the Younges were not questioned about fortune-telling or theft, only about their relationship to each other, their places of origin, and their destination.¹⁰² According to John, he was returning from Rochester to his birthplace of Penzance in Cornwall. This put him about halfway through a roughly three-hundred-mile journey across the south of England. He deposed that “Frances Younge the woman now in his Company is his wyfe”, that they had been married one year ago by a curate in Southwark, and that the “Children, now likewise taken in his Company are his brethren”. It seems he had already been questioned about his relationship to Frances, as the examination records that he was “demanded whie hee did tell the Tithingman of Camell that hee had byne marryed these 4 yeares” (he replied that if he had said so, he did not remember it). Frances’ examination was brief but along similar lines – like John she deposed that she had been born

¹⁰⁰ Tooth-drawers have often been studied as one of the many varieties of itinerant ‘mountebank’ healers – see for example M. A. Katritzky, “Marketing medicine: the image of the early modern mountebank,” *Renaissance Studies* 15, no 2. (2001): 121-153.

¹⁰¹ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/53/74

¹⁰² Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/53/75

in Penzance and had lived in Rochester for the past nine years. She further claimed, as Feaver had said she would, that “in all that tyme shee never lyved out of the said towne of Rochester”. If Rebecca Thatcher had had her purse cut during that time, it seems obvious why Younge would dispute and be questioned on her whereabouts. But the fact that she and John were examined not only on their movements in Somerset, but where they were born and resided, whether, for how long, and by whom they were married, and what was their relationship to the two children in their company, demonstrates a generalised investigation into two strangers or outsiders and their lifestyle. As the questioning indicates, they were regarded with considerable suspicion, not only as to whether they had told fortunes or cut purses, but as to where they came from, whether they were lawfully married and/or a family unit, and other questions seemingly meant to ascertain whether or not they lived in what would have been considered a respectable fashion.

Margaret Sergeant was seemingly questioned more directly about fortune-telling. On 7th of July 1656, Sergeant, who was recorded as “late of Newington in the County of Surrey”, deposed that she and her father had been apprehended at Barrington in Somerset (which would place them about 130 miles from home), but her father had escaped the officers.¹⁰³ She did not state specifically for what reason they were apprehended, but reported that “her Father did professe the telling of peoples fortunes, & that hee did tell some at Barrington, & had money of the people for the same; at w[hi]ch tyme this Exam[inan]t was w[i]th her said father”. But like the Younges, she was also questioned as an outsider – “being demaunded where they learned that strange language that they speake, saith of their Father”. Also like the Younges, it seems the Sergeants were suspected of crimes besides fortune-telling, as Margaret also deposed that they had acquired the horse they had with them in Devonshire. This would also indicate that the Sergeants, unlike the Younges, were not travelling from their last residence, coming to Somerset from the southwest rather than the east.

The Joanes sisters, according to Simon Helliard, identified themselves as “Egiptians”, the most common label in the seventeenth century for persons who would now be described as Gypsies, Roma, and Travellers, and while they were not explicitly identified as such in the records, the reference to the Sergeants’ “strange language” may suggest that they were also Gypsies or foreigners.¹⁰⁴ A stereotypical

¹⁰³ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/93/135

¹⁰⁴ The word “Gypsy” has a complex history and is the subject of debates today as to its appropriateness, as it has derogatory connotations in certain contexts and usages, especially where a lower-case “g” is used. In policy, advocacy, and official circles, “Gypsies and Travellers” is now the normal way to refer to Britain’s hereditary and traditionally nomadic populations, with “Gypsy, Roma and Traveller” (GRT) as a descriptor for persons with Roma or nomadic heritage. For historians, Becky Taylor and Jim Hinks suggest that while “Gypsies and Travellers” and GRT are most appropriate when discussing the present day, “Gypsy” (with a capital “G” indicating that this is the name of a cultural group) is most appropriate unless specifically discussing Scots and Irish Travellers.

association between Gypsy, Romany, and Traveller persons and magical practices such as fortune-telling particularly by palmistry (divination by palm-reading) survives into the twenty-first century, and was certainly common in the seventeenth, with hostile writing against Gypsies emphasising fortune-telling, alongside imposture to the extent that ‘Gypsies’ was at times used almost interchangeably with ‘fortune tellers’ or ‘palmisters’, or as a term of invective connoting dishonesty.¹⁰⁵ The first of a series of sixteenth-century statutes criminalising Gypsies, the 1531 ‘Egyptians Act’ Statutes referred to “outlandish people calling themselves Egyptians” who “used great, subtil and crafty means to deceive the people, bearing them in hand that they by palmestry could tell men’s and women’s fortunes, and... deceived the people of their money”, while the last in 1563 (not repealed until 1783) referred not only to “Egyptians” but to those “in any Company or Fellowship of Vagabonds, commonly called or calling themselves Egyptians, or counterfeiting, transforming or disguising themselves by their Apparel, Speech or other Behaviour, like unto such Vagabonds, commonly called, or calling themselves Egyptians”.¹⁰⁶ While the laws against being and living as a Gypsy reflect the concern of authorities with individuals who were seen to defy all social and communal norms, and the potential punishments included deportation and execution, David Cressy has found that in practice in the seventeenth century, Justices and Magistrates were reluctant to take such extreme measures.¹⁰⁷ But the line of questioning faced by the travelling fortune tellers in the Somerset sessions rolls is demonstrative of official concerns about outsiders who became suspected of criminal behaviour.

These cases of itinerant fortune-tellers exemplify the role of law in seventeenth-century England as a communal exercise and concern. All kinds of crime were treated as communal grievances, disruptive to peace and order in the community, and to the detriment of moral conformity and good behaviour.¹⁰⁸ The literature around vagrancy, roguery, and vagabondage demonstrates how much of the time and

Becky Taylor and Jim Hinks, “What Field? Where? Bringing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History into View,” *Cultural and Social History* 18, no. 5 (2021): 631.

In a blog post published by Huffington Post and the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University, Margareta Matache has cautioned strongly against the use of “Gypsy” to “advance a global *Gypsy* identity”, but notes that it may still be a preferable term for scholars working on groups in Hungary, Spain, and the UK who may not identify with the term “Roma”.

Margareta Matache, “Dear Gadjo (non-Romani) Scholars...”, *FXB Center for Health & Human Rights at Harvard University*, June 19, 2017, accessed June 28, 2022, <https://fxb.harvard.edu/2017/06/19/dear-gadje-non-romani-scholars/>.

My intention here has been to use the most appropriate term for this context and in a respectful manner. The term most commonly used in the period would have been “Egyptians” but for obvious reasons this may be considered confusing or inappropriate in a modern context outside of quotation marks.

David Cressy, “Trouble with Gypsies in Early Modern England”, *The Historical Journal* 59, no. 1 (2016): 53 demonstrates the existence of “a distinctive Gypsy language” spoken by some Gypsies in seventeenth-century England.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁰⁶ The Egyptians Act, 1531, 22 Henry VIII c. 10.; Egyptians Act, 1563, 5 Elizabeth I, c. 20.

¹⁰⁷ Cressy, “Trouble with Gypsies”, 70.

¹⁰⁸ Herrup, *The Common Peace*, 3.

energy of legal institutions in England in this period was directed at controlling or removing 'undesirable' outsiders, of which travelling fortune tellers were clearly an example. While fortune tellers were not necessarily itinerant, Davies has suggested that mobility may have been particularly beneficial for this type of activity along with treasure detection and some other kinds of popular magic.¹⁰⁹ And the stereotypical association of 'Egyptians' and the power to tell fortunes could also have served as a boon for travelling fortune tellers as one of a multiplicity of factors which could contribute to a magical reputation. Certainly John Melton thought so, railing in *Astrologaster* against "Rogues" who darkened their skin to be seen as "Aegyptians" or "Gypsies", and against the people who "seeing them to be blacke and ill fauoured people, and it may be hearing before of some as wise as themselues, of the *Gypsies* cunning, would easily beleue that they were Cunning men, and doe strange things."¹¹⁰ Though Melton was fixated on people disingenuously representing themselves as "Aegyptians" he clearly felt that there was a common understanding that Gypsies were "cunning" and able to "doe strange things", and due to this association "many... neuer see a tawny visaged man, with a blacke curled head of haire (especially, if he be scholler, or professe himselfe to be one) but they will thinke he is a Cunning man and a Coniurer".¹¹¹ Tabitha Stanmore argues that service magicians generally were seen as "useful but distasteful" in early modern England, and that a similar category was applied to marginalised groups, like Gypsies, who were often ascribed magical powers.¹¹² Of course, while it could be useful or even essential, itineracy could also be a liability in the event that practitioners came into legal difficulties, especially compounded by prejudices against 'Egyptians'. Witnesses (particularly character witnesses) and local reputation were vital components in the evidentiary environment of seventeenth-century England, where hearsay was not only unproblematic but a desirable category of testimony.¹¹³ Without roots in the local community, travellers and outsiders were inherently more vulnerable than sedentary practitioners.

Pedlars and chapmen, like Gypsies and fortune-tellers, risked arrest as vagabonds, notwithstanding the usefulness or desirability of their services in many communities, and like magical practitioners might have benefited from a settled abode to which customers could be drawn.¹¹⁴ In a study of itinerant pedlars in the later seventeenth century Margaret Spufford finds that many successful travelling chapmen eventually took a shop, in many cases fully changing their itinerant business for a sedentary

¹⁰⁹ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 11.

¹¹⁰ John Melton, *Astrologaster, or, The figure-caster*, (London, 1620), 47-48.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹¹² Stanmore, "Magic as a Useful Category of Historical Analysis," 200.

¹¹³ Herrup, *The Common Peace*, 86.; Barbara Shapiro, "Law and the Evidentiary Environment" in *The Oxford Handbook of English Law and Literature, 1500-1700*, ed. Lorna Hutson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 270-271.

¹¹⁴ Margaret Spufford, *The Great Reclotting of Rural England: Petty Chapmen and their Wares in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), 7.

one.¹¹⁵ Unfortunately, the evidence for the lives of the Somerset magical practitioners is much too fragmentary to construct a 'life-cycle' as Spufford does for chapmen, but there is a clear overlap in the lifestyles of those who travelled to sell goods and those who travelled to tell fortunes or provide other magical services. One crucial difference, however, was that magical practitioners would have had far less (if any) need for suppliers of their own, and much lower operating costs than travelling chapmen. Given that the latter relied heavily on credit, which they could secure by being predictable if not stationary, this marks a significant difference in reputation.¹¹⁶ Unlike sellers of textiles and other material goods, sellers of magical services did not need to maintain standing relationships with suppliers or other sellers in order to continue to operate on the road.

The vulnerability of itinerant practitioners, and the aggressive approach of practitioners far from home to finding clients lend credence to Davies' argument that a sedentary life, with the stable local relationship that came with it, was invaluable to cunning folk.¹¹⁷ The Somerset material demonstrates that magical practitioners could and did ply their trades in unfamiliar surroundings, but without a reputation that drew clients to them, such practitioners were obliged to seek out potential clients and create a sense of the need for their services, to a greater extent than was common for their sedentary colleagues. These practitioners also faced additional dangers associated with their outsider status, especially when they were identified as Gypsies or itinerants. Spufford's findings suggests that the reputational considerations of being itinerant or 'away from home' were not unique to magical practitioners.¹¹⁸ As outsiders, not only did non-resident practitioners lack any established 'good' reputation locally, they were also likely to be viewed with suspicion and identified with the general understanding that nomadic or footloose people were likely to be lawless and troublesome.

III. The Media of Reputations

These geographical considerations give a sense of the importance of magical reputations that centred on the practitioner and radiated outwards, drawing clients from nearby or from as far as twenty miles. The sessions rolls also demonstrate some of the media by which these reputations were transmitted; primarily by word of mouth, but in many cases also by texts, physical objects, and visible behaviours.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹¹⁷ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 11.

¹¹⁸ Spufford, *The Great Reclotting of Rural England*.

Word of Mouth

English culture in the seventeenth century was distinctly oral; in most kinds of cultural, social, and economic activities oral communication was of primary importance.¹¹⁹ This is no less true for magic than any other field; indeed, given the (at best) unsteady legal ground on which most practitioners operated, word of mouth was perhaps even more important for them than for providers of other kinds of service. Cunning folk could not, for instance, publish advertisements or post handbills to publicise their illegal activities. Magical reputations, then, were transmitted primarily by word of mouth.

For most practitioners, we have evidence of only a single client or transaction in the Quarter Sessions records. But no less than four clients of the Taunton-based astrologer Jasper Bale complained about his practices at the Sessions in 1655, and these show clear similarities. Based on the Informations of Jane Scadden, Andrew Smyth, William Norton, and William Seager, all of Pitminster, it is possible to build an impression of Bale's practice.¹²⁰ Scadden deposed that on 30th May 1655, Richard Waterman came to her and told her that he had met a man who could tell her where her lost wool was to be found, and she should go to Taunton the following morning to meet him at the Widow Edwards' House. Scadden did so, going with Waterman who "discorsed with" Bale on her behalf. Another of Bale's clients, Andrew Smyth, also met him in Taunton to ask about his stolen goods, and as well as his own business brought two more clients. William Norton deposed that he met Smyth in Taunton, and Smyth asked him to come with him to hear what Bale would say. Norton was initially sceptical of Bale – confrontational, even – telling him that "he did goe aboute to Cosen y^e people of their money", but nonetheless asked Bale if he might recover a coat he lost at Crediton Fair. Smyth also recommended Bale to William Seager. Seager deposed that he met Smyth in Trull (another village between Pitminster and Taunton), and asked Smyth if he had recovered his stolen goods yet. Smyth replied that he had not, but that he would soon, and showed him his ticket from Bale with its description of the thief "as the Ticked p[re]tended". On hearing that Seager was "never the nearer" to recovering his own lost goods, Smyth recommended he seek help from Bale. Smyth's experience with Bale was evidently worth conversing about in the context of shared trouble with lost goods, and though he had not yet retrieved his goods, Smyth was sufficiently confident in Bale's prognostication that he felt able to recommend his services to Seager. Smyth, a then-satisfied client, by word of mouth converted his neighbour Seager from potential to actual client. Scadden, Waterman, Smyth, Norton, and Seager all took part in conversations about lost and stolen goods, and about the man in Taunton who could help find them. They were aware not only of their own losses, but of their neighbours', and actively

¹¹⁹ Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf, "Introduction" in *The spoken word Oral culture in Britain, 1500–1850*, ed. Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1-51

¹²⁰ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/91/118-121

participated in introducing those neighbours to Bale, enabling his reputation to circulate around Pitminster as part of the normal exchange of information through talk.

Use of Paper

But word of mouth was not the only means by which Bale's reputation circulated among the Pitminster villagers. The "ticket" that Andrew Smyth showed to William Seager shows that Bale made use of other media as well. All of Bale's clients report receiving a ticket of this kind; on their first meeting with Bale, they acquainted him with their losses, agreed a fee, and were told to return the following Saturday. At that time, Bale took payment and gave them their ticket.¹²¹

Jane Scadden's ticket survives alongside her information in the sessions rolls. It is a small piece of paper (about 100x120 cm) written in a fair hand. The ticket prepared for Scadden opened "By the rules of Astrologie" and gave a brief description of the supposed thief – he was "a man that came into the house after other things" he was "not much above middle stature, his haire indiferente Blacke, his complexion somthing pale his eyes somthing hollow and that goes a little forward & looking downward, and he seemed to live south or south eastward from the place it was taken".¹²² Bale further wrote that while he hoped the wool would be recovered in the next seven or eight days, if it was not, "it will hardly be had any more". This kind of prediction was not uncommon from astrologers in the seventeenth century – judgements on goods lost or stolen very often gave details of the thief's appearance (stature, countenance, complexion and so on all having astrological significance), and the direction in which they dwelt or had taken the goods (the cardinal directions likewise being astrologically significant).¹²³ The final part of the judgement, as to whether the goods were likely to be recovered, was also very common – perhaps unsurprisingly, given the practical concerns of those who had lost their goods. The information was functional and useful, and laid out the basis for Bale's claims - "the rules of Astrologie" - and his prognostication.

Bale was not the only Somerset astrologer to use paper in this way – in 1653, Edward Banbury of Glastonbury provided a brief note that Thomas Willis could bring back to his mistress Mary Lansdown with the prediction her stolen apron would be found.¹²⁴ Banbury's note, unlike Bale's, is in the format of a letter, addressed to "ML" and signed "yours Edward Banbury". It has a neater appearance and, though shorter, is written on a much larger slip of paper. It does not provide the usual astrological details of physical markers and locations, but rather tells Lansdown that of the two people she asked

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/91/118

¹²³ Ann Geneva, *Astrology and the seventeenth century mind: William Lilly and the language of the stars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 1995. 62.

¹²⁴ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/175-176

for the apron, “the first yo[u] asked have it” and that she would have it again before the end of the month. Also unlike Bale’s ticket, Banbury’s letter does not lay out the basis of his prediction. The note has been annotated to show that Banbury acknowledged he had written it and given it to the messenger, indicating that he had been questioned about the letter and about his methods (he stressed that he worked “accordinge to the Rules of Astrologie and not by any Diabolical Art”) and this may give a suggestion as to why Bale included this information. Astrology, after all, was distinct from magic in legal terms.

Pieces of paper like this may have served a number of purposes. Banbury’s letter primarily seems to have bridged the gap between him and Mary Lansdown, who sent her servant to Glastonbury rather than visiting in person.¹²⁵ This may have been more necessary in this case than others because Lansdown had originally sent Willis to a different practitioner, Mr Gallup; he only consulted Banbury because Gallup was not at home, and a stranger recommended he try Banbury instead. The note, then, may have served as a kind of ‘receipt’ for Willis to bring back to Lansdown, acquainting her with the practitioner and the service he had rendered. The note he provided to Edward Pavy in 1655 had a similar function.¹²⁶ Pavy was sent by Susan Baker, a servant suspected of theft from the house where both she and Pavy worked, in order to absolve her. When Banbury sent him back with a note describing the guilty party (“a maid servant that of Mrs Symes house... [who] had a wart behind her eare, & another on her belly”), Baker had another man, Humfrey Upham, return to Glastonbury and show Banbury the note provided by Pavy. Banbury “made answer that it was the same note... he himselfe wrote”. Evidently displeased with the note Pavy brought her and perhaps mistrusting her messenger, Baker was able to confirm that the judgement was genuine by having Upham return the note to Banbury and check its authenticity. In this case then the note served a clear purpose in bridging a gap in trust by creating a verifiable record of Banbury’s judgement not unlike a receipt.

Bale’s tickets, though, had additional uses. Jane Scadden evidently kept her ticket and compared her experience (she never recovered her goods) to the guarantee she considered the ticket to offer.¹²⁷ As such, when she complained of Bale’s failure to get the desired result, she presented the ticket as evidence. Andrew Smyth kept his ticket too, and when he and William Seager discussed their respective lost stolen goods he was able to take the ticket from his pocket and have Seager read it, telling him that though he hadn’t recovered his goods yet, he soon would.¹²⁸ In this way, the ticket could act as something like advertising, serving as a prop to aid the face-to-face exchanges through

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/95/93

¹²⁷ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/91/118

¹²⁸ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/91/119-121

which Bale's reputation was propagated. For Scadden too the physical representation of her interaction with Bale served as a prop to aid in a discussion of his reputation – it was evidence of the service for which she had paid Bale and which she felt he had failed to perform.

The proliferation of different kinds of 'ticket' in the eighteenth century has been extensively studied, and while this literature typically focuses on a later, print-centric context, some commonalities might be perceived in Bale's handwritten astrological judgements. Sarah Lloyd writes that tickets made tangible "access, possession, information, social capital, and even chance", and "materialized knowledge and experience".¹²⁹ Certainly this could be said of Bale's tickets, which converted his astrological knowledge and judgement, his power to prognosticate, into a tangible object which the clients could read, retain, and show to others. This cements the picture of Bale's astrology as a service or tool, that is a form of 'service magic'. Bale's tickets, assuming Scadden's is representative, did not exhibit any of the visual interest or novelty of printed trade cards but seem to have played a similar role in some respects. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford argue that trade cards in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries served as a form of targeted advertising meant to disseminate knowledge about the business from existing to potential customers, and to serve to reinforce the experience of purchasing goods, and that producing and possessing such cards was part of a culture of social display.¹³⁰ While far simpler and less 'entertaining' or collectible in appearance, Bale's tickets were kept by his clients and, in the case of Smyth and Seager, showed and talked about, generating future custom for Bale. Bale's reach did not compare with that of William Lilly and other London astrologers who produced printed almanacs, but by providing hand-written tickets to his clients, he provided a means to aid the circulation of his judgements much as almanacs did for their compilers. Notably, however, and in stark contrast to trade cards or indeed most almanacs, Bale's ticket did not give his name or any explicit information about him, besides the fact that his conclusions were arrived at "By the rules of Astrologie". Bale's tickets may have rendered the interaction tangible, aiding publicity by giving satisfied clients something to show and talk about with prospective clients, and even serving as an implicit guarantee, but they were not fully articulated advertisements by any means. If Bale saw his tickets as a tool for publicity, their role was clearly at most supplemental to word of mouth. The tickets were a subject of conversation and worth showing to one's neighbour, but it was by word of mouth that potential clients learned who could help them recover their goods and where they could go to meet him.

¹²⁹ Sarah Lloyd, "The religious and social significance of Methodist tickets, and associated practices of collecting and recollecting, 1741-2017," *The Historical Journal* 63, no.2 (2020): 364.; Sarah Lloyd, "Ticketing the British Eighteenth Century: 'A Thing... Never Heard of Before'," *Journal of Social History* 46, no.4 (2013): 843.

¹³⁰ Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, "Selling Consumption in the Eighteenth Century: Advertising and the Trade Card in Britain and France," *Cultural and Social History* 4, no.2 (2007): 150-151, 166.

In the seventeenth century, paper in all forms, both manuscript and print, was increasingly part of daily life, and the use of tickets and letters like Bale's and Banbury's demonstrates how astrology followed this trend much like other areas of life. Far from supplanting oral culture and communication, however, paper media enhanced and infused it.¹³¹ Word of mouth remained the principle means by which news, rumours, stories, and other kinds of information were transmitted, but hand-written and printed documents of many kinds supplemented and supported this transmission, with information from one medium crossing freely into others, back and forth.¹³² Bale's tickets are an interesting example of this process at work in the business of an astrologer. It is hard to say for certain if he typically delivered his prognostications verbally in addition to the ticket, but in at least some cases he did not, given his instructions to William Norton not to open the ticket until the following evening.¹³³ So the outcome of the consultation and his astrological calculations was put on paper and handed to the client. But the ticket then served as a prompt or prop in conversations about the practitioner, his work, and the missing goods. Bale's practices invite further consideration about how the changing rates of literacy may have affected the daily business of magic and astrology. Determining whether his clients could read the tickets personally is difficult. One traditional means of gauging 'literacy' has been to judge based on whether or not the individual could sign their name – of the Pitminster group, William Seager signed his name in a fine hand, while William Norton signed simply with a 'W', and Andrew Smyth and Jane Scadden made a circular mark – but this simple measure obscures the diverse and complex ways in which people could be 'literate'.¹³⁴ Fox argues the presence of text in social life in the period meant that no one was "immune" to its influence; most everyone in seventeenth-century England could have text read to them or otherwise access its contents indirectly.¹³⁵ So whether or not the Pitminster clients could read personally, Bale's literacy was part of his working practice, and his clients were able to engage with the astrological judgements he committed to paper.

Physical Props

Practitioners could also make use of 'props' themselves. Davies suggests that in some cases, books displayed by cunning folk primarily served as props to convey erudition, and contemporary criticisms of cunning folk often emphasise their use of books, instruments, garments, visual devices (such as "characters" and symbols), and other objects to impress prospective or actual clients.¹³⁶ Katherine Sawcer, one of the witnesses in the case against John Mortemer, reported seeing him cutting crosses

¹³¹ Fox and Woolf, "Introduction," 8.

¹³² Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.

¹³³ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/91/120

¹³⁴ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/91/118-121

¹³⁵ Fox and Woolf, "Introduction," 7.

¹³⁶ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 70.

into sticks of elder.¹³⁷ She mistook these for “gambolls for boyes”, but Mortemer, who seems to have readily boasted of his capabilities according to the witnesses, explained to her that the sticks had the power to make beer “work”, and had been used to great effect in “parkford” (probably Sparkford in Somerset). He further extolled the virtue of the sticks, telling Sawcer that “there was never a Justice of peac w[i]thin this sheere [Shire] Could denye those Crosses”. Though cutting the crosses primarily seems to have been part of the magical operation – Sawcer deposed that Joan Bande, the alehouse keeper’s wife, told her she had paid Mortemer to “unwitch” her goods – he did this work in the alehouse, where the sticks drew attention. When questioned about them, he took the opportunity to display his capabilities, explaining what the sticks were for, citing an occasion on which they had proven effective, and boasting that even those who might prosecute him could not deny the efficacy of his magic. The sticks with crosses were not transmitted like tickets, but as magical objects they embodied Mortemer’s power, and as conversation-starters in the alehouse they were an occasion for Mortemer to speak about his abilities, and a prop which helped him to do so.

The Media of Reputations

Magical reputations, like other kinds, were in large part transmitted by word of mouth; friends and neighbours recommended practitioners or shared what they knew of them with those in need of their services. But these sources also indicate some of the ways that magical practitioners could bolster their reputations by other means. Pieces of paper like Jasper Bale’s tickets could serve to embody the practitioner’s knowledge and the client-practitioner exchange, while also serving as props to facilitate the oral transmission of the practitioner’s reputation. Objects like John Mortemer’s cut sticks, with the aid of some self-aggrandising statements, could help practitioners to make an impression on those who saw and heard them publicly at work.

IV. The Role of the Quarter Sessions

While the records of the Quarter Sessions provide valuable insights into the business of magic and the reach and circulation of magical reputations, the role of the courts themselves as a site where these reputations were contested cannot be ignored. Few if any documents from these cases survive outside of the sessions rolls, and if a case was not pursued to completion it is possible that the depositions and informations found in the rolls are the only documents it generated, which means that conclusions about the roles of the justices and the courts as an institution can be only speculative. But it is worth considering what the legal setting in which these sources were created can reveal about magical reputations. Firstly, where practitioners and clients speak about their own involvement with magic,

¹³⁷ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/21/9

the Quarter Sessions records reveal a certain ambivalence about what was at stake (or what was seen to be at stake) when it came to being identified as involved with magic. Secondly, it is worth considering that the courts themselves could contribute to the construction, or at least the contesting, of magical reputations.

The Stakes for Clients and Practitioners

The stakes for practitioners were clearer than for their clients. For practitioners, a brush with the law could potentially be dangerous, and at least some practitioners demonstrated their awareness of that fact. Edward Banbury's depositions are particularly telling in this regard. Questioned in 1653 about his detection of stolen goods, he was at pains to explain that he worked "accordinge to the Rules of Astrologie and not by any Diabolicall Art", and that he customarily repaid any money given to him if the client's goods were never recovered.¹³⁸ Here he addressed and denied both conceivable kinds of wrongdoing or crime he might have been engaged in; if we only used astrology and no "Diabolicall Art" he was not committing the crime of witchcraft, and if he had in this case and others returned payment to disappointed clients he could hardly be accused of avarice or fraudulent behaviour.¹³⁹ Whether to appear contrite or to cover all possible grounds of criticism, he also deposed that he was "resolved to leave of all farther practice of Astrology in this kinde" – a resolution which did not hold given he was named before the Quarter Sessions again in 1657 having performed exactly the same service.¹⁴⁰ Other practitioners also acknowledged the legal risk inherent in their work. John Mortemer's boast to Katherine Sawcer that "there was never a Justice of peac w[i]thin this sheere Could denye those Crosses" shows his awareness that in principle his magical operations might face legal scrutiny.¹⁴¹ But he made reference to the legal danger as part of a claim about his own power; the crosses he cut in the sticks were so potent, he claimed, that no Justice could deny their worth and so, presumably, punish him for their use.

If Mortemer was questioned himself, no record survives, but some other practitioners were, and many of these show a perhaps surprising degree of candour regarding their practices. John Howell, in his deposition, gave a detailed account of how he determined that Mrs Steed's cow was bewitched and, saying "in the name of the Father &c", burned the cow's hair to induce the witch to "come in hyther".¹⁴² This operation appears to be clearly magical, aligning with common counter-witchcraft techniques, but in Howell's testimony he neither concealed this nor attempted to account for it as a natural operation.

¹³⁸ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/86/176

¹³⁹ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/86/176

¹⁴⁰ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/95/93

¹⁴¹ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/21/10

¹⁴² Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/29/48

At least, if he did mount any defence of his practices this did not survive the process of recording and archiving.

It may not have been uncommon for both clients and practitioners to be uncertain of where the boundaries of legality lay when it came to counter-witchcraft in particular. Several of the witnesses accusing Agnes Hatton of witchcraft in 1607 reported countermagical operations performed by them as evidence of Hatton's guilt.¹⁴³ Thomas Smithe deposed that he began to suspect Hatton after a "physicion" in Gloucester confirmed by uroscopy that he was bewitched, and that after he sent servants to recover some of Hatton's thatch to be burned, the suspected witch soon came to the house and "refused to dep[ar]te until she had beene sundrie times required". After this, his condition soon improved. Giles Carter later corroborated Smithe's testimony and lent further weight to the thatch burning, explaining that Smithe "had hard that in burning the thatche of the house of anie sicke lewd p[er]son, the p[ar]tie himself will Come in place", and that Hatton "was never there before that time nor since". Thomas Abbott went even further, deposing that years earlier after losses of his livestock, "by the advice of Mr Rowsewell deceased... did thrust a Nale into the buttocks of the said Agnes Hatton, and drewe bloud of her. and suffered her to Come noe more to his house and had since noe suche no hurte nor loss In his goodes". Scratching, pricking, or otherwise drawing the blood of a suspected witch was, as in the case of Anne Browne, another common remedy against witchcraft in seventeenth-century England, and one which Abbott evidently considered effective.¹⁴⁴ That Smithe, Carter, and especially Abbott (who assaulted Hatton) volunteered this information as witnesses indicates that they did not consider their actions to reflect poorly on them or threaten their reputations, and that they expected the success of their counter-witchcraft would lend credence to their suspicions against Hatton – in other words, that the justice hearing the deposition would believe in the power of the operations.

Disputing Reputations in Court

The story of Hatton the suspected witch, as well as those of magical practitioners like John Mortemer, suggest that the courts might at times have been an arena in which magical reputations were disputed and constructed. Bonzol's case study from the Star Chamber shows how the representation of Joan Guppie by her family and witnesses was in conflict with her representation by those who had accused her of witchcraft and who had scratched her for that reason.¹⁴⁵ Similar cases played out before the Somerset Quarter Sessions. The witnesses against Hatton gave evidence that explained their

¹⁴³ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/2/108; Q SR/2/114; Q SR/2/117

¹⁴⁴ Somerset Heritage Centre, Q SR/20/33-4; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 634.

¹⁴⁵ Judith Bonzol, "In Good Reporte and Honest Estimacion amongst Her Neighbours", 177.

attribution of supernatural power to a neighbour, but much of this evidence was itself acquired by preternatural means; popular magical techniques contributed to the construction of Hatton's reputation as a witch. John Mortemer, meanwhile, evidently had a reputation as cunning man in and around North Petherton, where multiple people had engaged his services, but the case against him presented Philippa Austin's sickness as evidence that his powers could be used for evil. The reputations of other practitioners, like the astrologer Jasper Bale, were disputed in court on the grounds that they actually had not done *enough*; despite having been paid for judgements on the clients' stolen goods, Bale had failed to produce the desired results. These practitioners then, though they had evidently constructed themselves as astrologers and cunning folk in their home communities, were reconstructed by the plaintiffs and witnesses (and the Justices and scribes involved in recording their depositions) as bad actors.

Conclusions

Quarter Sessions documents from Somerset and elsewhere can provide some important insights into magical reputations, providing as they do snippets of information about practitioners, clients, and their interactions which otherwise would have been unlikely to survive in the historical record. Both clients and practitioners shared agency in these encounters, with both parties under different circumstances taking the initiative – on the one hand, clients seeking out and soliciting the services of magical practitioners, and on the other practitioners creating their own business by approaching prospective clients. It seems likely, at least from these sources, that it was practitioners who did not have a settled local reputation to draw clients to them that were most likely to follow the latter course. These settled reputations were valuable to most kinds of magical practitioner, and in primarily rural parts of the country they worked not dissimilarly to those of, for example, medical practitioners who were concentrated in towns and met the needs of the surrounding rural populace. Just as people would most often travel a few miles or as many as twenty to seek medical assistance or to visit fairs and markets, people were aware of magical practitioners within similar distances and would travel to consult them.

While word of mouth was the primary means by which magical reputations – like other kinds of information – circulated in the period, magical practitioners also made use of other media for this purpose. Some, like Jasper Bale and Edward Banbury, gave their clients handwritten papers which served a range of purposes such as embodying the expertise and judgement of the practitioner and bridging the gap between the client and the practitioner when the former had sent an intermediary. But these papers could also serve as aids to oral circulation of the practitioner's reputation, giving clients something to carry and show to their neighbours in the process of converting them into clients

in turn. We might also consider other physical objects as kinds of 'media' for magical reputations. Items like John Mortemer's magical sticks could serve as props and conversation-starters to impress prospective clients with the practitioner's abilities.

When the courts themselves are understood as a space in which magical reputations were constructed or disputed, a certain ambivalence about the validity and legality of some kinds of magic emerges. People who had performed counter-magical operations, even those that involved assaulting suspected witches, were prepared to speak candidly about these to Justices of the Peace, even expecting that such operations would lend them credibility. While rarer, some practitioners, like John Howell, were willing to give detailed accounts of their magical practices. While such candour did not necessarily mean that practitioners or clients actually faced any legal repercussions, and we cannot know from these sources if there were less tangible social repercussions for the same, it seems that practitioners and their clients were not necessarily in step with the law or learned opinion when it came to making judgements about what was acceptable or appropriate when it came to magic, or what might lend them credibility or damage their reputations.

Finally, these court cases give a sense of the priorities of clients when it came to judging practitioners. As with any service, clients like Jasper Bale's had engaged him with certain expectations about what he could do for them or how he would conduct his business. They expected that paying an astrologer like Bale would restore their lost goods to them, and they may have expected that in the event it did not, he should at least return their money. Their concern was with results; a 'bad' practitioner in these cases was one who failed to deliver a useful service to act appropriately when they did so. This was not the *only* reason that practitioners might become involved in cases before the Quarter Sessions, however. Some of those who found themselves in legal trouble relating to their magical practices were suspected of doing material harm – like John Mortemer's suspected poisoning or bewitching of Philippa Austin. In this case, the magical reputation Mortemer had cultivated was subject to being assessed and re-defined by his neighbours; he had established that he was able to do many magical things, and following the illness of Philippa Austin some had begun to question whether, despite his claim to the contrary, one of those things was witchcraft. Practitioners could be dangerous to their communities in other ways also. Even if they were not suspected of any malicious magic, the reputations of practitioners could help or hinder the reputations of others. If it was understood that a practitioner could accurately identify a thief or even a murderer, they could cast reputation-ruining suspicions on a neighbour or absolve a client of the same. Whether the concern was with a failure to produce good results or the production of bad results, it was on the basis of results that many people judged magical practitioners and, indeed, magical practices.

Chapter 2. Magical Reputations in the Annals of the College of Physicians of London

Introduction

Magic was far from only a rural or provincial phenomenon in seventeenth-century England. London, the capital and by far the largest city in England, was replete with magical practitioners of all kinds, offering many of the same services in many of the same ways as their rural and town-based contemporaries to a large populace with its own demand for magic. As in the rest of England, one of the most urgent of these demands was for healing. A vast literature has established the diversity of medical and therapeutic provision in seventeenth-century London and beyond; Harold Cook described a competitive and complex 'medical marketplace' in Stuart London, dispelling the notion that gentlemanly physicians had no need to 'sell' their skills as did other types of healer, and since then early modern historians have examined, debated, and refined the concept many times over.¹ By 2003 Margaret Pelling critiqued the theory as overdue for revision.² After Cook, she argued, the concept had begun to lose contact with contemporary concepts and lost its ability to connect medicine to society. As part of the revision of the concept, Pelling suggested more attention be given to the role of religion in early modern medicine and the extent to which healing could remain outside the cash economy, and to situate irregular medical practitioners less in the marketplace than in the regulated world of early modern craft organisations, commerce, and law.³ The concept was then significantly reviewed in a collection edited by Mark Jenner and Patrick Wallis in 2007, identifying several avenues of study, and calling for greater recognition of the medical marketplace as socially embedded and as "no more than a site where the broader forces of economy and society come together as people jostle to buy and sell".⁴ The focus of this chapter will be on one corner of this marketplace – that occupied by magical practitioners, their clients, and their patrons. Despite the considerable literature on healers in London, practitioners' reputations have not been the focus of many studies, and a number of important insights into the lives of magical practitioners thus remain to be discussed. The reputations of these practitioners were complex, comprising perceived personal qualities but also past cures and past patients, the names of former clients, colleagues, and patrons, claims to knowledge and power, a flair

¹ Harold Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime in Stuart London* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

² Pelling, Margaret. *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London: patronage, physicians, and irregular practitioners, 1550-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 343.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Mark Jenner and Patrick Wallis, "Introduction," in *Medicine and the Market in England and Its Colonies, C. 1450- C. 1850*, ed. Mark Jenner and Patrick Wallis (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007), 17.

for the dramatic, and in some cases a diffuse set of expectations invoked for effect on the London stage. This chapter will explore these complexities and place magical healers in the context of the history of magic and in conversation with the other magical practitioners discussed in the preceding chapter and in the second half of this thesis.

Following Chapter 1, this chapter is concerned with practitioners who primarily were not widely known, and whose historical record is mainly comprised of the records of their interactions with institutions. Several institutions exercised authority over magical healers in seventeenth-century London, not least among the courts that enforced ecclesiastical and secular legal prohibitions on magic. But the focus of this chapter will be on an institution with a narrower focus and less established authority – the College of Physicians of London. The College was a medical corporation founded in 1518 with the goal of controlling the practice of physic in and within seven miles of the City of London by forbidding the practice of physic by any individual not licensed by the College.⁵ Licences were limited and exclusive – they were available only to men, and typically only to those who had graduated from Oxford or Cambridge or had their degrees incorporated there. Pelling contrasts this to the older system of ecclesiastical licensing (which was theoretically superseded by the College in London, but remained current in the rest of England) whereby a much wider range of medical practitioners could be licensed by bishops.⁶ The College's efforts to control medical practice mostly manifested in the prosecution of those defined as 'irregular' or illicit practitioners; the College was empowered to summon such individuals for questioning, and penalise them with fines and imprisonment if the President and Censors (the officebearers responsible for this activity) deemed it necessary. One outcome of this process was the wealth of records preserved in the form of the Annals of the College. The registrar of the College was responsible for recording all meetings of the College's *comitia* (which comprised the president and four censors), including those at which irregulars were summoned, questioned, or prosecuted. As regulation of this kind was the major activity of the College up until the period of the civil war, the Annals are an incredibly rich source regarding medical practitioners in London in the first early- to mid-seventeenth century. From the civil war period onwards, the College enjoyed less royal support, and its regulatory activities trailed off, so this chapter will focus primarily on the period from 1600 – c.1640 when censorial hearings were fairly regular and records of a significant number of irregulars survive.⁷

⁵ Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime in Stuart London*, 20. The College was not known as the "Royal College of Physicians" until the 1680s. As the cases covered in this chapter predate this change, the contemporary "College of Physicians" will be used.

⁶ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 2.

⁷ Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime in Stuart London*, 92.

This chapter makes use of the typescript of the early Latin Annals translated between 1953 and 1957 by J. Emberry, S. Heathcote, and M. Hellings for the Royal College of Physicians itself, and converted to microfiche by Adam Matthew Publications in 1991.⁸ The comprehensive notes on these records created by Margaret Pelling and Frances White and published by the Institute of Historical Research as the *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database* has been an invaluable guide.⁹ In places, I have also consulted a microform facsimile of the original manuscripts, which are substantially in Latin but include English passages as for example when letters are reproduced or testimonies in English are recorded.¹⁰ Primarily the Annals record the details of *Comitia* meetings: which officers were present, who was summoned, and what action was taken. Though the institutions that created them were different in power, purpose, composition, and many other crucial ways, the format of the Annals is not unlike that of the sessions rolls used in the previous chapter, and other contemporary legal sources. They are arranged chronologically by meeting, with the records of each meeting usually beginning with a list of officebearers and fellows present, followed by a brief account of each piece of business conducted. Sometimes, this includes a record of the irregular's response to questioning or account of their practice, and in some cases additional details are provided by reproduced letters or other associated documents.

The Annals are a rich source, providing details of the business of the College and the lives of those who interacted with it, including many irregulars about whose lives little other evidence exists. That being said, the sources present certain difficulties, as Margaret Pelling highlighted in her landmark work on the College and the Annals, *Medical conflicts in early modern London: patronage, physicians, and irregular practitioners, 1550-1640*.¹¹ Pelling picks up where previous authors, most notably Harold Cook and Charles Webster, had left off by turning away from an institutional history of the College and intellectual history of its members, and towards a history of the 714 irregulars that appear in the Annals 1550 – 1640.¹² This work added significantly to historians' understandings of irregular medical practitioners and their relationships with patients and officialdom. Besides illuminating the diversity

⁸ *Archives of the Royal College of Physicians, 1518-1988: Typescript Translation of the Early Latin Annals 1518-1915*. Marlborough: Adam Matthews, (tr. J. Emberry, C. Heathcote and M. Hellings). Unless otherwise noted, references will be to the typescript translation, and page numbers will refer to the typescript, where page numbers for the originals can be found.

⁹ Margaret Pelling, Frances White, *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database* (London, 2004), British History Online, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640>.

¹⁰ *Archives of the Royal College of Physicians, 1518-1988: Annals of the Royal College of Physicians 1518-1915*. Marlborough: Adam Matthews.

¹¹ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*.

¹² Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime in Stuart London*; Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, vi. Outlines the history of the Biographical Index that would develop into the *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners* database, beginning with the work of Charles Webster, to whom Pelling's book is dedicated.

of irregulars and the futility of the College's efforts to categorise its opponents, Pelling argued that the College's interaction with these practitioners demonstrated that it was in fact "parasitic for its own identity on the confrontations with irregulars", and that medicine was "a process of learning and becoming throughout life, in which the distinction between the medical man and the lay person is blurred, just as the distinction between College members and irregulars is blurred".¹³ The College's highly self-conscious approach to recording its own history and defining its purpose ensures that the irregulars and their practices are almost invariably presented in a hostile or disparaging light by the Annals. The irregulars themselves also may have distorted their own images in the Annals, as those who were examined were often highly motivated to minimise their punishments by presenting themselves in particular ways, as shown in part 3 of this chapter. Additionally, as with the quarter sessions, most of those magical practitioners who came to the attention of the College did so because they had come into conflict with clients or those who knew them, meaning the Annals effectively selected against practitioners who operated without such conflicts. This was not always the case, however, as College members could and sometimes did accuse irregular practitioners on their own initiative.

The magical practitioners in the Annals are relatively few in number, and the categories significantly blurry, so quantitative conclusions are difficult to draw. But as historical subjects, enough are present to gather some impressions. In the seventeenth century, twenty-three irregulars appear in the Annals whose practices can broadly be considered to contain elements of magic and astrology. The majority of these were identified in Pelling's notes which run until 1640, after which I have identified only one other – James Baston, an astrologer examined and forbidden to practice physic in January 1656/7.¹⁴ As Cook and Pelling have noted, the College's censorial activities trailed off significantly after 1640 so this dropping off is not unexpected.¹⁵

By centring reputation, this chapter contributes to our understanding of the relationship between the College of Physicians and irregular healers, as well as our understanding of the position of magical practitioners in England in the period. The College emerges from Pelling's study as a minor component in health in early modern London, and medicine, while the irregulars appear to have been individuals possessing a "portable skill" judged and valued by health-seeking patients at all social levels.¹⁶ As part of this image of the London medical milieu, in which a range of irregulars were judged according to

¹³ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 333.

¹⁴ Pelling and White, *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*; Annals, 2 January 1656/7, 82.

¹⁵ Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime in Stuart London*, 92.; Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 7-8.

¹⁶ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 333.

their (perceived or actual) possession of healing skills, Pelling takes note of the role of magic in irregular medical practice, but does not single out magical practitioners as a distinctive subset of irregulars. Though the insecurity of the College may heighten the appearance of this dynamic in the Annals, it is not unique to this context. As we saw in the previous chapter, while magical reputations were challenged in the courts, practitioners and clients were not always aligned with Justices and the law when it came to the position of magic and its practitioners. Focusing on reputation highlights how magical practitioners and the institutions which policed their activities often seem to have ‘talked past each other’ when it came to what made good or bad practices and practitioners. The College judged practitioners according to its own criteria, which often had little or no relationship to the criteria by which they and their clients understood their reputations. This approach also sheds light on the ways in which magical practitioners were a ‘normal’ or unremarkable part of the provision of healing in seventeenth-century London, and on the sometimes-minor distinctions that set them apart. It also helps to highlight the importance of cooperation and collaboration between practitioners, as well as patronage and ‘patronage-like’ relationships, all of which functioned to connect the reputation of a practitioner to other names and reputations.

The chapter will consist of three sections. The first will chart some of the characteristics of the London magical healers in the Annals, demonstrating their value as a source for magical practices, locations, gender, occupations, fees. The second section will discuss the elements that comprised and propagated practitioners’ reputations; the traits and qualities they claimed, the media, materials, and behaviours by which their names spread, the significance of their names in fiction, and their connections to patrons and colleagues. Finally, the analysis will turn to the College and its interaction with magical practitioners; the effects of a confrontation with the College on a practitioner’s reputation, the responses of practitioners to the challenge posed by the College, and the processes by which the College sought to judge practitioners outwith the reputations they brought with them to the confrontation. In particular, the third part will discuss the case of James Leverett, a touch healer whose politically charged claims to holy and magical power were the subject of an extended experiment by the College.

This discussion of magical reputations and the College of Physicians leads to three conclusions. First, while magical practitioners were part of the mass of London’s ‘irregular’ healers and often functionally indistinguishable from their non- or less magical colleagues, some were set apart by the specifics of their claims to healing power and by often-diffuse associations with their names. Second, the reputations, and sometimes the fates, of magical practitioners were tied in large part to the names and reputations of others, especially potential or actual patrons and clients but also fellow practitioners and others. Finally, the College of Physicians judged practitioners not according to their

established reputations but to its own institutional criteria, characterising magical healers as ‘irregulars’ failing to meet the standards of college physicians rather than in the practitioners’ own terms.

I. Magical Healers in London

The Annals provide a wealth of detail on London magical practitioners and their practices, and analysing this information will provide some useful context for the discussion of practitioners and their lives. These biographical and demographic features of the practitioners demonstrate the similarities between magical healers and other kinds of ‘irregular’, as well as to other magical practitioners like those active in Somerset, and as a ‘normal’ part of contemporary society and the medical marketplace.

Practices

The College was concerned with the suppression of irregular medical practice and it is therefore through this lens that their interactions with magic and magical practitioners came about. There is, for example, little reason why the College would deal with nearly as many witchcraft accusations as the secular or church courts might. In this regard, the Annals self-select for service magicians involved in healing, and take an interest in their activities as providers of a service. This is in contrast to legal sources where allegations of malefic witchcraft which may or may not have involved service magicians were common. This section will consider the range of practices attested in the Annals, before considering the fees, the geographic distribution, the gender divide, and the occupations of the practitioners.

Astrological medicine is significantly more common in the Annals than explicitly magical operations, with six astrologers questioned in the seventeenth century. It bears reiterating here that astrology was not universally taken to be magical or unnatural in the seventeenth century – indeed, astrological knowledge was valued by many university-educated physicians, though its popularity in ‘educated’ circles was waning in this period. By the 1660s historians agree the discipline had been largely exiled from orthodox learning, becoming what Patrick Curry described as “a vulgar knowledge”, but with the College’s censorial activity mostly taking place before 1640, astrology remained a popular but disputed discipline in the period covered by this chapter.¹⁷ Many of the astrological medical practitioners examined by the College were questioned on the principles of astrology by the Fellows of the College, demonstrating plainly that the College as an institution was not ignorant of and did not object to

¹⁷ Patrick Curry, “Astrology in early modern England: the making of a vulgar knowledge”, in Stephen Pumfrey, Paolo Rossi and Maurice Slawinski (eds.), *Science, Culture, and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 274–91.

astrological medicine on the whole. Invariably though the astrological knowledge of these practitioners was found to be insufficient, as in 1627 when John Lambe was asked, along with other questions on physic, “in Astrology what house he looketh into, to know a disease, or the euent of it and how the Lord Ascendent should stand therto”.¹⁸

Diagnosing and curing witchcraft has been upheld as one of the most vital functions of cunning folk in English society – in later centuries, Davies credits unwitching with maintaining the popularity of magical healers even as medicine became formalised and professionalised.¹⁹ While the treatment of unnatural illnesses was perhaps inextricably linked to the occult in itself it was, like astrology, not rejected wholesale by university-educated physicians – until about the mid-seventeenth century, many physicians diagnosed and attempted to cure the bewitched.²⁰ In the Annals, three ‘irregulars’ were examined regarding their treatment of the bewitched. In 1623 the censors questioned Robert Booker about his treatment of John Parker – they agreed that Parker’s illness was unusual and potentially tied to witchcraft, though they denied that Booker had any skill to treat it.²¹ Whether Booker habitually diagnosed and treated the bewitched is uncertain, as we only have evidence of his doing so for Parker, but Mistress Woodhouse, examined in 1602, certainly seems to have habitually confronted witchcraft. She claimed to have cured many bewitched people, affected by sorcery or the stars.²² She may not have been a cunning woman, however; in her examinations by the College, she was questioned on the principles of physic, discussing Galenic properties, medications she had administered, and bloodletting. While the College took a dim view of her medical expertise, then, her practice may have consisted largely or entirely of ‘orthodox’ natural medicine to cure occult disease. In 1614, a third individual, Mistress Godfrey (probably the Agnes Godfrey tried for witchcraft at the Middlesex Sessions the same year) was accused by three women (a mother, a daughter, and a servant) of giving potions and medicines to an infant whom she had bewitched.²³ Given that a price was negotiated for the cure (Godfrey demanded £3, but they agreed £2, with half paid in advance) it would seem that in this case witchcraft was probably *not* suspected until after the treatment had begun. At least if it was, Godfrey was presumably not the suspect. While the complaint was that Godfrey’s medicines had not helped

¹⁸ *Archives of the Royal College of Physicians* (Typescript Translation) Vol. 3 f.77b

¹⁹ Davies, Owen. “Cunning-Folk in the Medical Market-Place During the Nineteenth Century”. *Medical History* no. 43 (1999): 57.

²⁰ Judith Bonzol, “The Medical Diagnosis of Demonic Possession in an Early Modern English Community” *Parergon* 26, no. 1 (2009): 115–39.

²¹ *Annals*, 11 June 1623, 170.

²² *Annals*, 3 July 1596, 101.

²³ *Annals*, 16 February 1614, 68.; John Cordy Jeaffreson (ed.) *Middlesex County Records, vol II: Indictments, Recognizances, Coroners’ Inquisitions-Post-Mortem, Orders and Memoranda, temp. James I.* (London: Middlesex County Records Society, 1886-1892), 79.

the child, it seems that her unsuccessful treatment had become entangled with a suspicion of witchcraft such that she was cast as both witch and unwitcher.

Given the importance of unwitching in the history of magic, it is perhaps surprising that so few cases were recorded in the Annals. The only other reference to witchcraft in the Annals is the case of Elizabeth Jackson, who in November 1602 wrote to the College for assistance.²⁴ Jackson was accused of bewitching a fourteen-year-old girl, Mary Glover, in what was then a current *cause celebre* in London. Glover's affliction was a subject of debate among physicians and others, with some believing her claims to be bewitched by Jackson and others diagnosing some combination of natural illness and dishonesty on her part.²⁵ Following Jackson's petition to the College, fellows were divided on the matter, with those physicians named by Jackson as among her accusers explaining their positions. Physicians testified both for and against the supernatural explanation for Glover's illness at Jackson's trial, which ended with her being found guilty of witchcraft and sentenced to a year's imprisonment, though she seemingly acquired a pardon and did not face punishment.²⁶ The case led one fellow, Edward Jorden, who had argued unsuccessfully against the diagnosis of witchcraft, to publish a treatise elaborating on his theory, titled *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother*.²⁷ In March 1605, the Bishop of London, Richard Bancroft (who, according to Michael MacDonald, had orchestrated Jackson's petition to the College for help) wrote to the physicians regarding "a certain girl possessed of the devil" and three fellows (including John Argent, who had argued alongside Jorden that Glover's illness was natural) were sent to investigate.²⁸ They judged that the alleged witchcraft was nothing more than "bare fiction and manifest pretence" on the part of the bewitched girl. Pelling suggests that Glover was the girl in question, though by this time the trial was long over and Glover had been "dispossessed" by Puritan preachers.²⁹ MacDonald argues forcefully that Bancroft's interest in possession and exorcism had a political element – Puritans and Catholics alike made use of cases of possession to win public approval and converts – and the medical opinion of the physicians was sharply divided.³⁰ Though Jorden was in the twentieth century hailed as an early sceptic, neither the College

²⁴ Annals, 13 November 1602, 132.

²⁵ Michael MacDonald, *Witchcraft and Hysteria in Elizabethan London: Edward Jorden and the Mary Glover Case* (London: Routledge, 1991), x.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, xix.

²⁷ Edward Jorden, *A briefe discourse of a disease called the suffocation of the mother Written vppon occasion which hath beene of late taken thereby, to suspect possession of an euill spirit, or some such like supernaturall power* (London, 1603).

²⁸ Annals, 4 March 1605, 169.

²⁹ Margaret Pelling, Frances White, "JACKSON, Elizabeth", in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, *British History Online*, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/jackson-elizabeth>.; MacDonald, *Witchcraft and Hysteria in Elizabethan London*, xix.

³⁰ MacDonald, *Witchcraft and Hysteria in Elizabethan London*, viii, xii.

as a whole nor the individual fellows involved rejected witchcraft as a possibility; in Jackson's case, the physicians represented a source of expert opinions that might judge an illness as natural or supernatural and protect Jackson from being labelled a witch. As Jackson was not a magical practitioner and witchcraft is not the subject of this thesis, the case is an anomaly, but it is noteworthy as an indication of the College's relationship to the supernatural.

Unlike astrological medicine or even cases of witchcraft, the merits of other magical practices were rarely discussed; cases involving charms and other magical cures mostly began with the premise that the methods were ineffectual. Five individuals in the Annals are associated with paper charms - three of them as part of the same case – while two practitioners were associated with verbal charms. Two irregulars claimed to heal primarily by touch. These common categories of magical healing will be discussed in more detail in Section 2. Other practices also appear in the Annals, including pregnancy-divining via uroscopy, anointing with oil, "reading in a booke" and taking nail parings, and washing clothes. Most of these practices were not particularly unusual – all manner of magical remedies used hair, nails, urine, clothes, and other things connected to the patient, which operated according to the principle of sympathy.³¹ This principle allowed body parts, clothing, and the like to represent their owners in magical operations such that the owner could be affected at a distance. This was common across the spectrum of magical healing, from the popular folk magic of measuring a sick person's girdle to diagnose them to the (in)famous weapon salve and the highly-articulated "magnetical medicine" of Robert Fludd.³²

Fees

In the majority of cases, the practitioners' fees are not given in the Annals. The few that are listed vary significantly. In 1627 Thomas Winche, a tailor, charged only a shilling to cure the Lord Mayor's scullion by taking nail parings, and 1639 Christopher Barton charged John Osmotherlaw and Jane Samon five and three shillings respectively for cures, while Michael Knight and Jane Bigg paid him two shillings and sixpence each.³³ The alewife Catherine Chaire charged significantly more; over a course of treatment including multiple medicines and burning cloth, she charged Mrs Bridgman a total of thirteen pounds.³⁴ More expensive still was John Lambe, who according to Matthias Evans "usually

³¹ Owen Davies, "The World of Popular Magic" in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Witchcraft and Magic*, ed. Owen Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 174.

³² Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 217.; Lauren Kassell, "Magic, Alchemy and the Medical Economy in Early Modern England: The Case of Robert Fludd's Magnetical Medicine" in *Medicine and the Market in England and Its Colonies, C.1450- C.1850* ed. Mark Jenner and Patrick Wallis (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 89.

³³ Annals, 16 March 1627, 222.; Annals, 2 August 1639, 494.; Annals, [blank] September 1639, 495.

³⁴ Annals, 4 August 1598, 115.; Annals, 19 August 1598, 116.

askes for his cures xl. or l. li.” (£40 or £50).³⁵ Lambe was certainly the outlier, and the price quoted by Evans probably reflects a longer-standing arrangement rather than a fee for a specific cure; some of the patients Evans lists paid significantly less than the exorbitant sum Evans claims was typical of Lambe’s practice.³⁶ Medical practitioners were sometimes held on an annual retainer to be at the disposal of their patrons in the period, and this was also the case for some magical practitioners. Frances Shute, for instance, was accused of offering Matthias Evans an annual retainer of fifty pounds on account of his “reputac[i]on and fame of being skillful in magick, sorcery & nigromancy”, and other elite clients had similar arrangements or else expected magical services from people retained as confessors, physicians and so forth.³⁷ ‘Average’ or ‘normal’ fees for magic and medicine are challenging to determine. Pelling identifies medical contracts from 1581-1640 with total fees as low as 10 shillings and as high as 28 pounds though the lower end seems to have been more common.³⁸ The fees charged by most of the magical practitioners in the Annals are not recorded, but some are given as either a few shillings or a few pounds, with Lambe the notable outlier. Among magical practitioners more generally prices also varied greatly with the practitioner, the client, and the service at hand.

Occupations

Regarding the occupations of most of these practitioners, little detail is given in the Annals or can be found elsewhere. Among the men, several were artisans and merchants, and a few worked in medical or medicine-adjacent fields, like John Bell the apothecary’s attendant, and John Fleming who may have been a surgeon.³⁹ Two, Thomas Bretnor and John Keene, were almanac-makers.⁴⁰ One, Nicholas Fiske, was a university undergraduate.⁴¹ Abraham Savery was formerly an actor, and James Leverett, before he took to healing full-time, had been a gardener.⁴² Simon Forman is the only other magical healer in the Annals for whom we know that medicine was a full-time occupation.⁴³ The only woman whose

³⁵ Annals, 7 May 1619, 125.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Cecil L’Estrange Ewen, *Robert Ratcliffe, 5th Earl of Sussex. The witchcraft allegations in his family.* (London, Printed for the author, 1938), 5.; Tabitha Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure: Service Magic in England from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 224.

³⁸ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 258.

³⁹ Annals, 7 November 1606, 187.; Margaret Pelling, Frances White, “FLEMING, John”, in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, *British History Online*, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/fleming-john>.

⁴⁰ Annals, 7 February 1612, 34.

⁴¹ Margaret Pelling, Frances White, “FISKE, Nicholas”, in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, *British History Online*, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/fiske-nicholas>.

⁴² Margaret Pelling, Frances White, “SAVERY, Abraham”, in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, *British History Online*, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/savery-abraham>; Annals, 3 November 1636, 454.

⁴³ Margaret Pelling, Frances White, “FORMAN, Simon”, in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, *British History Online*, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/forman-simon>.

occupation can be positively stated is Catherine Chaire, who was an alewife, though Pelling tentatively identifies Mistress Phillips with a midwife of the same name who searched an accused witch in 1634.⁴⁴ Much recent literature on early modern medicine has demonstrated that healing, even in exchange for a fee, was often a part time or opportunistic pursuit, and the same can be said of service magic; practitioners often supplemented a more conventional income with magical practice, or else nominally professed a traditional occupation while working primarily as a service magician.⁴⁵

Gender

Davies and Stanmore both find that about two thirds of cunning folk were men, though Stanmore also finds that for healing specifically women were in the majority.⁴⁶ Of the twenty-three magical healers I have identified from the Annals, eighteen were male, meaning this set of practitioners is significantly more male than the average for cunning folk or magical healers, but also that women are slightly more common among this subset than among the irregulars as a whole (Pelling finds that 15.4% of irregulars were women, and for this study's subset the figure is 22%).⁴⁷ As this is a relatively small subset of the 714 irregular medical practitioners identified by Pelling, a case could be made for this as a statistical anomaly.⁴⁸ But it could also be representative of certain gendered aspects of the College's approach and of the practice of magic and medicine in seventeenth-century England. Based on a range of legal sources, Stanmore finds that healing was a significant proportion of all service magic in medieval and early modern England – about 21% of cases of service magic – and that magical healing was more female-dominated than other magical services or than service magic overall.⁴⁹ That being the case we might expect that there would be more women among the magical practitioners found in the Annals than among the magical practitioners at large, rather than fewer. But Pelling finds that the Annals likely significantly underestimate the number of female practitioners; many groups of women who were certainly active in the world of medicine (midwives, gentlewomen, wives of clergy, women employed by parishes to treat the poor) are almost entirely absent from the Annals, and while the Annals to some extent preserve the stereotype of “the poor old woman who intruded into medicine”, these

history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/forman-simon. On Foreman see Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman: astrologer, alchemist, and physician* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ Annals, 4 August 1598, 115.; Margaret Pelling, Frances White, “PHILLIPS, Mistress”, in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, *British History Online*, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/phillips-mistress>.

⁴⁵ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 139.; Davies, *Popular Magic*, 74-75.

⁴⁶ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 69.; Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 74-76.

⁴⁷ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁹ Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 38, 76.

women were as likely to be excused for being poor and old as accused.⁵⁰ The College's gender anxieties manifested in a particularly tentative approach to engaging with female irregulars which would have strongly influenced actions against female magical practitioners.⁵¹ It is conceivable also that, more so than men, women who practised magical healing might not be identified as such in the Annals, as their being women was sufficient to discount them from legitimate practice in the eyes of the College; to describe them as women already marked their practice as unacceptable even without further detail.

Geography

As in legal records, the Annals sometimes provide basic location information for the practitioners questioned – typically a parish or even a street. Some clients can also be located, but few cases provide locations for both the practitioner and client. As such the picture of the reach of London-based practitioners' reputations is less clear than for the Somerset practitioners discussed in the preceding chapter. However, some patterns can be identified. The distribution of practitioners around London suggests that they were mostly to be found on the geographical margins; around the city walls and beyond. Of the magical practitioners for whom locations are provided, seven were located in the City itself, of which only one (Henry Goodwin alias "Wizard" of Crooked Lane) was within the walls.⁵² The others were found in parishes within the City but outside the walls.⁵³ Seven more were located within the College's area of jurisdiction but outside of the City.⁵⁴ Tabitha Stanmore identifies three 'rings' of

⁵⁰ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 195-196.

⁵¹ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 197.

⁵² Annals, 7 March 1600, 127.

⁵³ For some practitioners, multiple locations are available from different times, meaning some are counted twice. Margaret Pelling, Frances White, "BELL, John", in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, British History Online, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/bell-john>.; Margaret Pelling, Frances White, "CHAIRE, Catherine", in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, British History Online, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/chaire-catherine>.; Margaret Pelling, Frances White, "FORMAN, Simon", in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, British History Online, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/forman-simon>.; Margaret Pelling, Frances White, "SAVERY, Abraham", in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, British History Online, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/savery-abraham>.; Annals, 18 December 1627, 240-243.

⁵⁴ Margaret Pelling, Frances White, "BARTON, Christopher", in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, British History Online, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/barton-christopher>.; Margaret Pelling, Frances White, "FORMAN, Simon", in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, British History Online, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/forman-simon>.; Margaret Pelling, Frances White, "LEVERETT, James", in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, British History Online, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/leverett-james>.; Margaret Pelling, Frances White, "PHILLIPS, Mistress", in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, British History Online, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/phillips-mistress>.; Margaret Pelling, Frances White, "SAVERY, Abraham",

habitation in London – within the walls, the neighbourhoods immediately outside the walls, and London’s ‘satellite’ areas further afield.⁵⁵ Stanmore finds that the central ‘ring’ was home to very few magical practitioners, while larger concentrations were to be found in the middle and outer rings either close to the walls or along major thoroughfares into London. The impression given by the Annals aligns very closely with Stanmore’s findings, with only one practitioner within the walls and significantly more in each of the other ‘rings’. This pattern of habitation ensured that magical practitioners were readily accessible to Londoners but comparatively safe from the secular or ecclesiastical authorities that concentrated their attentions on the centre of the City.⁵⁶ The College itself was perhaps unlikely to have been a major factor in practitioners’ decisions about where to practise; Pelling finds that much of the College’s censorial activity had less to do with the College’s assiduous policing of London’s practitioners than with Londoners’ seeing it as “a potential resource in the management of their own affairs”.⁵⁷ This being the case, practitioners were perhaps in no more or less danger from the College wherever in London they were. Nevertheless, the locations given in the Annals give a sense of the working conditions of magical practitioners, who based themselves in areas that struck a balance between availability of clients and presence of secular and ecclesiastical legal authorities.

II. Practitioners’ Reputations

As a rich body of sources on the lives and practices of these magical healers, the Annals can reveal a great deal about their reputations. In terms of the qualities with which practitioners sought to be associated, and the problems that would cause them to be identified as ‘bad’ practitioners, the London cases found in the Annals share much with the Somerset cases found in the sessions rolls. Likewise, word of mouth and the written word both acted as media for magical reputations in these cases and, as the Annals often provide more details on the practices of their subjects than did the sessions rolls, it is also possible to consider how these media played various roles in the work of the practitioners. To a greater extent than the Somerset examples, several London-based practitioners clearly made significant use of performance and spectacle as part of their practice and self-representation, and some were sufficiently well-known to be referred to on the London stage.

in Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database, 2004, British History Online, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/savery-abraham>.; Margaret Pelling, Frances White, “WOODHOUSE, Mistress”, in Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database, 2004, British History Online, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/woodhouse-mistress>.

⁵⁵ Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 116.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵⁷ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 84.

Bad Practice

The complaints recorded in the Annals, like those found in the Somerset quarter sessions rolls, can provide some useful information as to what made a 'good' or 'bad' practitioner, though for the College of Physicians all magical healers, as 'irregulars', were 'bad' whatever their individual qualities or actions.

In many cases, there is no more specific complaint against practitioners than the fact of their practice. By the standards of the College all of these 'irregulars' were suspected of violating the College's monopoly by practising 'physic' within their area of jurisdiction. To be a magical healer at all, even without any suggestion from clients or neighbours that one was unsuccessful, dishonest, or disruptive, was sufficient to warrant censure by the College. This is not to say that the College had a special philosophical objection to the practice of magic or to any specific qualities of magical practitioners. As an institution it had a narrow focus, to put a stop to all 'irregular' medicine in and around the City of London. The case of the tailor Thomas Winche, who claimed in 1627 to heal by "reading in a booke" and taking nail parings, illustrates this.⁵⁸ Following examination, the officers of the College recorded in the Annals that his practice "is granted to be charming but whether it be physicke yt is doubted and they will take counsell upon it"; it was clear to them that Winche was practising magic, but less clear if it was any concern of the physicians. The College's institutional point of view then means that, to a greater extent than for the Quarter Sessions, practitioners might appear in these records without having done anything 'wrong' beyond being a practitioner in the first place.

In some cases, however, practitioners were complained of to the College and the substance of their disapproval is recorded. Some complainants reported that practitioners had failed to cure them or other patients, for instance Gabriel Sherritt who reported in 1602 that Mistress Woodhouse (who claimed she had "restored many bewitched people") had advised an old man regarding bloodletting who had died shortly thereafter.⁵⁹ Several of Christopher Barton's former patients appeared in 1639 to report that he had undertaken to cure them but failed to do so.⁶⁰ This type of complaint was very common for medical practitioners in general but, as in the Somerset material, it is also reflective of the results-focused approach people took to many magical services.

More specifically, some practitioners were criticised not so much on the basis that they had tried and failed to be effective healers, but that they had tricked or deceived their clients. Richard Cuckston complained in 1601 that Simon Read, found unlearned by the College, had "made fun of" his wife by

⁵⁸ Annals, 16 March 1627, 222.

⁵⁹ Annals, 14 September 1602, 149.; Annals, 17 September 1602, 150.

⁶⁰ Annals, 2 August 1639, 494.; Annals, [blank] September 1639, 495.

giving her a paper charm to wear, and John Bell's paper charms were described as "tricks" by the physicians in 1639.⁶¹ Matthias Evans' lengthy denunciation of John Lambe in 1617 included both that he had failed to cure his patients and that he had "cheated" and "cosened" them with "delusions" shown in a crystal.⁶² As with thief-detection in the quarter sessions, here too is evidence of the power of practitioners to negatively affect the reputations of others. In 1605, Christiana Gordon complained that Mistress Phillips had examined her urine and "declared her to be pregnant with a male child, which although false, was to her great shame and ruin".⁶³ The circumstances under which Phillips came to examine Gordon's urine aren't clear – possibly she was seeking a general medical diagnosis, or perhaps she expected the procedure to absolve her of the suspicion of a scandalous pregnancy. Whatever the case, Phillips' judgement evidently held enough weight to bring shame to Gordon.

Media and Materials

Like magical practitioners elsewhere (for instance in Somerset, per the previous chapter), London magical healers used more than one medium to carry out their work and to disseminate their reputations. Word of mouth was vital, but healers and other magical practitioners also existed in a world of paper, and used textual objects as part of magical operations as well as in the same ways as other healers.

Paper was a part of the working world of many irregular healers, as well as university-educated physicians, and some magical healers shared their patterns of working. As in other areas of seventeenth-century life, the written and spoken word complemented and drew upon one another.⁶⁴ Doctor's bills – prescriptions and instructions for preparing medicines given to apothecaries – were a core part of the seventeenth-century doctor's trade. These bills embodied the doctor's expertise and reputation in a physical and transferrable form. As such, they became valuable commodities that were often bought and sold, retained and reused by apothecaries, and even kept in recipe collections by patients for future reference.⁶⁵ They were also kept on file by apothecaries, where the College of Physicians was able to use them as evidence of the doctor's practice and of their relationship to the apothecary. In 1622 the irregular doctor and conjuror Abraham Savery's bills were used as evidence against the apothecary Thomas Whetlye, "a mainteyner of irregular practises in physique, as namely

⁶¹ Annals, 2 July 1601, 135. The formulation "made fun of" is of course from the modern English translation of the early Latin annals.; Annals, 7 November 1606, 187.

⁶² Annals, 7 May 1619, 125.

⁶³ Annals, 6 August 1605, 173.

⁶⁴ Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf, "Introduction" in *The spoken word Oral culture in Britain, 1500–1850*, ed. Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 7.

⁶⁵ Elaine Leong and Sara Pennell, "Recipe Collections and the Currency of Medical Knowledge in the Early Modern 'Medical Marketplace'," in *Medicine and the Market in England and Its Colonies, c. 1450–c. 1850*, ed. Mark Jenner and Patrick Wallis (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007), 134.

of Saverye”, and many other apothecaries were questioned on similar grounds as part of the College’s regular censorial activities.⁶⁶ The retention and circulation of bills like Savery’s speak to the reputations of the doctors that prepared them. In preparing a bill, doctors inscribed their real and perceived expertise in a format that allowed that expertise to circulate, tied to the doctor’s name.

Just as the spoken word could be an element in magical practices as well as the business of magic, paper and physical objects could also be part of magical operations more directly, and in this way too they could contribute to the circulation of the practitioner’s reputation and skills by making them tangible. Charms written on paper and carried by the patient for an extended time were a common feature of popular magic in early modern England, and examples appear in the Annals. In 1602 John Bell, an apothecary’s attendant, used “a piece of paper on which he had written inspired words” to attempt to cure Mrs Stutfield’s fever, while in 1601 Simon Read was accused of “making fun” of Richard Cuckston’s wife by “hanging a paper around her neck” after he purged and bled her for melancholy.⁶⁷ In both of these cases, paper charms were part of a course of treatment that also involved more conventional medicines, but the paper warranted special mention in the Annals. That Read was accused of “making fun” of Mrs Cuckston by having her wear the charm is particularly significant. In this case, the paper was clearly more visible and lasting than the purge and bleed Read had also administered, and wearing it marked Cuckston out as having availed herself of the services of Read or someone like him, a connection considered by Mr Cuckston to be embarrassing or ridiculous. Mrs Cuckston’s wearing of the charm made her position as Read’s client and as one who believed in the power of such charms tangible and visible. As with the astrologers’ tickets in Somerset, discussed in the previous chapter, the ways in which people interacted with written charms could have interesting implications for further studies of the role of literacy and the written word over the course of the early modern period.

Paper charms were not as transparently reputational as doctor’s bills or other papers like tickets and letters, however. Most often, charms were written up and then sealed, with the understanding that should they be opened they would lose their effectiveness. As with some other aspects of magical practice, a magical association with secrecy was in tension with the very mundane need of practitioners to be known, but the requirement that patients wear and put faith in a written charm they were forbidden to read or unseal speaks to the role of trust in the client-practitioner relationship. In some cases, the portable and transmissible nature of paper charms could perhaps further divorce them from the names of their creators. In 1608, the College dealt with three men – Philip Bernardinus,

⁶⁶ Annals, 29 November 1622, 159.; Annals, 19 December 1622, 161.; Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 109.

⁶⁷ Annals, 7 November 1606, 187.; Annals, 2 July 1601, 135.

John Fleming, and Francis Saporanus – regarding fifty paper charms and accompanying doses of “anti-catharticum” (a purgative drug) found at Bernardinus’ house.⁶⁸ As with Bell and Read’s charms, the charms at Bernardinus’ house were administered alongside a drug. But the scale and commercialisation of this operation was significant. According to Bernardinus, the doses and charms had been left at his house by Saporanus and Fleming, having been imported from overseas (possibly from Italy, as the Annals at one point refer to the latter two men as “the Italian merchants”), and he served as a middle-man, receiving the treatments from Saporanus and Fleming and selling them on to those that requested them. He also claimed that if he had distributed the fifty doses at his house, one or two thousand more would have been imported. Bernardinus’ commercial expectations should be taken with a pinch of salt, however; on their second appearance before the College, having been commanded to bring the anti-catharticum with them, Saporanus and Fleming produced forty-one doses (and “some” of the paper charms), suggesting that the sale of all fifty was a long way off and two thousand more perhaps ambitious.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, to import fifty doses of the drug with accompanying paper charms was already to operate on a significant scale, and the impersonality of the enterprise is striking. Normally, the only information a sick person would have on a charm in these circumstances was information about the person who made it and perhaps previous patients, but in the case of a large number of charms pre-prepared in a foreign country and provided alongside a drug, patients would have had even less to go on when judging the charm. It may be that the producer of the drugs and charms *was* named and ‘sold’ to prospective patients but not revealed to the College, but if the cures sold by Bernardinus were as anonymous as the Annals suggest, this would indicate that while paper and physical objects could embody and propagate the reputations of the practitioners who created them, they could also be sold as commodities with no other link between the creator and the eventual recipient.

Performance and Spectacle

In several of these cases, we might also consider that no small amount of showmanship or drama on the part of the practitioners contributed to their fame. Savery had been an actor, and even written plays himself, and Lambe claimed his business was to “make gentlemen merry” (a claim which will be further considered in the following chapter).⁷⁰ Roy Porter characterised seventeenth-century quacks as medical practitioners at the forefront of advertising, and the eighteenth century saw an explosion of advertising for patent medicines and other products alongside other hallmarks of the rise of

⁶⁸ Annals, 25 July 1608, 212-213.; Annals, 5 August 1608, 213.; Annals, 12 August 1608, 213-214.

⁶⁹ Annals, 5 August 1608, 213.

⁷⁰ Mark Eccles, “Elizabethan Actors IV: S To End”, *Notes and Queries* 40, no. 2 (1993): 165.; Annals, 18 December 1627, 242.

consumerism.⁷¹ More broadly, a whole field of overlapping labels for irregular medical practitioners emphasises their ‘popular’ appeal and theatrical approach. “Mountebank” originally denoted one who mounted a stage to sell his wares, and “charlatans” originated in Italy as itinerant performer-salespeople.⁷² This engagement with performance and theatre varied from the bombastic language of quack advertisements through to actual staged entertainments in the marketplace.⁷³ Generally, explicitly magical practices could not be so openly advertised due to the statutes regarding magic, but performance and spectacle were relevant to magical healers and service magic more broadly. While most magical healers did not stage formal entertainments, they were not uncommonly associated with the same traits of exoticism, spectacle, and the outlandish as quacks and mountebanks. Focusing on sixteenth-century France, Alison Lingo has suggested that the spectacular healing offered by itinerants contributed to a broader “social ritual” of public healing, in which the therapeutic efficacy of the drugs was less important than the broad experience, which appealed to the desire for an instant or remarkable cure.⁷⁴ Similar considerations might contribute to the popularity of magical healers and other service magicians in seventeenth-century England – clients expected to be impressed by the magical solutions to their problems, and the ritual of seeking answers mattered as much as the outcome. It would be too strong to suggest that all magical services or magical practitioners were theatrical, but practitioners like Lambe and Savery in particular seem to lend credence to the idea that those who became famous became so due in part to a grasp of spectacle that gave their services an entertaining as well as (or instead of) a pragmatic value and may indeed have made them more compelling characters in scandals and gossip. In Lambe’s case, this will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Fictional Representations

The lively culture of print and drama in London could also respond and contribute to the fame of certain practitioners by naming or alluding to them in fictional or semi-fictional texts. In Ben Jonson’s

⁷¹ Roy Porter “The language of quackery in England, 1660-1800” in *The Social History of Language*, ed. Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 73-103.; For more early modern consumerism see for example Sara Pennell, “Consumption and consumerism in early modern England,” *Historical Journal*, 42, 2 (1999), 552.; on medical advertising in the eighteenth century and later Hannah Barker, “Medical Advertising and Trust in Late Georgian England,” *Urban History* 36, no. 3 (2009): 379-98.

⁷² David Gentilcore, “‘Charlatans, Mountebanks and Other Similar People’: The Regulation and Role of Itinerant Practitioners in Early Modern Italy,” *Social History* 20, no. 3 (1995): 299.; Alison Klairmont Lingo, “Empirics and Charlatans in Early Modern France: The Genesis of the Classification of the “Other” in Medical Practice,” *Journal of Social History* 19, no. 4 (1986): 588.

⁷³ Gentilcore, “Charlatans, Mountebanks and Other Similar People”, 308.

⁷⁴ Lingo, “Empirics and Charlatans in Early Modern France,” 587.

The Devil is an Ass (first performed in 1616, the same year Savery was questioned regarding the Overbury Affair), the foolish would-be conjurer Fitzdottrel lists famous conjurers:

I, they doe, now, name Bretnor, as before,/ They talk'd of Grefham, and of Doctor Fore-man,/ Francklin, and Fiske, and Sauory (he was in too)/ But there's not one of these, that euer could/ Yet shew a man the Diuell, in true sort.⁷⁵

Among those names invoked by Jonson's Fitzdottrel, Bretnor and Fiske also appear in the *Annals* as irregular practitioners, though they do not have such colourful biographies as Forman and Savery, (or Lambe, who was also discussed on stage). Despite Jonson's listing them as conjurers like Gresham, Foreman, Franklin, and Savery, there is also little evidence to connect Bretnor or Fiske to magical practices beyond astrology. In 1612, Thomas Bretnor was summoned alongside a fellow almanac-maker identified only as Keen (probably John Keene, who had attacked Bretnor as ignorant in his almanac for that year) for describing themselves as medical practitioners while unlicensed.⁷⁶ Indeed, in their 1612 almanacs, Keene had described himself as "student in the Mathematickes and practitioner of Physicke", and Bretnor had described himself as "Teacher of the Mathematiques and practitioner in Physicke".⁷⁷ The two were admonished by the College and never summoned again, though both continued to identify themselves as practitioners or students of physic in their almanacs.⁷⁸ That the two were summoned in the same year that Keene took up against Bretnor and his clients in print may not be coincidental, but Keene published no further almanacs after 1617 and Bretnor died in 1618, so given the often lengthy intervals between encounters with the College it could well be so.⁷⁹ Bretnor published almanacs from 1607 to 1619, and Jonson's reference to him and another by Thomas Middleton in which a farmer is unwilling to plant until Bretnor's almanac advises him to do so are good indicators of the currency of his name.⁸⁰ Like William Lilly, whose reputation is the focus of Chapter 4, Bretnor's technical expertise as an astrologer, his practice as a physician, and his use of print all formed a complex reputation.

⁷⁵ Ben Jonson, *Bartholmew fayre : a comedie, acted in the yeare, 1614 by the Lady Elizabeths seruants, and then dedicated to King Iames, of most blessed memorie ; The diuell is an asse : a comedie acted in the yeare, 1616, by His Maiesties seruants ; The staple of newes : a comedie acted in the yeare, 1625* (London, 1631), 97.

⁷⁶ *Annals*, 7 February 1612, 34.; Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 159, n.78.

⁷⁷ John Keene, *[an new almanacke and] prognostication for the [yeare of our Lord] God 1612, being leap-yeare* (London, 1612).; Thomas Bretnor, *a new almanacke and prognostication for the yeare of our Lord God 1612, being the bissextile or leape yeare* (London, 1612).

⁷⁸ See for example John Keene, *a [new almanacke and] prognostication for the yeere ... 1613* (London, 1613).; and Thomas Bretnor, *A new almanacke and prognostication, made for the yeare of our Lord God. 1613* (London, 1613).

⁷⁹ Bernard Capp, "Bretnor, Thomas (1570/71–1618), astrologer and medical practitioner," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 22, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3339>

⁸⁰ Thomas Middleton, "The Inner Temple masque", in *The Works of Thomas Middleton, Vol.7*, ed. Arthur Henry Bullen (London: John C. Nimmo, 1886), 211.

Nicholas Fiske similarly was an astrologer, and he was accused of unlicensed practice in 1614, though little information about the accusation is recorded.⁸¹ Like Bretnor, it was for astrology and not for conjuring the devil that he was best known. In the 1630s Fiske was a successful London astrologer and an associate of William Lilly, who described him as “a Person very studious, laborious, of good Apprehension, and had by his own Industry obtained both in Astrology, Physick, Arithmetick, Astronomy, Geometry and Algebra, singular Judgment”, and in 1650 he published Christopher Heydon’s *An Astrological Discourse*.⁸² Less is known about his life at the time he appears in the Annals, however; he is listed there as an undergraduate, though he appears never to have received a degree.⁸³ Lilly described him as a “Licentiate in Physick”, suggesting he had a licence to practice from a clergyman, and also noted that he was well acquainted with William Gilbert (c.1544-1603), a natural philosopher and physician well-known for his treatise *De Magnete* (1600) and who, notwithstanding his unorthodox natural philosophy and opposition to dogmatic Galenism, was at one point both a Censor and President of the College.⁸⁴ How much time he spent in London around 1614 is uncertain – Lilly is unspecific about the dates writing that Fiske was acquainted with Gilbert and “afterwards” came to London, though he himself did not meet Fiske until 1633 when the latter moved from Suffolk.⁸⁵ He may have been simply passing through or visiting London when accused in 1614. Lilly writes that “in his youth he would never stay long in one house”, and Pelling finds that it was common for medical practitioners to support themselves while away from home and in so doing come to the notice of the College.⁸⁶ But clearly he had accrued enough of a reputation by 1616 to be invoked in Jonson’s play.

Little evidence survives of Bretnor and Fiske’s engagement in magical practices beyond astrology and astrological medicine, which casts an interesting light on their appearance in *The Devil is an Ass* alongside Forman and Savery as conjurers who, in spite of their magical paraphernalia (Fitzdottrel references crystals, magic rings, virgin parchment, skulls, ravens, and “characters”), were unable to conjure the devil.⁸⁷ The Annals of the College of Physicians on their own, concerned as they are solely with medical practice, can tell us only that Bretnor and Fiske identified themselves as medical

⁸¹ Annals, 4 March 1614.

⁸² William Lilly, and Elias Ashmole (ed.) *Mr. William Lilly's history of his life and times, from the year 1602, to 1681 Written by Himself, in the sixty-sixth year of his Age, to His Worthy Friend, Elias Ashmole, Esq.* (London, 1715, re-printed London, 1822). 72-73.; Lilly’s judgements about Bretnor and other London-based astrologers are discussed further in Chapter 4.

⁸³ Bernard Capp, “Fiske, Nicholas (1579–1659), astrologer and medical practitioner,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 22, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/53670>.

⁸⁴ Lilly, *Life and Times*, 73.; Stephen Pumfrey, “Gilbert, William (1544?–1603), natural philosopher,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 22, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10705>.

⁸⁵ Lilly, *Life and Times*, 73.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.; Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 100.

⁸⁷ Ben Jonson, *The diuell is an asse*, 97.

practitioners, or provided physic while in London. Other textual remains of the two astrologers indicate their interest in astrology, astronomy, and related fields, but only Jonson's play identifies them with crystals, rings, and diabolic conjurations. This is firstly indicative of the limitations of textual sources for the study of magical reputations – if Bretnor and Fiske *were* commonly seen as conjurers, as Jonson implies, a playwright's satirical remark could be the only surviving evidence. Given the legal status of magic, it is to be expected that those who practised astrology and magic would not include the latter in their almanacs, technical writings, and histories. But it may be indicative also of the way in which astrologers and magical practitioners were thought of in seventeenth-century England (or, at least, London). Whether these individuals did or didn't actually practice the ceremonial magic to which Jonson alludes, for his dramatic purpose of lampooning foolish, credulous, superstitious, and morally compromised Londoners, their names sufficed. If Bretnor and Fiske did engage in magical practices obscured by their illegality, Jonson and his intended audiences were no less the wise to them. If not, then the astrologers' perceived or imagined connection to the world of occult crystals and magic rings was strong enough regardless to be deployed in Jonson's satire.

Patronage and Connections

These cases also illuminate some of the ways in which practitioners' reputations were tied to the reputations of others; patrons, former clients, and fellow practitioners who might be treated as authorities. The Annals provide useful evidence of these connections and networks that supported the work of magical healers. Such relationships could be a social resource for practitioners that helped them to ply their trade and to avoid difficulties of the kind sometimes posed by the College.

At the most basic level, practitioners could sometimes rely on well-disposed persons to stand surety before the College, much like defendants in court. In 1606 John Bell, investigated by the College for undertaking to cure a fever using a paper charm, had his case dismissed by the College on the surety of "Thomas Smith of Fleet Street, a worthy man".⁸⁸ The nature of their relationship is not discussed in the Annals, but in order to stand surety, Smith had to be "worthy"; he had to possess a degree of respectability and public good behaviour. Pelling suggests Bell was likely connected to the established Bell "dynasty" of apothecaries based in Fleet Street, in which case his family's 'embeddedness' in the parish might have improved his chances of securing a worthy Fleet Street resident to stand surety for him.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Annals, 7 November 1606, 187.

⁸⁹ Margaret Pelling, Frances White, "BELL, John", in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, *British History Online*, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/bell-john>.

Other practitioners brought before the College had clearer patronage relationships which they leaned on at the time of their interaction with the College or which they had benefited from at some prior date. The usefulness of this type of relationship varied. In 1602, Mistress Woodhouse, described as “so notorious a practitioner in medicine” was investigated for her medical practice and said in her defence that she had healed many people who were bewitched or negatively affected by the stars.⁹⁰ The Physicians were evidently well-informed about the “notorious” Woodhouse and in particular, they knew she had been employed by the Lord High Treasurer, Thomas Sackville, to treat his daughter Anne, Lady Montague outside of London.⁹¹ Before proceeding against Woodhouse, the College sent three doctors to secure Sackville’s permission, which he granted on the basis that he had no further need of her services. In Woodhouse’s case, having one of the most powerful men in the country as a seemingly satisfied former client failed to protect her from the College, but this was due to Sackville’s refusal to extend his protection. The fact that the College felt it necessary to seek his permission to proceed against Woodhouse indicates that had he offered it, such protection would have been valuable to her. In this case, Sackville’s name was attached to Woodhouse’s; she was known to the College as the “notorious... practitioner” who had treated the Lord High Treasurer’s daughter and as a result the physicians felt that their actions against Woodhouse required Sackville’s consent. His attachment to Woodhouse’s name was surely an asset, but as the case demonstrates a great deal of the agency in this relationship remained in the patron’s hands – though he could have chosen to defend her from the College by withholding the requested permission to sue her, he refused, allowing the proceedings to go ahead.

If they were so inclined, influential individuals could indeed protect favoured practitioners. In 1602, having previously been censured by the College for using a paper charm, Simon Read appeared again having been “freed from prison, with remission of his fine by the Bishop of London who had written to the College on his behalf”.⁹² Unfortunately, the letter is not recorded in the Annals, so it remains unclear how Read secured the bishop’s help, but the case demonstrates how a powerful individual could reverse the College’s censorial decisions with a letter. Abraham Savery, who was pursued by the College on several occasions and was an object of some concern for the physicians, made use of friends in the highest places in 1625 when the king himself wrote to the College, informing them that Savery had been instrumental in treating an epileptic.⁹³ The king informed the physicians that Savery told him

⁹⁰ Annals, 17 September 1602, 150.; Annals, 3 July 1596, 101.

⁹¹ Annals, 17 September 1602, 150.; Rivkah Zim, “Sackville, Thomas, first Baron Buckhurst and first earl of Dorset (c. 1536–1608), poet and administrator,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 22, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24450>.

⁹² Annals, 5 May 1602, 144.

⁹³ Annals, Palm Sunday 1623, 164.; Annals, 7 January 1625, 192.

he was “no physician” as he only treated epilepsy, and that he would suppress him if it was found to be otherwise. Savery certainly did treat conditions other than epilepsy, but regardless, James’ apparent understanding that the College’s prerogatives did not extend to practitioners who only treated specific ailments was inaccurate; legally the College was well within its rights to suppress Savery’s practice. Nonetheless, a letter from the king blithely reporting Savery’s own protestations of innocence had to be taken seriously by an institution so sensitive to its dependence on the crown.⁹⁴ Savery was well known to several people in power, but it is unclear how he came to enjoy the king’s favour; previously he had been questioned in connection with the murder of Thomas Overbury, questioned about witchcraft, and suspected of espionage on behalf of the Spanish – nonetheless he was seemingly able to secure royal protection when he dealt with the College.⁹⁵

The evidence of the Annals broadly supports Stanmore’s argument that the degrees of magician-patron loyalty varied and that while high-status patrons *could* protect their favoured magical practitioners, many declined to do so.⁹⁶ But the consideration that potential patrons were given by the College, and cases where favourable connections did help practitioners to avoid the worst outcomes indicate that patrons could be an important tool for practitioners. More than this, patrons and former clients were attached to or formed part of the reputations of the practitioners who had treated or otherwise served them. The following chapters will demonstrate how the names of famous practitioners could be attached to ideals, causes, and political malaise but the evidence of the Annals demonstrates how the names of others could in themselves form part of the practitioner’s reputation.

These reputations were also connected with those of other practitioners, and these relationships could be a hindrance as well as a help. At times irregulars examined by the College referred to one another as authorities, invoking well-known practitioners like Savery as part of their defence or explanation. The apothecary John Quince, when questioned about the death of one of his patients, said that all he had done had been at Dr Savery’s direction, with the result that Savery himself was summoned.⁹⁷ Savery was *also* summoned in 1622 after the College investigated another apothecary, Thomas Whetlye, “as a mainteyner of irregular practises in physique, as namely of Saverye”.⁹⁸ In 1624 Ann Fathers confessed to practising uroscopy and “divers practices extravagant”, particularly on one Lady Harrington, but said in her defence that she had first consulted many doctors, especially Savery.⁹⁹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, Fathers’ recourse to the authority of a man the College already considered a

⁹⁴ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 321.

⁹⁵ TNA, SP 14/82 ff.65-67; SP 14/82 f.164; SP 14/82 f.193; Eccles, “Elizabethan Actors IV: S To End”, 165–76.

⁹⁶ Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 233-235.

⁹⁷ Annals, 21 April 1618, 112.

⁹⁸ Annals, 29 November 1622, 159.

⁹⁹ Annals, [blank] June, 1624, 186.

problem did little to ease the blow, and she was ordered to pay a fine of five pounds. Patrick Wallis has demonstrated how, despite the typical focus on competition within the medical marketplace, connections and cooperation were often vitally important to early modern medical practitioners, and while Savery was not a 'normal' practitioner (given the extent of concern about his practices and his somewhat storied past as an actor, alleged brothelkeeper, and accused witch) his seemingly quite 'normal' relationships with apothecaries and with other practitioners with whom he consulted suggest a degree of social embeddedness.¹⁰⁰ There is also a degree of hierarchy implicit in the College's indirect interactions with Savery. As he had proven difficult to pin down, the physicians exercised their right to search apothecaries' shops, using Savery's connections to the apothecaries, embodied in his doctor's bills, to gather evidence against him. But the fact that Ann Fathers and John Quince invoked Savery's name in their attempts to justify their practices shows the power they understood it to hold. Their own reputations clearly did not impress the College, but they believed that by subordinating themselves to Savery they might either legitimise themselves or at least shift the blame to a more prominent figure.

Working with other practitioners, magical or not, was not altogether uncommon. John Lambe was reported to the College in 1619 by Matthias Evans in what Pelling describes as "[o]ne of the most comprehensive sell-outs" of one irregular by another in the Annals.¹⁰¹ He was able to provide many details on Lambe's clients and practices because the two had worked closely together, with Lambe promising Evans "halfe his gettings this yeare". It was his failure to deliver on this promise that motivated Evans to report him.¹⁰² While this collaboration was evidently unsuccessful, it was not unique; magical practitioners like Lambe and Evans shared space as London-based practitioners catering to wealthy and often elite clients, and such individuals evidently knew one another and worked together for many clients. In 1622, Evans had worked alongside another practitioner, Edward Frodsham, in the employ of Frances Shute, later the Countess of Sussex.¹⁰³ In fact, Frodsham allegedly recommended Evans to Shute when she required his services first to calculate her daughter's nativity and then to be retained for astrology, physic, and love magic. Frodsham had also been employed by Frances Coke, Viscountess Purbeck alongside John Lambe. The two were discussed together as accessories to Purbeck's alleged poisoning of her husband, and reacted to the accusation in the same way, presenting their work as harmless "juggling".¹⁰⁴ While magical practitioners were very common in seventeenth-century England, this constellation of fairly high-profile practitioners points to the

¹⁰⁰ Patrick Wallis, "Competition and Cooperation in the Early Modern Medical Economy" in *Medicine and the Market in England and Its Colonies, C.1450- C.1850*, ed. Mark Jenner and Patrick Wallis (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 48.; Eccles, "Elizabethan Actors IV: S To End", 165–76.

¹⁰¹ Annals, 7 May 1619, 125.; Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 112.

¹⁰² Annals, 7 May 1619, 125.

¹⁰³ Ewen, *Robert Ratcliffe, 5th Earl of Sussex*, 4.

¹⁰⁴ TNA, SP 14/183 ff.73-74. This incident is discussed further in the following chapter.

interconnection of practitioners who operated in the same space; practitioners like Lambe, Evans, and Frodsham knew each other and their 'network' of relationships could, as in the Shute case, be a part of the functioning of their reputations.

Between patrons, clients, and colleagues, relationships to others could be an integral part of the reputations of magical practitioners in London. These relationships could be essential parts of working, as for instance when practitioners who prescribed medicines worked with apothecaries who prepared them, or of securing clients. They could contribute to the practitioner's sense of the legitimacy of their practices – as when Ann Fathers argued that her practises were approved by the well-known Savery – and they could at times be a significant factor in how practitioners fared in their interactions with institutions like the College.

III. The College and Reputation

The College itself should not be seen as a neutral presence. Its interactions with practitioners were, perhaps to an even greater degree than cases before the quarter sessions, negotiations of reputation. While the magical healers themselves had established reputations that they and their clients presumably understood, in interacting with the College they were recharacterized as 'irregulars', a category imposed on them by the physicians to describe them as wrongdoers failing to meet the College's strict standards for a reputable practitioner. The effect of the College on the practitioners and their reputations, and the ways in which practitioners adjusted their self-representation in the moment of confrontation reveals further complexities to magical reputations, and the cases in which the College actively investigated the claims of magical practitioners shed further light on the roles of truth and trust, as well as the perceived qualities of practitioners.

Practitioners' Responses

Faced with the authority of the College, practitioners could respond in a number of ways; some resented the interference of the College and were outwardly defiant, while others submitted readily and satisfied the physicians with promises not to practice. Many protested their innocence, their ignorance, or both in order not to face the penalties directed at irregular practitioners.

Many irregulars summoned by the College never actually appeared, and often were never summoned again, and while some have interpreted this as an indication that the College successfully deterred such practitioners, Pelling is sceptical.¹⁰⁵ She argues that the large number of practitioners who never appeared or never reappeared after the first time is more likely a reflection of the sheer number of

¹⁰⁵ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 285, 85.

practitioners, and the opportunistic, occasional, and transitory nature of the practitioners and their work.¹⁰⁶ Many when summoned responded that they were too ill, or too busy to attend, or sent proxies or representatives. The College had little power to enforce its prerogatives against such practitioners, meaning it was fairly easy for irregulars summoned by the College simply not to appear at all. Simon Forman was particularly noteworthy in this regard; though the College pursued him more vigorously than perhaps any other irregular practitioner, he continued to defy the Physicians often by refusing to appear when summoned.¹⁰⁷ Given the number of practitioners who failed to appear, and those who were summoned repeatedly over several years, it seems reasonable to conclude that coming to the attention of the College was not necessarily disastrous for practitioners or their reputations.

Given that those who most opposed the College's authority were able to avoid appearing at all, it is perhaps unsurprising that the most common position for irregulars who did appear before the College was one of submission. The College's primary aim was to extract from the irregulars a promise to cease practice, and its more extreme punishments served primarily as examples to help secure such submission.¹⁰⁸ But the way that magical practitioners framed their practises when submitting to the College can tell us something about what it meant to be known for magic.

Some practitioners confessed to the practices of which they were accused, but argued that what they did was not physic or that they were otherwise unaware that they had done anything wrong, for instance Christopher Barton who explained in 1639 that the wine he gave to his clients was only a drink and not a medicine – his cures were effected by touch.¹⁰⁹ This was not unique to magical healers, and supports Pelling's argument that the College was, in effect, alien to the society in which it operated.¹¹⁰ The categories employed by the physicians did not always make sense to irregulars or align with the experience of their clients.

Others went further, insisting that they had not done much of anything, and that they made no claims to practise physic. John Lambe is perhaps the most striking example; when asked by the physicians how he came to practice physic he replied that "he neuer had taken to that study that he makes no profession therof, but that he liues by making gentlemen merry", and further said that "all he did was trifles, fooleryes, and bables to get a little mony".¹¹¹ Professions of ignorance and deceptive behaviours like this were not uncommon among magical practitioners when questioned by authorities, with some evidently preferring to confess to fraud than to magic. Stanmore suggests that this might have been

¹⁰⁶ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 85.

¹⁰⁷ Kassell, *Medicine and magic in Elizabethan London*, 85-86.

¹⁰⁸ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 306.

¹⁰⁹ Annals, [blank] September 1639, 495.

¹¹⁰ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 1.

¹¹¹ Annals, 18 December 1627, 240-243.

an appealing option particularly to occasional dabblers or travelling magical practitioners, who “may not have been as invested in maintaining their image” as well-established cunning folk with regular clients and noted rates of success.¹¹² The latter group would have had more to lose than the former from being identified as fraudsters or cheats because they had a more established reputation as trustworthy and effective magical practitioners. Lambe complicates this image, however – as will be discussed in the following chapter, Lambe was famous in London and well-established as a conjuror and doctor by the time he was questioned in 1627, but on more than one occasion he responded to questioning by presenting himself as at best an entertainer and at worst a fraudster. This might reflect a certain savviness on Lambe’s part – the College, after all, was interested only in the practice of physic, not the provision of entertainment to gentlemen. Lambe’s questioning by the College should also be seen in its context – he had narrowly avoided hanging for witchcraft and for rape by 1627, so the risk to his reputation from being identified as a liar might well have been outweighed by the risk to his life and liberty from being associated with any more serious crime.

A small minority of irregulars appeared before the College but did not submit, instead vocally defending their right to practise. Simon Forman was the most notable of these; to a perhaps unique degree he challenged not only the College’s authority to prevent him from practising physic, but their understanding of the art of medicine, which he deemed vastly inferior to his own.¹¹³ James Leverett, whose case is analysed in more detail below, insisted upon the efficacy of his healing touch, and had previously boasted that he could heal those the physicians could not.¹¹⁴ Some others were resistant but less aggressive, for instance Philip Bernardinus who insisted in 1608 that an unnamed man from Tower Hill had “greatly benefited” from the treatments he sold.¹¹⁵ Pelling and Kassell find that the College’s harshest penalties and most dogged pursuits were reserved for irregulars who most directly challenged the College’s authority, and this is reflected in the magical examples.¹¹⁶

Truth, Testing, and Experimentation

While it was not always relevant to the College’s business, some cases entailed passing judgement on the claims of magical practitioners to truthfulness and effectiveness, and while the College was notably jealous of its prerogatives and derisive of outsiders a strand of informed scepticism can be seen in its

¹¹² Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 135.

¹¹³ Kassell, *Medicine and magic in Elizabethan London*, 85.; Margaret Pelling, Frances White, “FORMAN, Simon”, in *Physicians and Irregular Medical Practitioners in London 1550-1640 Database*, 2004, British History Online, accessed Jan 22, 2025, <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/london-physicians/1550-1640/forman-simon>.

¹¹⁴ *Annals*, 28 November 1637, 460-461.

¹¹⁵ *Annals*, 12 August 1608, 213-214.

¹¹⁶ Kassell, *Medicine and magic in Elizabethan London*, 86, 89. Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 294.

treatment of some magical healers. The College of Physicians was not primarily or directly interested in magic; it was not concerned with pursuing and suppressing superstition or blasphemy, or with removing magic from popular belief. Censorial activity was part of the institution's self-definition – the College made a name and an identity for itself by contrast to a constructed 'other'.¹¹⁷ But this other was irregular medicine in general, and the College was concerned with magic only when and insofar as it was an aspect of irregular medicine, a practice of the irregulars. For the most part then when the Annals deal with magic it is as one type of bad medical practice, perhaps no more striking than any other.

Perhaps paradoxically, however, the College's exclusive interest in medicine in some cases required debate or discussion of magic. Magic was not the concern of the College on religious, moral, or intellectual grounds, only as one variety of irregular medical practice; that being the case, when dealing with many of the individuals considered here, the officeholders of the College were required to contextualise them as either practising physic or not. Furthermore, while it appears that Londoners generally had a poor grasp on the specifics of the College's prerogatives, at least some of the practitioners demonstrated an understanding that certain forms of healing might not fall within the remit of the physicians, and attempted to deploy the distinction as a defence.¹¹⁸

In these sporadic attempts to demarcate magic from medicine, a strong strand of scepticism can be detected. While the College did not reject the supernatural as a rule, accepting (in line with the orthodox position of learned writers in the first half of the seventeenth century) the reality of witchcraft and other 'supernatural' phenomena, when the officeholders assembled as a *Comitia* (a meeting of the Censors and the President in their official capacities) they appear to have been highly sceptical regarding individual instances and claims to supernatural power.

The Case of James Leverett

One case in particular – that of James Leverett, a gardener turned touch healer – saw the College of Physicians not only interrogate the claims of a magical practitioner but investigate them in a formal experiment.¹¹⁹ With the prompting of the Star Chamber, scepticism about Leverett's magical practice manifested as an experimental and legalistic approach to his claims to have cured hundreds of patients

¹¹⁷ Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime in Stuart London*, 68; Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 4.

¹¹⁸ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 280.

¹¹⁹ Annals, 20 October 1637, 454; Annals, 3 November 1636, 454-456.; Annals, 8 November 1637, 456-457.; Annals, 10 November 1637, 457-458.; Annals, 14 November 1637, 458.; Annals, 17 November 1637, 458.; Annals, 21 November 1637, 459.; Annals, 25 November 1637, 459-460.; Annals, 28 November 1637, 460-466.

by touch.¹²⁰ Unusually (and uniquely among the magical practitioners), Leverett was commanded to “make experiment of his said Cures”; his claims to magical healing were not only closely examined by the College but actively tested to determine if they had any effect. In his first appearance on 3rd November 1637, the officebearers of the College were charged

to call the said Leverett before them, and to examine his said pretended Cures, as well vpon such Informacion and proofes as shall be given them by Mr. Serieant Clowes, as by any other waies and meanes which they shall thinck fitt for discoverie of the Truth. And likewise to cause him to make experiment of his said Cures in their presence, and therevpon to make Certificate to this Board, of what they shall find appeare before them, and of their opinions concerning the same.¹²¹

Leverett’s case was not typical or representative of the College’s approach but it is highly revealing of Leverett’s reputation, and demonstrates that when motivated to do so the College did possess the tools to dissect a practitioner’s reputation and truth claims.

The main reason for the College’s unusual approach to Leverett’s case was its political significance. On 19th September 1637, the Privy Council had sent a messenger to bring them “Leverete a Gardner that undertakes to cure the Kings Evil”, and on 20th October the royal sergeant surgeon, William Clowes, had brought a complaint against him to the Star Chamber for the same.¹²² Touch healing in England could be uniquely politically charged, as a long-standing tradition held that the King was able to heal the ‘Kings Evil’, scrofula, by stroking the sufferer.¹²³ As such, other healers who laid claim to the same power, as Leverett did, risked undermining royal prestige and sacralty. Not only did Leverett claim to heal by touch, but he claimed to be particularly successful at treating the Evil, and to have cured many who had been with the King or with physicians without success.¹²⁴ Stephen Brogan suggests that the punitive measures against Leverett, which followed his examination by the College, reflected Charles I’s particular concern for his royal prerogative to ‘touch for the Evil’, and contrasts this Caroline response to the more laissez-faire attitude of previous monarchs to provincial touch healers.¹²⁵ Under earlier Stuart and Tudor monarchs, he argues, touch healers commonly touched for a range of diseases rather than only ‘the King’s Evil’, and they posed less of a challenge to the king as the royal touch was

¹²⁰ Annals, 20 October 1637, 454.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² TNA, SP 16/367 f.255; Annals, 20 October 1637, 454.

¹²³ Stephen Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England: Politics, Medicine and Sin*. (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 1-5.

¹²⁴ Annals, 3 November 1636, 456.

¹²⁵ Brogan *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England*, 85.

more readily accessible. Leverett also touched for a range of diseases, but as Brogan points out it was his comments about scrofula that particularly caused legal trouble.

The royal concern with Leverett was timely. As Brogan notes, the 1630s saw several touch healers achieve renown while claiming to be seventh sons.¹²⁶ He names three: a French knight, James Philip Gaudre, active in 1632; Leverett, who was questioned in 1637; and an unnamed blacksmith in Wiltshire active in 1638.¹²⁷ To Brogan's three, another can be added from the State Papers, a five-year-old boy named Richard Gilbert of Prestleigh, Somerset, who was investigated by the Bishop of Bath and Wells in 1637.¹²⁸ Brogan suggests that the rise to prominence of touch healers in this period was prompted by lulls in royal touching; in January 1632 when Gaudre was investigated, Charles I had missed his last scheduled round of healing due to plague, and announced that another round would not occur until Lent. When Leverett was examined by the College, Charles had similarly missed the Easter and Michaelmas rounds of healing due to plague, and had issued a proclamation that he would not touch until springtime.¹²⁹ This could apply to Gilbert also, given the proximity of the cases. The blacksmith's case arose shortly after Charles' proclamation that he would no longer touch while on progress. The timing of these cases, so closely following actual or perceived lapses in access to the royal touch, does support the idea that touch healers like Leverett were most in demand as a substitute for the king himself, though it is worth noting that while the healers were investigated at these times, none of them sprung up overnight. Leverett claimed to have worked his first cure three years prior to his examination, and the five-year-old Gilbert had been credited with his first cure soon after his birth and before his baptism. This does not exclude the possibility that established touch healers saw an upsurge in demand for their cures when the royal touch was less accessible – Leverett said when questioned that he “now” might touch thirty or forty patients in a day, suggesting that previously his patients had been fewer.¹³⁰ But it is also possible if, as Brogan argues, Charles “guarded his prerogative jealously” that royal institutions were simply more sensitive to and proactive in dealing with touch healers when their members were aware that the king had not touched for an extended period and would not for several months.

Beyond the political significance of the case, it is an important one as it gave Leverett far more opportunity than most irregulars to account for himself and to explain his position as a healer. This account of his own understanding of his alleged gifts, and the ways in which Clowes and the College

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 83.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 84

¹²⁸ TNA, SP 16/368 f.159; SP 16/371 ff.230-235.

¹²⁹ Brogan *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England*, 84.

¹³⁰ Annals, 3 November 1636, 455.

investigated and challenged his claims tell us a great deal about his reputation and self-representation, and about the scrutiny to which it was subjected.

In his first meeting with the College on 3rd November 1637, Leverett told the story of how he came to be a healer. He had worked his first cure on his wife seemingly by accident six years prior, while feeling her chronically painful arm. Six months later, a maid and another woman came to him and prevailed upon the reluctant and sceptical Leverett to touch their arms, relieving their pain. He had not begun to use any words in his healing until he had cured about a dozen, when he began to use the words recorded in the experiment – “God giue a blessing I touch God heales”. He said he might touch thirty to forty patients in a day, and had cured at least three hundred in total. He admitted that “Hee takes money for his cures but not by contract. yf hee should not take money hee might starve, having forsakenn his trade by the calling of God”, and also related that he had once been assaulted by “some Surgeons or Phisitions” whose names he did not know, and who wrung his thumb (fortunately, he was able to cure it by his own touch). Leverett’s narrative resembles published accounts of miraculous cures and other prodigies. He reported that he semi-accidentally discovered his prodigious gift and healed a chronic infirmity, whereupon word spread and Leverett, despite his initial humble rejection, came to be convinced that God was working through him.

The role of God in Leverett’s story was an important one, and one which the College investigated particularly keenly. Leverett described his shift from gardening to touch-healing as following “the calling of God”, and insisted on several occasions that the cures were worked by God and that he “doth his dutie” in touching the sick.¹³¹ The College carefully recorded his pious ‘charm’ to that effect and his urging the experimental patients to pray for God’s blessing before and after the procedure. They clearly investigated the theology of Leverett’s touching to at least some degree – on 17th November the Annals record that Leverett said he never used the names “Jesus” or “Christ” in his words, but would not explain why when asked.¹³² Leverett had put further thought into the origin of his healing power, and so did the College. In his first appearance before the College, it was recorded “Hee denies vertue to bee either in his gloves or lynnenn, or any thing that toucheth his naked bodie, although yt was then objected against him.” The possibility of a more mundane explanation was proposed and rejected by Leverett. He referred to a “virtue which goes out of him” when he touched; when drained of this virtue by touching thirty or forty people in one day, he was left more exhausted than after heavy labour in a garden, so weak he was forced to retire to bed.¹³³ Seemingly, the notion of a virtue which left his body to work the cure was contentious – on his second appearance before the College “hee retractes that

¹³¹ Annals, 3 November 1636, 456.

¹³² Annals, 17 November 1637, 458.

¹³³ Annals, 3 November 1636, 455.

any virtue goes out of him, but saies that hee is growne weake with touching, which is as much in effect".¹³⁴ The voice of the physicians is particularly audible in this part of the record – evidently those examining Leverett were suspicious of his claim that a virtue passed from him to the patient, physically exhausting him, and unimpressed by his retraction since it still appeared to be the logical conclusion from his claim that to heal exhausted him. The perceived importance of this point is further demonstrated by its recurrence in Clowes' complaint against Leverett and the testimonies of several of the witnesses against him.¹³⁵ In their report to the privy council, the physicians described the claim as "blasphemous", perhaps because it would appear to be at odds with the idea that the cure came directly from the grace of God – a Protestant theological necessity that proponents of the royal touch had grappled with carefully.¹³⁶

In his examination by the College, Leverett appears to have been committed to the divine explanation of his healing, but his claimed identity as a seventh son also formed part of his healing reputation. In English folklore, seventh sons were commonly credited with healing gifts, sometimes referred to as the 'doctor' of the family, and it was not uncommon for healers and cunning folk to claim this special status for themselves.¹³⁷ Leverett affirmed in his first appearance that he was the seventh of his father's eight sons, but demurred, saying "hee did not challenge any virtue by being the 7th sonne". While distancing himself from such 'superstition' before the College was perhaps a logical move, it seems unlikely that Leverett had not previously traded on the seventh son label. In Clowes' 'certificate' of his accusations against Leverett he described him as "an Impostor and Cousoner of the Kinges people vnder pretence of being the seaventh sonne of a seaventh sonne", and he also produced a note from the register of the parish of St Clements East-Cheap, showing that James was no seventh son at all, but the fourth son, one of his father's seven children (sons and daughters) of whom the youngest was a girl named Anne.¹³⁸ In the College's answer to the privy council, reporting its findings on Leverett, the very first item listed was that the President and the College found him to be his father's fourth son.¹³⁹ Claims such as Leverett's were not uncommon among magical practitioners, but it is striking that Clowes sought and produced documentary evidence in an effort to dispel it. The crux of the matter may have been less whether or not Leverett was a seventh son, however, and more whether or not he was a liar, or an "impostor"; he was accused of cozening the king's subjects "vnder pretence of being

¹³⁴ Annals, 8 November 1636, 456.

¹³⁵ Annals, 28 November 1637, 460-466.

¹³⁶ Annals, 28 November 1637, 465.; Brogan *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England*, 12-13.

¹³⁷ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 70.

¹³⁸ Annals, 28 November 1637, 460.; Annals, 28 November 1637, 465.

¹³⁹ Annals, 28 November 1637, 464.

the seaventh sonne”, and demonstrating that he had falsified his origins proved him an untruthful and untrustworthy character.

Besides his claims to work on God’s behalf and/or to be a seventh son, Leverett’s most fundamental and contested claim was perhaps that he was an effective healer. This was a key concern for irregulars and the College in most cases; the irregular practitioner claimed to have effected cures and to offer beneficial treatments to the sick, while the College typically found that as the practitioner had no university degree or license from the College, and therefore no right to practise physic, those claims were untrue. In Leverett’s case, however, his claims to be able to heal by touch were actively tested. The process of experimentation was straightforward. On 8th November 1637, Leverett appeared for the second time, and, having affirmed he was “in good disposition to touch” was presented with two patients – twenty-three-year-old Richard George, suffering of a tumour in his knee, and Elizabeth Appleton (a space is left blank for her age in the Annals), had a swelling in her neck from the King’s Evil.¹⁴⁰ Leverett’s treatment of the patients was closely examined – the Annals record in precise detail his words and actions. When presented with George’s knee Leverett was initially concerned that it was in fact “out of joint”, and when assured it was not complained that he had been presented with this ailment rather than “the Evill” as he had requested. Before touching the knee, he said “I doe not promise any cure, God cures, God giue a blessing I doe but my dutie”. He bowed, bid the patient pray for God to bless Leverett’s hands, and then laid them a little above the knee and stroked downwards, repeating “thrice, thrice and thrice” the words “God blesse I touch God heales”. With that done he again urged George to pray for God’s blessing, and began to cover the knee. He became irate when George touched the knee himself – “he had spoiled all, for neither hee nor any bodie else must touch yt, nor any oyles nor oyntmentes nor plaisters must come vponn yt”, and so Leverett touched the knee twice as before, repeating the words six times, then covering the knee and bidding George to pray, refrain from touching his knee, drink only small beer, and wash only in warm water. The precise detail in which the procedure is recorded is indicative of the attention the College paid – for their experiment, the words Leverett used and the number of times he repeated them, the placement and movement of his hands, the prayers he enjoined, and the prescriptions he made for George’s diet all mattered. When he treated his second patient of the day, Appleton, the officebearers of the College again watched carefully, reporting that there were no differences in his procedure besides that Leverett crossed her cheek and neck where the scrofulous sores were present – a traditional element of the royal touch largely abandoned by James I as suspiciously popish. The precise description may also indicate a precision on Leverett’s part, though given the circumstances it is harder to be certain of this;

¹⁴⁰ Annals, 8 November 1637, 456-457.

whatever he did would be recorded carefully, and it is impossible to know that his actions under the eye of the College were identical to his usual treatment of patients.

On 10th November, Leverett touched George and Appleton for the second time – he had explained previously that “hee toucheth none aboue twice or thrice and that the first time they find ease and good effect of his touching” and was presented with several further patients.¹⁴¹ Henry Welch suffered from pain in his hand which caused convulsive fits – Leverett declined to touch Welch’s hand as “he did not knowe but there might bee some mischief in his hand that might doe him harme”, but insisted he had cured similar ailments before, and offered to bring his own patient to be cured of convulsive fits. This the College refused unless it could be confirmed that Leverett’s guest truly suffered from fits – clearly they had some measure of concern for the integrity of the experiment and were suspicious of the accused impostor’s motives. He did agree to touch Judith True, who had a sore in her breast, and Hester Fisher and Sara Anderson who had “vicerated and tumefied fingers”, and the College recorded that

His touching of sores is different from the former tumors, for first hee layes his whole hand and saies his charme or wordes thrice then hee puttes constantly the toppe of his middle finger and repeates his charme thrice more and so till he hath done nyne tymes... The binding up is different for hee takes a piece of Cloth and wreathes yt into a Circle, then hee puttes that over the sore, soe that the Clothe toucheth it not, and herein hee is very curious that it touch not the sore, Then he bindes a broader cloth all over it, and exhortes the Patient to prairie to God his hand may take effect.¹⁴²

Again, keen attention was paid to the procedure – the College noted that the ailment was different and that Leverett treated it differently. Seemingly Leverett’s “charme or wordes” remained unchanged, and the physicians also noted Leverett’s attention to detail in ensuring the cloth covering “touch not the sore”.

On 14th November he touched all the patients of the 10th a second time, as well as touching Henry Welch, and Thomas Scamodye, a new patient with a tumour in his foot.¹⁴³ On this occasion Richard George “desired hee might bee noe more touched”, as he had experienced unfamiliar pain and swelling since the procedure, “but hee was perswaded by the Colledge to try further”. Mostly, the patients appear in the experiment as passive objects, wheeled in to be subjected to Leverett’s touch, but George’s example – and that of Welch, who likewise later asked not to be touched as his pain had

¹⁴¹ Annals, 10 November 1637, 457-458.

¹⁴² Annals, 10 November 1637, 458.

¹⁴³ Annals, 14 November 1637, 458.

worsened – indicates the degree of agency they had in the procedure. They were aware of their place in the experiment, consenting to be touched by the suspect healer and monitoring their conditions for relevant change. Notably, George and Welch did not conceive of Leverett’s touch as being either effective or fraudulent – they found it to be operative but harmful. Their experiences of Leverett’s touch were recorded by the College, though in George’s case at least the importance of the experiment evidently outweighed his discomfort.

On 17th November, Leverett did not appear.¹⁴⁴ On 21st November he apologised for his former absence and explained he “was not now disposed to touch”.¹⁴⁵ The College appears to have respected this – he had maintained from the outset that he had to be “disposed” to touch in order to work a cure. In any case, he was not forced to continue the experiment. Instead, the College seemingly took the opportunity to question him further, and requested that he return with six of his healed patients. At this point, the experiment appears to have fallen off – no further mention was made of the trial patients, and no outcome was recorded besides George and Welch’s requests not to be touched again. Instead, the investigation into Leverett turned to documentary proof and the more conventional evidence of witnessing.

Witnesses called by Leverett and by Clowes also spoke to both his actions and his character.¹⁴⁶ Much more than documentary evidence, witnessing was at the heart of early modern dispute and litigation.¹⁴⁷ When he first appeared on 8th November, Leverett brought “diuers men women and children that hee said hee had cured and praied the College to examine them”; his first recourse when required to present himself to the College was to marshal satisfied customers whose testimonies would vindicate his reputation.¹⁴⁸ The officebearers of the College refused to examine the witnesses, however, assuring Leverett they would be heard at another time. On the 25th of November, after the final round of the experiment, Leverett brought “divers with him”, of whom three (and their relatives) were examined by the College. Notably, all the patients examined were children – first was Robert Monday, aged about eight, along with his mother and father; next was Elizabeth Maye, aged eleven, and her father; and lastly Peter Norris, aged six (if his parents were questioned their answers were not recorded).¹⁴⁹ It may be that Leverett’s patients were frequently children – two of Clowes’ witnesses

¹⁴⁴ Annals, 17 November 1637, 458.

¹⁴⁵ Annals, 21 November 1637, 459.

¹⁴⁶ Annals, 25 November 1637, 459-460.; Annals, 28 November 1637, 460-466.

¹⁴⁷ Barbara Shapiro, “Law and the Evidentiary Environment,” in *The Oxford Handbook of English Law and Literature, 1500-1700* ed. Lorna Hutson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 257.

¹⁴⁸ Annals, 8 November 1637, 456-457.

¹⁴⁹ Annals, 25 November 1637, 459-460.; Annals, 28 November 1637, 461-462.

against him were parents whose children had been touched by Leverett – if he imagined that children would make for more convincing witnesses he must have been disappointed.

The Mondays all reported that Robert had suffered from a sore, and that a surgeon named Cooke had healed this but it had returned, after which Leverett touched the sore three times and it dried up after several months. They appear to have been questioned on specifics – Robert recalled being touched four times, and having brown paper put on the sore – Leverett corrected him, saying it had been linen cloth. Robert's father, Richard Monday, also affirmed a cloth had been used, adding that the child's hands had been wrapped in cloth also, to prevent him from touching the sore (which would appear to agree with Leverett's touching of Richard George before the College). His mother Elizabeth specified that he had been touched three times in nine days, and confirmed that Leverett had used words in the touching. Elizabeth Maye reported that she had had the king's evil in her eyes for seven years and that "her head brake forth". She reported that Leverett bade her serve God, and touched her eyes three times in nine days (the same schedule reported by Elizabeth Monday) and she was well nine days later. She also reported that "Shee had bene with the King 2 yeares before and carries the Angell [a gold coin given to those touched for the evil] still, but was not well by the Kinges touching". Her father offered less information, but reported "Hee was hoast to Leverett half a yeare and saieth that Leverett touched her many times, but how often he knoweth not". Peter Norris, the final patient examined, said he too had had the king's evil in his eye, and that Leverett had touched it many times "But the Child saieth, yt is not yet well, and yt so appeared vnto vs."¹⁵⁰

The outcome of the witness testimonies was perhaps not as Leverett hoped – the Mondays and the Mayes affirmed that his touch had been successful (though in the Monday's case the sore dried up months later – somewhat less striking a success than the nine days for Elizabeth Maye), but the physicians agreed with young Peter Norris' report that his eye was still ailing. The College's report to the privy council claims that "[a]mong many whom hee pretends to haue cured hee made choise of three of them..." and noted that Monday's sore had dried up by itself, that Maye had actually been cured by a flux of the belly before and after, and that Norris' eye had not been helped by Leverett's touch.

The next entry regarding Leverett is dated 28th November, and on that date Clowes appeared with "divers persons" of his own, all of whom had signed the certificate presented in the Annals.¹⁵¹ He had brought the certificates on 17th November, but the College had requested he bring the parties themselves. Clowes certificate included seven articles against Leverett: that he blasphemously claimed

¹⁵⁰ Annals, 25 November 1637, 459.

¹⁵¹ Annals, 28 November 1637, 460-466.

a virtue went out of him when he touched; that he “scornfully slighteth His Majesties sacred gift of healing”; that he claimed his healing hand “must not be touched by any hand “except it be to put a pipe of Tobacco or an Angell into it”; that he claimed the sheets he had lain in had curative properties, which Clowes knew had been tried unsuccessfully; that he claimed to live in fear that the physicians and surgeons would murder him; that “Hee hath contemptuously vsed his Juggling trickes since hee was before the Lordes of the Councell convicted as a delinquent”; and that “great Lordes and Ladies and Gentlemen and rich men haue fondly gone vnto him, whereof many of them... are blushingly ashamed”; and that if it could be proven any man could cure by touch, it was “not fit” that the king’s person should be risked by the procedure. Alongside these articles, Clowes included the aforementioned extract from the parish register showing that Leverett was not a seventh son, and the signed testimonies of five witnesses.

Edward Pate reported that because he had first taken his child to the king for a cure, Leverett called him a “foole” and made him wait several days before touching the child, to no benefit. In fact, when Pate followed Leverett’s instruction to “stoppe vp my Childes yssue and take off the Angell”, the child nearly died. Thomas Clowes reported that his child had suffered from the evil, and that while Leverett had pretended to expect no payment “hee did intend and expect nothing more then money and proffitt”; he would do nothing “vnless hee were fedd daily with wine and Tobacco and other guifts as also with much entreaty”, citing the exhaustion that came with the touching. He added to this that Leverett was frequently drunk (and that it was this, not exhaustion, that had him crawling upstairs to bed), and on one occasion refused to touch a maid unless she kissed him. Samuel Turner reported that he had been “in company” with Leverett and heard him say that after he had touched many he was so weakened he could not get up to bed without the help of his hands. The anonymous “G” was sceptical that Leverett could cure a tetter (an itchy skin condition) on G’s hand, as the infection was in the liver, but Leverett replied “hee could do yt by waie of touching my brest”, and did so many times, charging 10s. but failing to produce a cure. G opined that “To speake truth I do believe this Leverett to be a mere Impostor and one that daily abuseth his Maiesties Subiectes”. Finally, Robert South testified simply that Leverett had failed to cure his wife’s sore breast and his daughter’s scrofula and that “This Fellow I believe to be a mere mountibanck and [deceiver] of his Maiesties people”. From these testimonies, the tenor of Clowes objection to Leverett is clear – his touch did not cure as he claimed it did; he blasphemously claimed that a virtue or strength was transferred from him to the patient, leaving him tired; and furthermore, that he was a disreputable and immoral man, avaricious and lecherous, who exploited would-be patients for gifts and maidens’ kisses. Clowes and his witnesses presented almost a stock image of a disreputable conjurer – dishonest and morally dissolute, their

version of Leverett resembles the widely-reviled John Lambe, and perhaps the Somerset cunning man John Mortemer, who it was said had threatened to make a woman “follow hime where he listed”.¹⁵²

From Leverett’s examination several elements of his self-representation emerge, each of them contested in the reconstruction of his reputation by the College and Sergeant Surgeon Clowes. Firstly, Leverett claimed his power to heal was granted by God, and that he served God or answered a calling by touching the sick. This claim was not as directly challenged as others, but Clowes and the College demonstrated a keen interest in the religious aspects of his practice; they investigated the exact words he used (did he invoke God? Did he use the name of Christ?) and decried as blasphemous some of his claims, for instance that “a virtue went out of him” when he touched.¹⁵³ Leverett retracted the “blasphemous” claim but it was investigated beyond his words before the College; witnesses reported that he had claimed to be exhausted by touching the sick, from which it was inferred that he believed something – a “virtue” – left his body and entered that of the patient. Secondly, he claimed to be a seventh son, and while he denied claiming any special power thereby in his examination, it is a fact that seventh sons were commonly believed to possess a healing touch in seventeenth-century England. This claim Clowes went out of his way to disprove with documentary evidence – rather than fighting Leverett on the *concept* of the seventh son, he consulted the parish registers of his birthplace to prove that he was not, in fact, a seventh son at all. Not only did Clowes aim to demonstrate that Leverett was not a supernaturally gifted seventh son, he aimed to demonstrate that he was a liar. Leverett claimed also to be an effective healer, boasting of the efficacy of his touch and his willingness to demonstrate. This claim was put to the test experimentally and by witnessing; by having Leverett touch patients and examining them, as well as by questioning those he presented as having been cured by his touch, the College repudiated his reputation as a healer. Finally, the witnesses when questioned presented Leverett as amoral and mercenary, deceptive and lascivious, characteristics which implicitly or explicitly marked him as a wicked impostor rather than a blessed healer, and which may have associated him with an archetypal cozening conjurer. These important elements of Leverett’s claim to supernatural power, the foundation of his evidently successful reputation as a healer, were tried and found wanting by Clowes and the College, who labelled him instead “an Impostor and a deceavor of over Credulous people” whose “pretended cures [were] full of superstition and sorcery”.¹⁵⁴

Leverett’s examination certainly stands out from other cases in the Annals, but the essential points of the investigation were not completely unprecedented – a contemporary case from Somerset demonstrates that the Privy Council’s concern with touch healers and the questions asked of them

¹⁵² Somerset Heritage Centre Q SR/21/10

¹⁵³ Annals, 8 November 1636, 456.

¹⁵⁴ Annals, 28 November 1637, 466.

were not unique to Leverett's case. Between September and November 1637, around the same time that Leverett was under investigation, William Pierce, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, asked many of the same questions in his investigation of Richard Gilbert of Prestleigh – a five-year-old boy who had accrued a reputation for touch healing – and his father William.¹⁵⁵ In his report to the Privy Council, Pierce provided an account of how the child first began touching the sick, just as Leverett gave for himself. He investigated the particulars of the child's touching process, finding that people came to him on Monday mornings, the boy and the patient both having fasted, and were touched three times.¹⁵⁶ Gilbert, once he was old enough to speak, used words almost identical to Leverett's – "I touch and God heals", and Pierce attempted unsuccessfully to get to the bottom of who taught him to say them.¹⁵⁷ Pierce investigated the idea of the power of the seventh son, reporting that Gilbert was indeed a seventh son and that his grandmother had first begun to spread word of his ability to heal when he was born.¹⁵⁸ He questioned the efficacy of the child's cures, speaking with some of those he had touched, finding some whose conditions had improved and some whose had not; though he did not conduct an experiment as in the Leverett case he proposed an explanation for the apparent success of some of Gilbert's cures, namely that those patients had come to him after trying many medicines and when their swellings were almost ready to fade naturally.¹⁵⁹ Perhaps most importantly, he gave his judgement on the character of the child and his father. Contrary to the damning reports of the witnesses against Leverett, Pierce found that the elder Gilbert was "reputed an honest man amongst his Neighbours" with "little learning but great understanding", though he was "given much to talkinge, and bragginge".¹⁶⁰ He compared the value of the land that Gilbert had held when his son was born to that of the land he held at the time of writing and found that he had not "increased his meanes", and that neither he nor the child had "received any money or gifts" beyond "trifles" such as fruits, garters, and scarves. Indeed he reported that young Richard Gilbert had told him he could accept no money or he would be unable to perform any cures.¹⁶¹ On this basis he found, contrary to the outcome of Leverett's case, that the Gilberts had not "used any imposture, or deceit herein; but, onely hath beene carried away with a simple credulity".¹⁶² He commanded the elder Gilbert to put a stop to the touching, and reported that he had readily obeyed.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁵ TNA, SP 16/368 f.159; SP 16/371 ff.230-235.

¹⁵⁶ TNA, SP 16/371 f.231v.

¹⁵⁷ TNA, SP 16/371 f.232

¹⁵⁸ TNA, SP 16/371 ff.230v-231

¹⁵⁹ TNA, SP 16/371 ff.232v-233

¹⁶⁰ TNA, SP 16/371 f.230v

¹⁶¹ TNA, SP 16/371 f.233

¹⁶² TNA, SP 16/371 f.233

¹⁶³ TNA, SP 16/371 f.233v

As far as the evidence indicates, that was the end of the Gilbert case, while James Leverett was flogged and sent to Bridewell for six weeks. The similarities between the two cases indicate that there was a standing set of concerns about touch healers – when they were investigated it was with the suspicion that they might be predatory deceivers exploiting their patients for monetary gain. It was on that basis that the Privy Council charged Pierce to investigate the Gilbert case because the child “under pretence of being his [father’s] seventh son, undertakes to do cures, and thereby has abused divers of his Majesty’s subjects”.¹⁶⁴ In the eyes of the bishop, it was significant that the Gilberts appeared to him not to be getting rich (or trying to get rich) by pretence, but were simply “carried away”.¹⁶⁵ Conversely, the witnesses against Leverett, and Clowes’ investigations, found him to be avaricious and immoral. The differences in outcome also likely had something to do with the attitudes of the healers in question. While William Gilbert and the people of Prestleigh appear to have cooperated readily with the bishop’s inquiries and his command that the touch cures cease, Leverett had a history of antagonism towards the medical establishment and the king, having accused physicians and surgeons of assaulting him in the past, and having boasted that he could heal those the king and the physicians could not. As discussed above, the College gave its harshest punishments to irregulars who proved truculent, or who otherwise presented a particular challenge to the College’s authority, and the Court of Star Chamber, which actually administered Leverett’s punishment, would certainly have been motivated to punish his acts of *lèse-majesté*, defamation of the king’s dignity.

Ultimately there was little surprising in the College’s findings on Leverett. He was suspected of *lèse-majesté* and imposture by the Crown, and had been submitted to the College so that the physicians could opine on the suspicions of the privy council. To have reached any conclusion but that Leverett was a cheat would have been to contradict, essentially, the king. Cook, Pelling, and other historians of the College are in broad agreement that this would be highly out of character for an institution heavily reliant for its prestige and privileges upon its relationship to the Crown and obedience to authority.¹⁶⁶ The officebearers of the College took any opportunity to foster closer ties with the king and his people, and it is doubtlessly that, over and above any intellectual curiosity, which prompted this thorough experimentation of Leverett’s claims to heal by touch. But that being said, it would be too much to reduce this episode to pure servility. Though the process was extended, the findings against Leverett were consonant with the College’s usual approach to irregular healers of all kinds, and the process is revealing of the kinds of claims magical healers could make and the kinds of scepticism they could face. Leverett offered a religious account of his ability to heal, combined with an appeal to the potent

¹⁶⁴ TNA, SP 16/368 f.159

¹⁶⁵ TNA, SP 16/371 f.233

¹⁶⁶ Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime in Stuart London*, 92.; Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 331.

traditional 'superstition' of the seventh son. He likely impressed his clients with the difficulty of the cure, which exhausted him so badly he was forced to crawl up the stairs to bed. While decried as blasphemous by the College, this transference of vitality appears occasionally in accounts of magical healing, particularly of the bewitched – many cunning folk transferred sickness and witchcraft by sympathetic principles from the patient to themselves or to some intermediary.¹⁶⁷ His self-representation carried shades of religious enthusiasm, a category more associated with the later seventeenth century and beyond, but in Leverett's case perhaps in evidence in the fixation with his 'blasphemous' claims that a virtue went out of him when he touched. This is reminiscent of later representations of unorthodox medicine as overzealous and sectarian.¹⁶⁸ As in later constructions of enthusiasts and quacks, Leverett was 'out of place', having abandoned his profession of gardening, claimed divine inspiration, and vocally rejected formal education and authority, boasting of his ability to cure those failed by the king and the physicians.

The essential objection to Leverett was the political ramifications of his claim to cure scrofula by touch, and particularly his derisive statements about the king's (and the medical establishment's) relative ability to do the same. His act of *lèse-majesté* brought him to the attention of the privy council and eventually saw him flogged, and his denigration of London's physicians and surgeons cannot have helped his case. But Clowes' articles against Leverett and the College's points of questioning turn up common points of objection to magical healers and magical practitioners in general – untruthfulness, immorality, blasphemy, and superstition – and forecast somewhat the mid-seventeenth century turn in the representation of quackery. These aspects of ill-repute characterised the contemporary image of a 'bad' magical practitioner, as will be further seen in the following chapter. How far this image of Leverett was also known to those who resorted to him for healing is uncertain. It would be easy to assume that people would not seek healing from someone with a reputation for avarice, blasphemy, or dishonesty, but if he also enjoyed a reputation for successful cures, or was seen to have the legitimacy of divine providence or reliable folklore, this may not have been the case. The ambivalence of magical reputations in this regard will likewise be further explored in Chapter 3.

Conclusions

Magical healers in seventeenth-century London shared much in common with magical practitioners of other kinds, as well as with the broader category of irregular medical practitioners. They were an

¹⁶⁷ Judith Bonzol, "The Death of the Fifth Earl of Derby: Cunning Folk and Medicine in Early Modern England", *Renaissance and Reformation* 33, no.2 (2010): 84-85.

¹⁶⁸ Mark Jenner, "Quackery and Enthusiasm, or Why Drinking Water Cured the Plague" in *Religio Medici: Medicine and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham. (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996).

integral part of the provision of healing in London with little hard boundary between them and the many other types of healers that made up the medical marketplace there. For some magical healers, elements of spectacle and performance contributed to their fame and drew in clients. This has been identified as a feature of some irregular medical practitioners more broadly, with mountebanks as the quintessential example, but it was also likely true of magical practices besides healing. As the following chapter will establish, for some practitioners like John Lambe, evoking wonder and impressing clients was of prime importance for the construction of a magical reputation.

Like other kinds of medical practitioner, some magical healers worked alongside apothecaries and other healers, and utilised paper as part of their work and as a medium for their reputations. For those like Abraham Savery, who operated in much the same way as other kinds of irregular healer and even collegiate physicians, doctors' bills served to give physical form to intangible expertise. The similarities between doctors' bills and the notes and tickets of the Somerset-based astrologers discussed in the previous chapter suggest that here too there were similarities in the ways of working between magical and medical practitioners that can be seen in the behaviours of the magical healers who represented the intersection of these groups.

These sources also illustrate the degree to which magical reputations were interconnected and relational. Practitioners collaborated with each other and in some circumstances lent each other legitimacy and authority, as when Ann Fathers said in her defence that all she had done was at the direction of the famous Dr Savery. Collaborations were not always successful, as Matthias Evans' complaints against John Lambe demonstrate, but practitioners like Evans could in other cases make use of their connections, as when his colleague Frodsham engaged him on behalf of Frances Shute. Practitioners' reputations were also partially constituted by the names of famous or influential former patients – though Mistress Woodhouse's own first name is not recorded, she was known to the College and thus to posterity as the healer who had treated the Lord Treasurer's daughter, and the College felt it necessary to approach her accordingly.

But beyond the influence (potential or actual) of powerful patrons and occasional despair at the degree of fame enjoyed by, for instance, Abraham Savery, the College of Physicians had little interest in the specifics of magical reputations. Magical practitioners were approached like any other 'irregular' – if they could be said to be practising physic, they violated the privileges of the College and were fit to be censured. In this way, the College's institutional imperatives shaped the way the physicians saw, thought of, and treated magical practitioners far more than did their established reputations. When the complaints of clients are recorded in the Annals, it is possible to gain a sense of what was expected from magical healers – what made a good or bad practitioner and reputation. But for the College it

was a fairly simple matter of determining whether or not an individual was an ‘irregular’ and how severe a punishment their attitude – defiant or submissive, for instance – warranted. This appears to align with Margaret Pelling’s contention that the College was an outsider to seventeenth-century London, an “anxious institution” concerned to safeguard its privileges but not firmly rooted in contemporary society.¹⁶⁹

When motivated by its institutional imperatives, however, the College was able to investigate and examine the reputations and activities of magical practitioners more closely, as the case of James Leverett demonstrates. Due to the political significance of his magical practice – his perceived arrogation of the special royal power to heal the king’s evil by touch – Leverett was of particular interest to the Crown and the Privy Council. At their request, the College investigated Leverett more carefully and inquisitively than almost any other ‘irregular’, because to do so now aligned with the College’s need to align itself with the Crown, the source of its authority. While most practitioners were investigated only as far as was necessary to determine if they were practising physic without a licence, in Leverett’s case the College worked to test Leverett’s reputation as a healer. With the royal serjeant surgeon Clowes as Leverett’s antagonist, the College investigated his claims and the elements of his reputation. The efficacy of his healing touch, as well as the specific mechanics and ideas that underlaid it, were subject to experiment and found broadly to be insufficient. Even the folkloric basis of his reputation – the idea that he was a seventh son and thus innately gifted as a healer – was investigated so that it could be disproven with documentary evidence. His personal character was also examined and found wanting, with Clowes’ witnesses applying to Leverett all of the negative qualities commonly associated with ‘bad’ magical practitioners other than malefic witches – Leverett was presented as blasphemous, lazy, avaricious, lecherous, and dishonest.

Finally and more broadly, this London-centric material begins to demonstrate the different degrees of fame attained by magical practitioners. Most if not all of those practitioners discussed in the previous chapter had relatively small-scale local reputations – they might be known to prospective clients as far as twenty miles away in some cases but more often within what would have been a normal travelable distance in the seventeenth century. They did not have wider recognition or longer-lasting fame. The same was true for most of those questioned by the College of Physicians. But some of these London practitioners appear to have been more well-known. Leverett drew enough clients that his practice became a concern for the Privy Council. Savery too, suspected of connection to a high-profile scandal, was investigated by the authorities, and his name was sufficiently widely known that it, along with those of other magical practitioners and astrologers, could be used for effect by London-based

¹⁶⁹ Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London*, 25.

playwrights. Magical practitioners and their activities were common and 'normal' in seventeenth-century England, but they had the capacity to become subjects of discussion, drama, and news, achieving widespread fame perhaps more easily in London than elsewhere. One of the most famous of those magical practitioners discussed here was John Lambe, whose uncommonly high-profile reputation is the subject of the following chapter.

Part 2

Chapter 3. Notoriety, News, and Spectacle; the Life, Death, and Afterlife of John Lambe

Introduction

The reputations of most magical practitioners discussed so far could reach a few miles, and are attested in only one or a handful of sources. Some of those who interacted with the College of Physicians had a wider reach and were referred to in multiple sources. But some magical practitioners in seventeenth-century England were far more widely known. The second part of this thesis deals with two such individuals, John Lambe and William Lilly. John Lambe (1545/6-1628), often known as Doctor Lambe, lived a long life and was involved in magical practices for at least the last few decades of it.¹ His name was known across the country and beyond, and decades after his death it was remembered.

As an uncommonly well-known practitioner whose life has left a variety of textual remains, Lambe can tell us more about the potential reach of magical reputations and the significance of very well-known individuals, as well as providing insights into how magical reputations operated even if most were not at the same scale. Lambe has not been ignored by historians. Mentions of his life and particularly his death began to appear in chronicles and histories almost immediately following his death, continuing to do so for the rest of the century and in a handful of references in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the mid-twentieth century, historians of English witchcraft took note of Lambe – Kittredge took King James' "toleration" of Lambe (along with Simon Forman and John Dee) as evidence of his less-than-absolute commitment to witchcraft prosecution, Wallace Notestein made one passing reference to Lambe, and Keith Thomas deployed him as an example of different practices several times over the course of *Religion and the Decline of Magic*.² In 1973, Leba Goldstein produced the first modern work on Lambe specifically, arguing that "[m]odern accounts of Lambe either dwell on his self-created legend of being a black magician, or dismiss him briefly as a shady creature of the Duke of

¹ Anita McConnell, "Lambe, John (1545/6–1628), astrologer," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Sep 20, 2024.

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-15925>.

²George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1956), 316-318; Wallace Notestein, *A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1718* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), 211; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Penguin Books, 1973) 244, 249, 303, 346-348, 366, 384.

Buckingham” establishing that his life and death (particularly his death) were of political interest and consequence.³ More recent books on popular magic have, like the late twentieth-century works, made use of Lambe as an example and since the 1970s, Lambe has been the subject of a handful of articles.⁴ Alastair Bellany examined Lambe’s murder through the lens of scandal, crowd violence, and popular politics, and John Higgins has expanded on this to discuss the significance of Lambe’s death for the politics of the theatre.⁵ Jillian Linster has examined Lambe as a “magical doctor”, whose career and death are revealing of shifts in cultural expectations of medical practitioners in the early seventeenth century.⁶ Laura Levine’s recent article on Lambe and the Scottish conjuror Doctor Fian has examined Lambe’s relevance as a witch figure particularly in relation to sexual violence.⁷ Most pertinent to the aims of this chapter however is Malcolm Gaskill’s 2007 article which, along with Bellany’s, has been cited by most works on Lambe since their publication. Gaskill considers Lambe’s relevance in the decades after his death as a symbol of disorder and touchstone of political-cultural memory, touching on concerns of reputation and, particularly, ill repute.⁸

As this brief survey demonstrates, scholarship on Lambe for the past fifty years has taken him as example and case study from several angles – as a murder victim, a magical-medical practitioner, a witch, and especially as a political symbol. Most of these have dealt significantly with Lambe’s perceived connection to the George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham, and the political symbolism of his murder. This chapter seeks in a sense to bring this scholarship full circle, taking more seriously what Goldstein described as Lambe’s “self-created legend” to consider him as an individual engaged in a range of magical (and medical) practices in his own right and the holder of a high-profile magical reputation in his lifetime, as well as at the time of his death and in the decades that followed.⁹ While alive, Lambe was a figure of considerable renown – far more so than most of the cunning folk and astrologers who appear in the records of the courts of quarter sessions or the Annals of the College of Physicians, and while it is undeniable that his connection to Buckingham and the political meanings attached to his name had an enormous influence on his reputation, his fame as a magical practitioner

³ Leba M. Goldstein, “The life and death of John Lambe,” *Guildhall Studies in London History*, 4 (1979), 19–32.

⁴ See for example Owen Davies, *Popular Magic: Cunning-folk in English History* (London: Hambledon, 2007) 23, 73-74; Tabitha Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure: Service Magic in England from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 93-94, 233.

⁵ Alastair Bellany, “The Murder of John Lambe: Crowd Violence, Court Scandal and Popular Politics in Early Seventeenth-Century England,” *Past & Present*, 200 no. 1 (2008): 37-76; John C Higgins, “The Killing of John Lambe and the Subjectivity of the Crowd in the Early Modern Theatre,” *Shakespeare* 14, no. 3 (2018): 226-35.

⁶ Jillian Linster, “‘Ye Lovers of Physick, Come Lend Me Your Ear’: Dangerous Doctors in Early Modern London,” *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 44, no. 2 (2018): 157–79.

⁷ Laura Levine, “Wicked Mysteries and Notorious Conjurors: Magic, Rape, and Violence in Two Early Modern Pamphlets,” *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 51, no. 3 (2021): 533–51.

⁸ Malcolm Gaskill, “Witchcraft, Politics, and Memory in Seventeenth-Century England,” *The Historical Journal* 50, no.2 (2007): 289-308.

⁹ Goldstein, “The life and death of John Lambe,” 19.

warrants investigation. In this regard – as a magical practitioner in his own right – Lambe has been largely neglected. Much like other magical practitioners and astrologers, Lambe was able to cultivate an image of supernatural power and superior knowledge, and attracted clients by offering magical services. But unlike most (or to an uncommon degree) he also negotiated elite patronage and courted widespread notoriety. He was known as “the dukes wisard”, but he was also known as a conjurer, fortune-teller, healer, and curiosity.¹⁰ Even setting aside his reputed affiliation with the Duke of Buckingham and the political meanings that were attached to his name, Lambe stands as a well-documented example of a highly successful magical practitioner, and as a case study of a conjurer of ill repute. This chapter then will seek to recover a sense of Lambe as a magical practitioner – the claims he made that were believed by or appealed to his clients – and the case made against him by his many critics.

Unlike the astrologers of the mid-seventeenth century, John Lambe did not make use of print to represent or sell his capabilities, and if he kept casebooks or diaries like his near-contemporaries Simon Forman and Richard Napier none now survive. In contrast to William Lilly (whose high-profile magical and astrological reputation is the subject of the following chapter), Lambe seemingly constructed his reputation without the use of print or, perhaps, any written material. No sources created by Lambe exist, with only a few instances of reported speech recording his own claims about his abilities and practices. As such, reconstructing his practices and reputation can be done only cautiously, by examining the overwhelmingly hostile body of sources discussing or referring to him. If these sources were constitutive of a reputation, it was not guided by Lambe and was most likely not identical to the reputation he was engaged in building for himself. Much of the focus here then will be on the negative reputation that Lambe accrued, as constituted by sources critical of Lambe or making use of his name for political and moral ends. As such, any reconstruction of Lambe’s self-representation or reputation-building behaviours is by necessity a highly speculative task. What can be said about Lambe’s own reputation-building behaviour will then be drawn out of his reported speech and by reading ‘against the grain’ criticisms of him by others.

Most of the primary sources for Lambe’s life and death were created in the late 1620s, at the end of his life. Little is known about Lambe’s life before this point, with most biographical information before that time coming from a pamphlet titled *A Briefe Description of the Notorious Life of Iohn Lambe Otherwise Called Doctor Lambe. Together with His Ignominious Death* (hereafter *A Briefe*

¹⁰ John Rous, ed. Mary Anne Everett Green, *Diary of John Rous Incumbent of Santon Downham, Suffolk, from 1625 to 1642* (the Camden Society, 1856), 17.

Description).¹¹ Published shortly after his death in 1628, this pamphlet has been the most important source on Lambe for most contemporary works that deal with him. The author is anonymous, but the English Short Title Catalogue suggests that it was possibly printed by G Miller in London, the Amsterdam imprint being false.¹² Given that Lambe's death was a politicised event, and considering that the balladeer Martin Parker was briefly imprisoned for publishing on the subject this anonymity was perhaps prudent.¹³ As with any early modern pamphlet, it is hard to say how common or 'popular' *A Briefe Description* was, but ten copies of the original 1628 printing are recorded by the ESTC. The pamphlet is quite brief at just over twenty pages. It begins with "A DESCRIPTION OF the Life and Death of Iohn Lambe, otherwise called Doctor LAMBE", providing a very brief biography before turning to discuss the indictment against him for witchcraft. Passages from the indictment and the statements of a witness against Lambe are quoted, and the pamphlet then turns to relating anecdotes of Lambe's magical practices, particularly "some exploits done by Doctor Lambe during his Imprisonment in the Castle of Worcester". The last quarter of the pamphlet discusses Lambe's indictment for rape, again quoting from witness depositions and giving a detailed account of the crime. Lambe's "Ignominious Death" is covered only at the very end of the pamphlet, taking only a page but providing lurid detail regarding the injuries Lambe sustained. The pamphlet also included a woodcut representation of Lambe's murder on the cover, showing an extravagantly dressed Lambe wielding a sword and attempting to fend off attackers wielding stones and a shoemaker's last (though the last is not mentioned in the text of the pamphlet, other sources refer to it as among the weapons used against him).¹⁴ *A Briefe Description* has, by and large, been accepted by historians as an authoritative account of Lambe's life and death, but care must be taken when engaging with this works in this genre – like other crime pamphlets, it adopts a moralising tone, presenting Lambe's "notorious life" as leading to and earning his "ignominious death".

A range of other sources provide more information on the later years of Lambe's life. Records survive of his examination by the Bishop of Durham seemingly at the Westminster Sessions in December 1627, and following that by the College of Physicians a few weeks later.¹⁵ This was the second mention of

¹¹ Anonymous, *A Briefe Description of the Notorious Life of Iohn Lambe Otherwise Called Doctor Lambe. Together with His Ignominious Death* (London, 1628). The imprint reads "Amsterdam", but according to ESTC Online the actual place of publication was London.

¹² *English Short Title Catalogue*, S120018, accessed Jul 11, 2021, <http://estc.bl.uk/S120018>

¹³ Goldstein, "The life and death of John Lambe," 19.

¹⁴ Anthony Weldon, *The court and character of King James whereunto is now added The court of King Charles : continued unto the beginning of these unhappy times : with some observations upon him instead of a character* (London, 1651), 199. Weldon writes of "Doctor Lamb... whose fate it was to be brained by a Shoo-makers Last".

¹⁵ LMA WJ/SR/N/020 F.27; *Archives of the Royal College of Physicians, 1518-1988: Annals of the Royal College of Physicians 1518-1915*. Marlborough: Adam Matthews. 18 December 1627, 240-243.

Lambe in the Annals of the College – the first was in 1619, though on that occasion Lambe himself did not appear.¹⁶ References to Lambe also appear in the State Papers – in 1623 and 1624, several letters were exchanged regarding Lambe’s conviction and pardon for rape, and in 1625 he was questioned in connection with charges against Frances Coke, Viscountess Purbeck.¹⁷ Also preserved in the State Papers are a number of letters and diaries that make reference to Lambe, particularly to the events of his death, and a number of other diaries published in modern editions also offer useful insights.¹⁸ Two surviving plays (*The Staple of Newes* first performed in 1625, and *The Fair Maid of the Inn* first performed in 1626) make reference to Lambe, as well as Parker’s ballad, *The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe, The great supposed Coniurer, who was wounded to death by Saylers and other Lads, on Fryday the 14. of Iune, 1628. And dyed in the Poultry Counter, neere Cheap-side, on the Saturday morning following*, (hereafter *The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe*) and a number of anonymous libels that circulated in the weeks following his death.¹⁹ Another play, *Doctor Lambe and the Witches* was being performed in 1634 but is now unfortunately lost.²⁰ Printed works created in the decades following Lambe’s death occasionally provide more information about his life, but more importantly provide insights into how his name and reputation were remembered and referred to after the man himself was gone. Most of these sources have been identified by historians studying Lambe in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, though some have received little if any comment, and few if any scholarly works have assembled them all. That being the case, this chapter offers a more broad-based study of Lambe as an individual than has previously been available. While the focus here is on reputation – both Lambe’s

¹⁶ Annals, 7 May 1619, 125.

¹⁷ TNA, SP 14/153 f.29; SP 14/164 ff.97-101v; SP 14/164 f.106; SP 14/214 f.63; SP 14/165 f.146; SP 14/167 f.25; SP 14/183 ff.73-74; SP 14/183 f.106; SP 14/183 f.107;

¹⁸ TNA, SP 14/184 f.77; SP 14/185 ff.77-78; SP 16/102 ff.104-111v; SP 16/107 f.152; SP 16/107 f.191; TNA, PC 2/38 f.211; Rous, *Diary*; Thomas Crosfield, ed. Frederick Boas, *The Diary of Thomas Crosfield* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935); Edward Burghall, “Providence Improved” in *Memorials of the Civil War in Cheshire and the Adjacent Counties*, ed. James Hall (Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society, 1889); BL, Add MS 35331; William Whiteway, ed. David Underdown, *William Whiteway of Dorchester: His Diary, 1618 to 1635* (Dorset Record Society, Dorchester, 1991).

¹⁹ Ben Jonson, *Bartholmew fayre : a comedie, acted in the yeare, 1614 by the Lady Elizabeths seruants, and then dedicated to King Iames, of most blessed memorie ; The diuell is an asse : a comedie acted in the yeare, 1616, by His Maiesties seruants ; The staple of newes : a comedie acted in the yeare, 1625*, (London, 1631); Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Comedies and tragedies written by Francis Beaumont and Iohn Fletcher gentlemen. Never printed before, and now published by the Authors Originall copies*. (London, 1647); Martin Parker, *The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe, / The great supposed Coniurer, who was wounded to death by Saylers / and other Lads, on Fryday the 14. of Iune, 1628. And dyed in the / Poultry Counter, neere Cheap-side, on the Saturday morning following*. (London, 1628); “Early Stuart Libels: an edition of poetry from manuscript sources.” Ed. Alastair Bellany and Andrew McRae. *Early Modern Literary Studies Text Series I* (2005). <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/texts/libels/Oii11,Oiii5,Oiii6,Oiii7,Oiii8,Oiii9,Pi1>.

²⁰ Christopher Matusiak, “Doctor Lambe and the Witches,” *Lost Plays Database*, May 19, 2010, accessed Dec 12, 2024, https://lostplays.folger.edu/Doctor_Lambe_and_the_Witches

and that of magical practitioners more generally – this chapter also demonstrates the value of further work on Lambe and figures like him both as individuals and as examples of magical practitioners.

The chapter consists of four sections. The first of these discusses Lambe’s biography and practices, grounding the chapter in an understanding of the kinds of activity Lambe was engaged in and his position in the wider milieu of seventeenth-century English magical practitioners. The remaining sections focus on different aspects of Lambe’s reputation and the insights these can offer into magical reputations more broadly. The second section deals with ‘notoriety’, or ill-repute, identifying the negative qualities with which Lambe was associated and the cultural-political significance of his reputation, building a picture of a ‘bad’ practitioner more infamous than famous. The third section proceeds from fame and infamy to discuss reputation as news, considering how stories and anecdotes about Lambe circulated and were recorded in letters, diaries, ballads, and libels, illustrating the reputational element of ‘current affairs’ involving magic and magical practitioners, as well as the role of wonder and spectacle in thinking about such events and people. The final section then considers the ways in which Lambe’s reputation outlived him, discussing the ways in which Lambe’s name, in a sense detached from the man himself, could continue to serve as a political and cultural symbol, as well as point of reference for living magical practitioners.

I. Biography and Practices

To understand Lambe as an individual magical practitioner, rather than solely an appendage of the Duke of Buckingham requires a consideration of his life and practices, as well as a discussion of the labels applied to him both in his lifetime and since.

Biography

Much of the biography of John Lambe is unknown. All the primary sources for his life were created in the last few years before his death, and what little is known about his life prior to this period mostly comes from *A Briefe Description*. The pamphlet states that Lambe began his adult life “in the houses of diuers Gentlemen, whose Children he taught to write and reade the English tongue”, after which he turned to “the profession of that noble and deepe Science of Physicke”, in what the pamphlet describes as “The first steppe that euer hee made towards that wicked course, which hee was afterwards accused for” [i.e. witchcraft].²¹ The pamphlet includes accounts of a few instances of Lambe engaging in magical practices before coming to London – namely invoking spirits, divining with a crystal, and entertaining onlookers with “tricks”, but the next major events described in the pamphlet are his trials

²¹ *A Briefe Description*, 1.

for witchcraft at the Worcester assizes. The first of these was for using “Witchcrafts, Enchantments, Charmers[sic] and Sorcerers[sic]” to “make infirme, and consume the body and strength” of Thomas Windsor, 6th Baron Windsor at Tardebigg in Worcestershire.²² The pamphlet claims he was “arraigned severall times” upon this indictment and found guilty, but “Judgement was suspended”.²³ The second indictment claimed that in Henlipp, Worcestershire, Lambe “certaine evill and impious Spirits, did invoke and entertaine”, contrary to the 1604 Act ‘against Conjuratiō, Witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits’.²⁴ This time, the pamphlet reports that Lambe plead not guilty, but was found guilty by the jury, and that again “Judgement was stayed”. After his arraignment at the assizes, Lambe was imprisoned in Worcester Castle, where it appears that he frequently received and entertained visitors. But after the high sheriff, the foreman of the jury, and forty other justices, jury members, and gentlemen “dyled all within one fortnight”, the pamphlet reports that “the Country”, frightened that Lambe had caused the deaths, petitioned for his removal from the Castle, whereupon he was removed to the King’s Bench prison in London.²⁵

The pamphlet seems to suggest that Lambe first came to London in this manner, and soon after faced his third indictment, this time for rape. In fact, the timeline is somewhat more protracted and Lambe’s movements more varied. Lambe’s alleged Worcestershire crimes took place in 1607-1608, but letter-writer John Chamberlain believed that his arraignment for witchcraft was “some yeare or two before” his indictment for rape in 1623, and a certificate by George Reynell, Marshal of the King’s Bench, confirms that Lambe was committed to the King’s Bench on 12th of February 1622 “Being Convicted of Felonye (that is to saye) for Sorcerye uppon the bodye of Thomas lord Windsor”.²⁶ It’s not clear then exactly when the alleged sorcery took place, how long it took for Lambe to be indicted at the Worcester assizes, or how long he was imprisoned in Worcester Castle before his relocation to the King’s Bench. In 1619, however, Matthias Evans testified before the Censors of the College of Physicians that Lambe was then practising physick in London.²⁷ He could not then have been imprisoned in Worcester from 1608 until his transfer to King’s Bench in 1622; it may be that he was imprisoned only very briefly in Worcester, between 1619 and 1622, long after the alleged crimes took place. The alternatives are that he was imprisoned in Worcester for a time, then practised in London, and then was transferred to King’s Bench, or that one or more of the sources are mistaken about Lambe’s whereabouts and

²² *Ibid.*, 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.; The Act Against Witchcraft, 1604, 1 Jas I, c. 12.

²⁵ *A Briefe Description*, 12.

²⁶ TNA, SP 14/184 f.77; Chamberlain was known as a collector of court, city, and country news, and his many letters to the diplomat Dudley Carleton constitute a major source for historians of the period. P.J. Finklepearl, “Chamberlain, John (1553–1628), letter writer,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 23, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/5046>

²⁷ *Annals*, 7 May 1619, 125.

activities. Noting also the pamphlet's account of Lambe entertaining the family of the Edward Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave, in Yorkshire, it does seem that Lambe's practise was to some degree peripatetic, or that he relocated multiple times during the early seventeenth century.²⁸ This and the distorting effects of gossip may have contributed to confusion about Lambe.

From 1622, however, Lambe seems to have remained in London. In his time at the King's Bench, as at Worcester Castle, Lambe continued to receive visitors and clients. The pamphlet says simply that "he lived in great plenty of money, and much resorted unto by people of severall conditions", and while this description is surely meant to provoke the reader's disapproval, information from the state papers confirms the impression that he was accessible while a prisoner.²⁹ On 16th June 1623 Lambe was indicted for the rape of a young girl, Joan Seager, and found guilty by the jury.³⁰ In May and June 1624, however, a series of letters between Chief Justice Jasper Ley and the Secretary of State Edward Conway reveals that the king took an interest in Lambe's case, had Ley examine him, and granted him a pardon for rape, with "all other accusac[i]ons" left to such trial or judgement as they required.³¹ Seemingly, no such further trials or judgements occurred, although Lambe was examined alongside another practitioner, Frodsham, in February 1625 in connection with another court case, this time "the Lady Purbecks busines".³² Frances (née Coke), the wife of John Villiers, 1st Viscount Purbeck and brother of the Duke of Buckingham, was accused of incontinency with Sir Robert Howard, and of using "powders and potions" to "intoxicate her husbands braines" and those of the Duke.³³ Lambe, it seems, confessed to playing a small role in this conspiracy. But while the Duke of Buckingham wrote to the Attorney General and Solicitor General urging that Lambe be pressed more firmly for information in the matter, he appears not to have faced further legal difficulties, and Purbeck was eventually cleared of the suspicion of sorcery (though not of incontinency).³⁴

In December 1627, Lambe was examined by the College of Physicians.³⁵ A book published from the Annals of the College in 1684, titled *An historical account of the Colledge's proceedings against empiricks and unlicensed practisers* suggests that this related to Matthias Evan's testimony, but that had been over a decade before Lambe's examination, which was in fact at the request of the Bishop of Durham or, according to the bishop's letter, the king himself.³⁶ This is the last reference to Lambe before

²⁸ *A Briefe Description*, 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.; TNA, SP 14/183 ff.73-74.

³⁰ *A Briefe Description*, 16.

³¹ TNA, SP 14/167 f.25.

³² TNA, SP 14/183 ff.73-74.

³³ TNA, SP 14/184 f.77.

³⁴ TNA, SP 14/185 ff.77-78.

³⁵ Annals, 18 December 1627, 240-243.

³⁶ Charles Goodall, *The Royal College of Physicians of London, founded and established by law as appears by letters patents, acts of Parliament, adjudged cases, &c.* (London, 1684), 397.

his death in June 1628, several accounts of which exist. While these accounts differ in some details, they agree that as Lambe came from a play at the Fortune playhouse, he was followed by a gathering crowd which grew progressively more violent as he fled through the City of London, was badly beaten, and taken to the Poultry Compter, where he died the following morning.³⁷

Labels

The wide range of Lambe's practices highlights the complexity of magical reputations and demands some consideration of the labels actually applied to Lambe. As discussed in the Introduction, I have primarily leant on the all-encompassing "magical practitioner", but in Lambe's lifetime and since a range of terms have described him. His modern Oxford Dictionary of National Biography entry characterises him as "Lambe, John (1545/6–1628), astrologer", and much secondary scholarship has described him similarly, but in his lifetime (and for a long time after) no surviving source labelled him as an astrologer.³⁸ There *is* evidence that he practised astrology, or at least that people believed he did, but neither the noun 'astrologer' nor any of the numerous disparaging epithets for astrologers are directly applied to him in any pre-nineteenth-century source that I have found. In the 1630s and 40s, when astrology was becoming increasingly popular but also increasingly contentious, Lambe's name was referenced in criticisms of astrology and astrologers, for instance in *Astrologomastix* (1646) which connected "that infamous Wizard Doctor Lamb" with "Divining astrologers", and *Against William Lillie*, which described the "devellish Doctor Lamb" as the "elder Brother" of the then living astrologer William Lilly.³⁹ But here astrologers like Lilly were meant to be embarrassed by being connected to a "Wizard" like Lambe. This speaks to the complexity and intermixture of magic and astrology in reputations and representation; in many ways Lambe was associated with the practice of astrology, but when near contemporaries spoke and wrote about him, "astrologer" and its analogues were not the labels they used.

One term more commonly used for Lambe was 'witch' - a relatively unambiguous label (or at least one so widely and casually used that its meaning is taken to be unambiguous), and given that Lambe was in fact indicted for the crime of witchcraft, that he should be called a witch seems unsurprising. 'Conjurer', however, is a more challenging label, and one which was often applied to Lambe. Today, 'conjurer' often means any person who performs magic, and may carry the specific connotation of

³⁷ *A Briefe Description*, 21.

³⁸ McConnell "Lambe, John."

³⁹ John Gere, *Astrologo-mastix, or A discovery of the vanity and iniquity of judiciall astrology, or Divining by the starres the successe, or miscarriage of humane affaires* (London, 1646), 20; John Vicars, *Against VVilliam Lillie (alias) Lillie that most audacious atheisticall rayling Rabsheca, that impious witch or wizzard, and most abhominable sorcerer, or star-gazer of London, and all his odious almanacks, and others* (London, 1652), np.

stage magic or entertaining tricks. Throughout the seventeenth century this latter connotation does not seem to have applied – ‘conjunction’ and the verb ‘to conjure’ both appeared prominently in the 1604 Witchcraft Act, and the label ‘conjurer’ was applied by various writers to describe witches, cunning folk, and practitioners of learned magic. In a sense it is undefinable in its inconsistency, but it does appear to have been a common term for almost any magical practitioner. Other terms, such as ‘cunning man’ were in contemporary usage and described people *like* Lambe, who engaged in similar or identical activities, but were, like ‘astrologer’ seemingly not applied to Lambe in surviving contemporary sources.

Practices

Lambe’s magical practices appear to have encompassed a range of the most common forms of service magic discussed in the preceding chapters, though many of the anecdotes about his life focus on more spectacular and unusual magical feats. According to the pamphlet, the “first steppe” in his magical career was “the profession of that noble and deepe Science of Physicke”, and he could also “tell the disease of any although hee neuer see the partie”.⁴⁰ Lambe’s medical practice is also attested in the Annals of the College of Physicians.⁴¹ In 1619 Matthias Evans, who had seemingly worked with Lambe and been promised “halfe his gettings this yeare” gave evidence against Lambe as “a quack” and “a notable Mountebank and impostor”. Evans’ opinion of Lambe’s remedies was low – he claimed that several of his patients had “dyled by him”. Evans also testified that Lambe typically charged a princely forty or fifty pounds for his cures, though as discussed in the previous chapter this figure might represent an annual retainer rather than a discrete fee. Based on Evans’ evidence, it was decided that Lambe should be summoned with Evans present, but if this summons was issued it appears not to have been heeded. Lambe did appear before the College in 1627, at the instigation of the Bishop of Durham, who wrote to the College to request Lambe be examined. The bishop’s letter states that Lambe “hath professed that he maketh a poore liuing by practise in Phisicke and Chirurgery, whereto by his long experience and practise he holdeth himself sufficient, affirming that he hath done many and great Cures in each Kind”, suggesting a fairly conventional lifestyle for an ‘empiric’. Though Lambe downplayed his medical practice in response to examination, the claims repeated in the bishop’s letter appear entirely consistent with the types of claims made by many irregular medical practitioners in seventeenth-century England, whose claims to knowledge rested upon “long experience and practise” and the proof of the “great Cures” they had performed.⁴²

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1

⁴¹ Annals, 7 May 1619, 125.

⁴² Margaret Pelling, *Medical Conflicts in Early Modern London: patronage, physicians, and irregular practitioners, 1550-1640*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 241-242.

Lambe also appears to have detected lost and stolen goods, possibly the most common magical service offered in early modern England, as discussed in Chapter 1. In December 1627, Lambe was examined by the Bishop of Durham at the Westminster Sessions, and confessed that he used his book, “Cattan” to make “coniectures” regarding lost things, requiring that clients who eventually recovered their goods return to him and pay “20s: 20d. or 40d. ... proportionable to the worth of ther things that were lost”.⁴³ In this examination, Lambe claimed that his services in this regard were very limited – he denied that he had ever told anyone where to look for their goods, or “undertook the bringing of the lost things to them again”. This common form of service magic carried with it a risk of social discord, as discussed in Chapter 1; accusations levelled explicitly or implicitly by cunning folk could damage reputations and spark disputes between neighbours. By claiming that he never told clients *where* to find their goods, or perhaps more to the point *with whom* to find them, Lambe perhaps avoided responsibility for such discord.

Lambe seems to have practised astrology to some degree (including as part of his medical practice). In his examination by the College of Physicians he was asked “in Astrology what house he looketh into, to know a disease, or the event of it and how the Lord Ascendent should stand therto”, answering that “he looks for the sixt house” (the astrological ‘house’ understood to govern health and wellness), but that he knew only as much astrology as he had learned from “Caliman”.⁴⁴ In his examination by the Bishop he named “his book Cattan”, noting that it was the only source of information he had on astrology and that he used it to make his “coniectures” on lost goods.⁴⁵ He further emphasised his ignorance of astrology and astronomy, claiming “he [did] not as much as knowe what the words meane, or euer said any thing to doe with Astronomie or Astrologie”, and could not say when asked in what sign the sun was on the day of the examination. While he is commonly described as an astrologer in modern accounts, given the scarcity of explicit references to Lambe actually practising astrology it is possible that it formed only a minor part of his eclectic practises. *A Briefe Description* says after he began to practice physic he turned to “other mysteries, as telling of Fortunes, helping of diuerse to lost goods, shew[ing] to young people the faces of their Husbans or Wives, that should be, in a Christall glasse: revealing to wives the escapes and faults of their Husbands, and to husbands of their wives”, and Matthias Evans testified to the College of Physicians that Lambe had showed a Mrs

⁴³ LMA WJ/SR/N/020 F.27

⁴⁴ Annals, 18 December 1627, 241-242.

⁴⁵ LMA WJ/SR/N/020 F.27; Lauren Kassell suggested Lambe’s “Caliman” was likely the Viennese doctor Georg Collimitius Tannstetter (1482-1535), but it does not appear that his works on astrology were available in English, and it was laboured in both of these examinations that Lambe understood no Latin. “Cattan” would be de Cattan, Christophe, *The geomancie of Maister Christopher Cattan Gentleman With the wheele of Pythagoras: a booke no lesse pleasant and recreatiue, then of a wittie inuention, to knowe all thinges, past, present, and to come. Translated out of French into our English tongue. By Francis Sparry.* (1608).

Littleton “what husband she should have”.⁴⁶ Evidently then he was consulted on many of the questions commonly asked of astrologers, but if his 1627 examinations are to be believed his technical understanding of astrology was limited, and while his astrological book was an important tool in his practice, his use of it was not grounded in wider learning.

Lambe’s “Christall glasse” was perhaps the most characteristic feature of his practice. This crystal is referred to by several sources. The pamphlet refers to Lambe not only to showing young people their future spouses, but also invoking and bindings spirits using the glass. It also relates the story of a man who picked up the crystal from a table and saw “the shape of a hand” and “a shepheard with a sheepehooke and tarbox on his backe” to the “great discontent” of Doctor Lambe.⁴⁷ Several of the accounts of Lambe’s death also make particular note of the crystal, which either fell from his pocket during the assault, or was among his possessions after death.⁴⁸ Evans’ account refers to Lambe showing his client Mr Peny “delusions and tricks in a cristall” and using “delusions in a cristall” to enter the Countess of Exeter’s good graces.⁴⁹ Given the numerous specific references to the crystal, it seems fair to say that it was to some degree a distinctive or perhaps emblematic feature of Lambe and his practice – it was a pocket-sized object he carried with him seemingly at all times, and a prominent feature of many stories about him.

Divination with a crystal or glass was often associated with the invocation of supernatural entities – as for example John Dee’s famous communications with angels.⁵⁰ In Lambe’s case, at least one testimony drew the connection between his crystal and supernatural beings, and invoking spirits was the basis for one of his indictments at the Worcestershire assizes. According to *A Briefe Description*, one Mr Wayneman met Lambe by chance and, impressed by Lambe’s knowledge and promises, was lured into “the Devillish Art of Conjuratiō”.⁵¹ Wayneman testified that “for curiositie sake” he came with Lambe to be shown “an Angell”, but Lambe placed his crystal on the table and knelt before it “saying I addure [i.e. adore] thee (*Benias*)”. Wayneman took issue with the ‘adoration’ of *Benias* and Lambe admitted “although I said to you, it was an Angell, I would shew you, I did deceive you, for it is a Spirit I use to call upon”, and that the spirit would not appear without the ‘adoring’ invocation. Wayneman testified that he then left, but later spoke again with Lambe, who told him more “strange things” were within his power, and that “he had 4. spirits bound to his christall but said (*Benias*) was his chiefe spirit”. The 1604 Witchcraft Act, reflecting James I and IV’s demonological understandings, had expanded upon

⁴⁶ *A Briefe Description*, 2; Annals, 7 May 1619, 125.

⁴⁷ *A Briefe Description*, 6.

⁴⁸ TNA, SP 16/102 ff.104-111v.

⁴⁹ Annals, 7 May 1619, 125.

⁵⁰ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 215, 217-218, 230.

⁵¹ *A Briefe Description*, 6.

earlier English witchcraft statutes to prescribe death without benefit of clergy for any person who “shall use practise or exercise any Invocation or Conjuration of any evill and wicked Spirit, or shall consult covenant with entertaine employ feede or rewarde any evill and wicked Spirit to or for any Intent or purpose”.⁵² The question of what a “Spirit” was, however, remained somewhat unclear. Secular law and demonological orthodoxy equated them with devils, but Neoplatonism acknowledged ‘spirits’ as distinct from devils or angels, and the great heterogeneity of folk belief meant that many cunning folk were associated with entities that might have been called devils, angels, fairies, or simply, vaguely, ‘spirits’.⁵³ The pamphlet also described Lambe conjuring wine from a tavern with the help of “a little boy in greene” – a description consistent with folkloric and folk-magical depictions of fairies, performing a service almost identical to that performed by diabolic magic in Marlowe’s play *Doctor Faustus*.⁵⁴ Between Lambe’s ersatz angel, conjured by a ritual invocation, and his green-clad conjured errand boy, the pamphlet’s depiction of Lambe’s trafficking with spirits seems to cover most of the conventional tropes of such magic (a blood-sucking familiar being the conspicuous exception), exemplifying its all-encompassing approach to what a man like Lambe might be able to do. Notably but not surprisingly, Lambe strongly denied all such practices when questioned about them officially – though he confessed to his medical practice, and to making judgements on lost goods, he “upon his salvation deni[ed] that he ever pretended to do any such thing” as “coniuring, or calling upon any Spiritts, or using any Spelles, or making circles or characters...”⁵⁵ The more explicitly magical a practice, the more clearly it violated the statutes, the more fiercely he denied them.

In the same examination, he denied “[th]e tale of [th]e watermen, (that he should forwarne them to drawe up their boats, because there was a great storme to come)”.⁵⁶ He explained that he suspected this was a misunderstanding – two weeks prior he had told two women that it was a stormy night and that he would not travel by the river and didn’t think they should either. It is unclear, of course, how such a discussion with two women one evening would become “the tale of the watermen”, but it is also uncertain whether any watermen claimed that Lambe had warned them personally of when a

⁵² The Act Against Witchcraft, 1604, 1 Jas I, c. 12.

⁵³ On ‘spirits’ and other entities see Jonathan Barry, *Raising Spirits: How a Conjuror’s Tale Was Transmitted Across the Enlightenment* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013); Daniel Harms, “Hell and Fairy: The Differentiation of Fairies and Demons Within British Ritual Magic of the Early Modern Period” in *Knowing Demons, Knowing Spirits in the Early Modern Period* ed. Michelle D. Brock, Richard Raiswell, and David R. Winter (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Emma Wilby *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2005).

⁵⁴ Christopher Marlowe, *The tragicall history of the life and death of Doctor Faustus*, (London, 1616) np. To impress a duchess who craves grapes in January, Faustus dispatches the devil Mephistopheles to fetch some from a far-off land. While slightly more ambitious in scope than Lambe’s spirit’s mission to the tavern, the essentials of the supposed operation are the same.

⁵⁵ LMA WJ/SR/N/020 F.27

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

storm would come or charged them for the service. Though predicting the weather was not explicitly a criminal act, if Lambe had ever done it, it was no doubt a little too close for comfort to *controlling* the weather.⁵⁷ Rushworth's *Historical Collections* relates that in 1626 a "terrible Storm and strange Spectacle" was seen on the Thames, believed by "the vulgar" to be the work of Doctor Lambe.⁵⁸ Indeed, this story could have been the origin of the notion that Lambe could warn watermen of when to draw up their boats. Even aside from the specific incident on the Thames, the raising of storms was among the dangerous kinds of magic sometimes attributed to witches in early modern Europe.⁵⁹

Lambe had even more reason than most to avoid official suspicion of witchcraft, having been previously indicted for *maleficium*. His indictment for bewitching Lord Windsor appears not to have been unusual in its substance – according to the text quoted in the pamphlet, he used witchcraft and sorcery "to disable, make infirme, and consume the body and strength" of his victim, matching the common depiction of the bewitched as generally infirm and 'languishing' rather than suffering more specific symptoms.⁶⁰ One letter written in 1625 suggested that Lambe had been arraigned specifically for "bewitching my L windsors ymplement" – impotency was also far from rare in witchcraft accusations.⁶¹ While impotency was not referenced in the quoted indictment, the pamphlet did suggest Lambe claimed that power, with Wayneman testifying that Lambe told him he could "intoxicate, poyson, and bewitch any man so as they should be disabled from begetting of children".⁶² The deaths of the forty men associated with Lambe's trial were also, according to the pamphlet, commonly attributed to his witchcraft.

⁵⁷ Broadly speaking, a conceptual slippage seemingly existed in the early modern understanding between predicting a thing and actually causing, desiring, or influencing it. Predicting death of monarchs, for instance, was a serious crime as to predict the event was akin to anticipating it.

⁵⁸ John Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State Weighty Matters in Law. Remarkable Proceedings in Five Parliaments. Beginning the Sixteenth Year of King James, Anno 1618. and Ending the Fifth Year of King Charls, Anno 1629.* (London, 1659), 393.

⁵⁹ James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), 65.; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 437. Sharpe and Thomas both note that storms and other large-scale calamities were much less common in English than in Scottish and continental witchcraft accusations. Some other instances of English weather magic accusations do exist however, for instance John Lowes who confessed in 1642 to having wrecked ships by raising storms at sea. Elizabeth Kent, "Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680", *History Workshop Journal* 60 (2005), 77.

⁶⁰ *A Briefe Description*, 4.; James Sharpe, "Witchcraft in Seventeenth-Century Yorkshire: Accusations and Counter Measures," *Borthwick Papers*, no.81 (1992), 5-6.

⁶¹ TNA, SP 14/184 f.77; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 437. Like weather magic, Thomas notes that causing impotence was a feature of English and Continental witchcraft accusations but "comparatively rare" in England.

⁶² *A Briefe Description*, 5.

Spectacle and Wonder

Perhaps the most striking feature of Lambe's practice is a strong affinity for spectacle and wonder. The specific nature of the crystal and Lambe's use of it is, further, somewhat emblematic of his reputation and what was known of his practice – Lambe, more than most seventeenth century magical practitioners, seems to have operated in large part as an entertainer. Most divination by crystal relied upon the practitioner and a 'scryer' – a third party (often a young woman or a child) employed to look into the crystal and perceive the spirit conjured there – but Lambe was said to show his "delusions" to clients or onlookers directly.⁶³ In his examination before the College he claimed that "he never had taken to that study [of physick] that he makes no profession therof, but that he lives by making gentlemen merry".⁶⁴ More than anything else, this seems to have been the unique aspect of Lambe's self-representation – few other magical practitioners had such success in marketing their supernatural abilities to high status company or were explicit about the entertainment value of their magical services.

Through all the accounts of Lambe's practices, not least his own, a notion of 'spectacle' can be distinguished. The third part of *A Briefe Description*, entitled "Here follow some exploits done by Doctor Lambe during his Imprisonment in the Castle of Worcester" emphasises the showmanship involved in Lambe's magical practices, and the high-status audiences Lambe entertained. In one story Lambe, "beeing merry at the Castle with divers of his acquaintance", spotted a woman approaching.⁶⁵ He told the company that he would make the woman lift her skirts and then "to the wonder of the company" she did so, believing that she was wading through a stream. This story is followed by another in which a gentlewoman "hearing the fame of Doctor Lambe, came to the Castle with other of her Friends, expecting some strange sights from him". The woman asked her friend "which was the Witch", and was amazed and ashamed by Lambe's ability to "understand secrets" and expose her past sins. One of Lambe's would-be jurors came to see Lambe (finding him "amongst a crowd of people in the chamber"). The juror, Wheeler, said he had come "to see, whether he could doe any such strange things, as he had heard of", which Lambe apparently confirmed by having the man knot his garter and then plucking it off him with ease "and in such a manner as it seemed to all the company, and to Wheeler himselfe, that the Garter came out of his very body". According to the pamphlet, the imprisoned Lambe was regularly surrounded by guests and spectators seeking to verify what they had heard of his abilities or simply to see "some strange sights from him". Lambe's demonstrations evoked "wonder", and left the watchers "wondering", "fearefull", and "much affrighted". Other sources also

⁶³ Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 60.

⁶⁴ *Annals*, 18 December 1627, 242.

⁶⁵ *A Briefe Description*, 9-12.

pick up the themes of spectacle and wonder – *Doctor Lamb Revived* tells that Anne Bodenham came into Lambe’s service because when she visited him on behalf of her mistress she “saw so many curious sights, and pleasant things, that she had a minde to be his Servant, and learn some of the art”.⁶⁶ Wonder, not only as a response to unanswered questions but as “an elemental factor in pushing forward the frontiers of intellectual and aesthetic experience” was a powerful force in early modern thought, and the capability of magical practitioners like Lambe to evoke it, drawing the attention, curiosity, and excitement of their contemporaries was likely an important part of how they successfully became known.⁶⁷

Lambe’s success in this regard might also go some way to explaining the apparent contradiction between his significant negative reputation and his continuous ability to attract clients and patrons. Illicit or semi-licit though they might have been, his practises and “tricks” were highly entertaining and provoked enjoyable reactions of fear and amazement. Davies’ work on cunning folk, and other works reconstructing the interaction between provider and purchaser of service magic have long suggested that impressing or awing clients was an important part of the business of cunning folk.⁶⁸ This was true of many contemporary representations too; hostile depictions of magical practitioners from the seventeenth century often included simple clients easily impressed by props and affectations. In *Astrologaster*, for instance, John Melton describes disguising himself as “a poore Countrey Client” and visiting a cozening astrologer-cunning man, who appeared

Before a Square Table, couered with a greene Carpet, on which lay a huge Booke in Folio, wide open, full of strange Characters, such as the Aegyptians and Chaldaeans were neuer guiltie of; not farre from that, a siluer Wand, a Surplus, a Watering Pot, with all the superstitious or rather fayned Instruments of his cousening Art. And to put a fairer colour on his black and foule Science, on his head hee had a foure cornered Cap, on his backe a faire Gowne (but made of a strange fashion) in his right hand he held an Astrolabe, in his left a Mathematicall Glasse.⁶⁹

Once paid, the “figure-caster” delivered an “Emperike-like Oration” regarding the narrator’s (imaginary) lost goods.⁷⁰ Melton highlighted that there was commonality and overlap with categories like ‘quack’ and ‘mountebank’ both of which were applied to Lambe – healers of this kind relied on

⁶⁶ Edmund Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived, or, VVitchcraft condemn'd in Anne Bodenham a servant of his, who was arraigned and executed the lent assizes last at Salisbury, before the right honourable the Lord Chief Baron Wild, judge of the assise* (London, 1653), 27.

⁶⁷ Peter G. Platt, “Introduction,” in *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Peter G. Platt (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), 15.

⁶⁸ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 112-114, 119.; Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 124.

⁶⁹ John Melton, *Astrologaster, or, The figure-caster*, (London, 1620), 8.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 9

showmanship and spectacle to draw crowds and thus attract clients. Harold Cook suggested that such methods were particularly important for itinerant practitioners, who could not rely on local word-of-mouth reputations, but for largely settled magical practitioners like Lambe such spectacle might have intensified word of mouth rather than replacing it, by giving people something to talk about.⁷¹ Lambe's reputation for "strange sights" would seem to suggest not only that he was particularly talented at creating a spectacle, but that for him at least (and quite likely for other, less famous practitioners) the expectation of being surprised or amazed was a major draw for would-be clients.

Clients

Lambe's practices are also noteworthy for the status of the clients he attracted. In his appearance before the College of Physicians, Lambe identified "gentlemen" as his essential clients.⁷² Contrary to some contemporary depictions (like Melton's) of the clients of magical practitioners as uneducated, rural, and poor, practitioners like Lambe provided a range of magical services to wealthier and higher-status people.⁷³ His indictment for witchcraft was for the bewitching of Thomas, Lord Windsor, and according to his examination by Chief Justice Ley in May 1624 he still had some degree of contact with the family, claiming that "the olde Ladie Windsor Aunte to the nowe Lord Windsor", had told him secrets about the Gunpowder Plot and misappropriated royal jewels.⁷⁴ He further claimed that if he spoke to Lady Windsor, she would furnish more details. Beside the Windsor family, *A Briefe Description* includes several accounts of Lambe socialising with, entertaining, or giving predictions to unnamed gentlemen and gentlewomen, and reports that Lambe entertained the sons of the Earl of Mulgrave, and his daughter Lady Fairfax, making the lady laugh until he predicted her brothers' imminent demise.⁷⁵

Matthias Evans' evidence against Lambe also speaks to his affinity for high-status clients.⁷⁶ The exorbitant fees Evans claims Lambe charged would have been prohibitive for many, and the clients he identified included "Mr. Mosse a lawyer", "Wilson ye keeper of Newgate [Prison]", "a gentlewoman in St. Lawrence lane" "A Lady neer Charing Crosse" and "Mr. Tristram a cole merchant"; gentry and individuals at the wealthier end of the 'middling sorts'. Most notably Evans testified that "He give phisick to ye Countess of Exeter, and by means of delusions in a cristall insinuateth himself into a Ladyes esteem and conceipts". Besides the Countess of Exeter, Lambe was also employed by Frances Coke,

⁷¹ Harold Cook, *The Decline of the old medical regime in Stuart London* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 35.

⁷² *Annals*, 18 December 1627, 242.

⁷³ Melton, *Astrologaster*, 8.

⁷⁴ TNA, SP 14/164 ff.97-101v

⁷⁵ *A Briefe Description*, 5.

⁷⁶ *Annals*, 7 May 1619, 125.

the viscountess Purbeck. In his examination by the bishop, Lady Purbeck was the only client whose name he said he recalled – he had cured her of “the Spleen”.⁷⁷ He was also accused of having been employed by her as part of her scheme to poison, bewitch, or debilitate her husband John Villiers (brother of George, the Duke of Buckingham), though the charges against Lady Purbeck involving sorcery were eventually dropped. It was seemingly not uncommon for practitioners and clients to confess to an association, but to stress that it involved only acceptable and harmless services such as healing – in a similar situation, Abraham Savery (discussed in the previous chapter) confessed to having been employed by Anne Turner, the Countess of Somerset’s co-conspirator in the Overbury Affair but insisted he had been asked only to speak to the object of her political-romantic affections and not, as was suspected, to bewitch him for her.⁷⁸ Evans, likewise, testified that he had been employed by Frances Shute only to practise physic and to resolve astrological questions, certainly *not* to bewitch and supplant her lover’s wife.⁷⁹

II. Notoriety

The qualities that comprised Lambe’s notorious reputation provide a useful insight into what, in the seventeenth-century imagination, constituted a ‘bad’ magical practitioner. In places, these elements overlapped with the reputation of the essential evil magic-user – the malefic witch – but Lambe was also accused of far more mundane moral failings which he was seen to share with many other magical practitioners not thought to be witches.

(Male) Witchcraft

Perhaps the most dangerous reputation for a magical practitioner to hold was that of a witch, and the suspicion that Lambe had harmed by *maleficium* or was allied to the devil was an important part of his ‘notoriety’. A wealth of scholarship has discussed the ways in which individuals became associated with witchcraft in the eyes of their contemporaries, and so it will not be necessary here to reconstruct the labelling of witches in general. But the witchcraft attached to Lambe’s reputation illustrates the overlap in different ways of thinking about magical practitioners and their capabilities.

For at least part of his life, Lambe was evidently seriously suspected of witchcraft, specifically of bewitching Thomas, Lord Windsor. For this, he was arraigned and imprisoned in 1607 in Worcestershire, and the knowledge of the incident evidently followed him over the years and miles to

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*; LMA WJ/SR/N/020 F.27.

⁷⁸ TNA, SP 14/82 f.164

⁷⁹ Cecil L’Estrange Ewen, *Robert Ratcliffe, 5th Earl of Sussex: The Witchcraft Allegations In His Family* (London: The Author, 1938). 5-6.

London in 1625 when John Chamberlain referred to it in one of his letters and in 1628 when the anonymous author of *A Briefe Description* discussed it at length.⁸⁰ He was also accused of having been involved in witchcraft and poisoning on behalf of Lady Purbeck in 1625, and it was on this subject that Chamberlain was writing when he recalled the earlier arraignment for witchcraft. The idea that Lambe was a witch was not always attached to specific accusations, however; often he was simply described as a witch, or associated with the devil, as for instance when *The Court and Character of King James* (1651) records that Lambe was among the “Witches, and Sorcerers” through whom the Duke of Buckingham used to “seeke to the Devill”.⁸¹

Though the vast majority of those accused of witchcraft most likely were not engaged in any form of service magic, practitioners like Lambe who presented themselves as capable of accomplishing magical feats could be vulnerable to the suggestion that such feats were accomplished with the devil’s help, or could be turned to sinister ends. Elizabeth Kent has suggested that one reason for the predominance of women among those accused of witchcraft in much of Europe is that the concept of a male witch encompassed different traits and actions, namely learned and service magic.⁸² This proposed dynamic – male witches as distinct from female witches in that they practised more learned and more practical magic, beyond straightforward *maleficium* – bears consideration, though with significant caveats.

Firstly, it is worth noting these gendered categories were not neat and separate; men could be accused of the same kinds of witchcraft that women were, and conversely women could fit into this proposed ‘male witch’ archetype. Though cunning men were on the whole more common than cunning women, many women practised service magic and they too could be suspected or accused of harmful practices or described disparagingly as witches. They could also, like Lambe, incorporate aspects of literacy and learned magic into their actual or suspected practices. It is also important to consider that most practitioners of popular magic of the kind described by Kent as male witchcraft were seemingly not broadly considered or called witches by those that dealt with them. But with these caveats in mind, it is possible that Lambe was an exemplar of a masculine-coded witchcraft. Building on Kent, as well as the influential work of Lara Apps and Andrew Gow, Karin Amundsen suggests that Lambe and other male witch figures were “a site for debates about normative gender behavior”, arguing that in his presentation by *A Briefe Description*, Lambe is stripped of admirable masculine qualities and implicitly feminised (this is in line with Apps and Gow’s arguments) and that discourses about male and female witches alike served a proscriptive purpose, warning about the dangers of misplaced femininity on the

⁸⁰ TNA, SP 14/184 f.77; *A Briefe Description*.

⁸¹ Weldon, *The court and character of King James*, 199.

⁸² Elizabeth Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680”, 69-92.

one hand and the lack of appropriate femininity on the other.⁸³ Malcolm Gaskill's less functionalist reconstruction of the male witch adds nuance to this idea, giving as examples several men who, like Lambe, appear to have practised some form of service magic, perhaps dabbling in aspects of learned ritual magic, and were accused or suspected of having diabolic motivations.⁸⁴ These men were, much as Amundsen argues, seen by their neighbours to have failed both as Christians and as men. Lambe's portrayal as dishonest, ignorant, and lecherous, and as a symbol of the Duke of Buckingham's devilish corrupting influence, contribute to this picture of what a 'bad', dangerous, or infamous magical practitioner could be.

Dishonesty

Honesty was a crucial Christian and masculine virtue in the seventeenth century, and its opposite was a common perceived failing of Lambe and other magical practitioners. If an individual like Lambe claimed to have supernatural capabilities but did not, one obvious explanation in the minds of his critics was that he was dishonest. The idea that such practitioners were liars who cozened their clients by pretending to accomplish magical feats was extremely common in writings directed against magical practitioners and their clients. *A Briefe Description* described Lambe as a "base Impostour" and in *The Fair Maid of the Inn* (1626) the mountebank Forbosco complains that "Europe is to little to be cozened by us" and is warned by the Clown that "traunce the world over you shall never purse up so much gold as when you were in England, and call'd your selfe Doctor Lambestones".⁸⁵ Here Lambe is called out as a cozener and cheat, and the English audience chided for their credulity.

Some writers, especially later in the century, saw dishonesty as the 'real' failing of 'witches' like Lambe, as for instance in John Webster, whose influential sceptical work *The displaying of the supposed witchcraft* (1677) condemned "Those that were and are active deceivers, and are both by practice and purpose notorious Impostors, though they shadow their delusive and cheating knaveries under divers and various pretences" and argued that "the existence of such kind of Witches as these (if you will needs call them by that name, and not by their proper titles, which are, that they truly are Deceivers, Cheaters, Couseners, and Impostors)" were common in all ages and had been discussed by earlier

⁸³ Lara Apps and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 7; Karin Amundsen, "The Duke's Devil and Doctor Lambe's Darling: A Case Study of the Male Witch in Early Modern England," *Psi Sigma Siren* 2, no. 1 (2004): 59.

⁸⁴ Malcolm Gaskill "Masculinity and Witchcraft in Seventeenth-Century England" in *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Alison Rowlands (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009).

⁸⁵ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Comedies and tragedies*, np.

writers.⁸⁶ Webster cited Lambe's "pretended" revelations through his crystal as an example.⁸⁷ While the pamphlet appears to charge Lambe with actual witchcraft, it also reports that the physicians who examined Lambe had thought him rather "an Impostour, whom the credulous ignorance of the common people had rased to that Fame, then to be truely and guiltily learned in those wicked Mysteryes".⁸⁸ Though accusations of diabolic witchcraft and accusations of self-interested cozening might appear mutually exclusive, some accounts (like the pamphlet) did combine them, and in a society that upheld truthfulness and honesty as a core component of manhood, the image of the cozening conjurer would sit comfortably alongside other aspects of the 'male witch' as signs of a failure of masculinity.⁸⁹

In some cases Lambe, like other magical practitioners, preferred to present himself as dishonest than to lay claim to magical power and thus incriminate himself in more serious crimes. When questioned in 1625 about his connection to Lady Purbeck, who was suspected of adultery and of poisoning her husband, and of procuring charms from Lambe for that purpose, he confessed that she had often visited him but claimed his services were nothing but "impostures & juglinge".⁹⁰ Denying any connection to Purbeck, and perhaps even denying having provided charms or other magical service to her, was most likely a non-starter; Lambe was, at the time, imprisoned at the King's Bench. While it appears he enjoyed a certain measure of privacy and was able to conduct his business while incarcerated, it seems likely it would have been hard to entirely disguise the fact of a viscountess' visits. It appears that the strategy may have been successful; John Chamberlain wrote that in the proceedings against Purbeck "all matters of sorcerie witchcraft and the like" had been "let fall", such that she was "only prosecuted for incontinencie in the spirituall court".⁹¹ Confessing to "impostures & juglinge" may have put Lambe at legal risk, but it was no doubt a far more appealing option than being treated as an accomplice in Purbeck's plot against her husband, the Duke of Buckingham's brother.

⁸⁶ John Webster, *The displaying of supposed witchcraft wherein is affirmed that there are many sorts of deceivers and impostors and divers persons under a passive delusion of melancholy and fancy, but that there is a corporeal league made betwixt the Devil and the witch ... is utterly denied and disproved* (London, 1677), 25-26.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *A Briefe Description*, 2.

⁸⁹ Alexandra Shepard, "From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, Circa 1500-1700," *The Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 292.; Amundsen, "The Duke's Devil and Doctor Lambe's Darling", 49-50.

⁹⁰ TNA, SP 14/183 ff.73-74.

⁹¹ TNA, SP 14/183 f.106.; SP 14/185 ff.77-78.

Ignorance

The other main line of criticism against Lambe and other practitioners was that they were ignorant or unintelligent. This may appear surprising given the bookish associations of Kent's proposed male witch and the fact that cunning folk were, as the term suggests, known for what they knew. But one strain of criticism levelled at Lambe and those like him presented conjurors and cunning folk as in fact ignorant and unlearned, either foolishly believing in their own powers or so laughably stupid as to be obviously without power. This was a common strain in sceptical writings particularly – the 1651 edition of Reginald Scot's *Discovery of Witchcraft* (originally published in 1584) described witches as mostly “poor, aged, deformed, ignorant people” – and over the course of the seventeenth century cunning folk no less than their clients were frequently lampooned as fools.⁹² Webster, like Scot, believed that many witches were “under a passive delusion” and confessed to “depraved fancies... though absurd, idle, foolish, false, and impossible”, and took as dim a view on the learning of cunning folk as he did on their honesty, describing for example how some operated “by pretending skill in Natural Magick, when indeed they can hardly read English truly”.⁹³

When pressed, Lambe presented himself as ignorant rather than diabolical. When asked in 1627 if he had any skill in astronomy or astrology he told the Bishop of Durham he did not “as much as knowe what the words meane” and that while he did take money to give an opinion on lost property “all his coniectures [were] uncertayne”.⁹⁴ A month later, he told the College of Physicians that he “neuer had taken to that study [of phisic]” and did not practise it, but lived “by making gentlemen merry”.⁹⁵ When the physicians put to him “the contradiction [that] in College he confesseth himself ignorant and denyeth practise, whereas in his Examinacon by the Lord Bishop of Durham he made show of Long experience and sufficiency and of hauing done many great cures” he denied having made such claims to the Bishop (the records of the examination indicate he did) but plead for “mercy” from the College. He claimed that his fame was “without his desert, that he cannot hinder commers to him and that all he did was trifles, fooleries, and bables to get a little mony”.⁹⁶ This examination demonstrates that Lambe was well aware of the avenues by which he might be criticised, and strategically embraced the least dangerous. When examined by the bishop, Lambe sought to avoid association with anything even vaguely magical – he did not know the meaning of the word ‘astrology’ and swore “upon his saluation” that he had never been involved in conjuring or calling spirits, but insisted that he had done good as a

⁹² Reginald Scot, *Scot's Discovery of vwitchcraft proving the common opinions of witches contracting with diuels, spirits, or familiars ... to be but imaginary, erronious conceptions and novelties* (London, 1651) NP.

⁹³ Webster, *The displaying of supposed witchcraft*, 32; 25-26.

⁹⁴ LMA WJ/SR/N/020 F.27

⁹⁵ Annals, 18 December 1627, 242.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 243.

healer, effecting cures for his “manie good patients”.⁹⁷ This may have been a sensible approach to a bishop, who was empowered to licence a man, whatever his education, to practise physic. The College of Physicians however, as discussed in the previous chapter, took a dim view on those who practised without a firm grasp of Galenic medicine as taught in the universities, and reserved its harshest punishments for those who demeaned its authority or stubbornly insisted upon their own practices. As such it behoved Lambe to deny that he had ever presented himself as a physician, to make no attempt at self-justification as a healer, and to adopt a submissive posture.

Lechery

Male magical practitioners were often associated with lechery and sexual immorality, and Lambe was no exception. The previous chapters have demonstrated how magical practitioners like John Mortemer in Somerset and James Leverett in London were accused of using magic to coerce or control women, and others like accused brothel-keeper Abraham Savery were associated more broadly with sexual immorality.⁹⁸ Similar suspicions were attached to Lambe. One of the pamphlet’s stories of Lambe’s misdeeds has him entertaining his visitors by causing a passing woman “take up her coates aboue her middle” by making her believe she was wading through water; among the accusations connecting Lambe to Lady Purbeck was the accusation that he had provided a venue for her extramarital liaisons with Sir Robert Carr; and an anonymous diary preserved in the state papers reports that he “supped wth a queane or two” on the day of his death in 1628.⁹⁹ An anonymous libel, surviving in many copies, presented the Duke of Buckingham challenging any to prove that “I need Lambes Philters to incite/Chast Ladies to give my fowle lust delight”.¹⁰⁰ Decades after Lambe’s death, the cunning woman Anne Bodenham, who allegedly claimed to have learned her craft from Lambe, was tried and executed for witchcraft. One of the two pamphlets describing the case, *Doctor Lambe’s Darling*, added an implied sexual element to their relationship, described by Diane Purkiss as “witchcraft (understood as a business) recuperated as whoredom”.¹⁰¹

Most damningly, in 1623 Lambe was indicted for the rape of a young girl named Joane Seager, who had been sent to him on an errand. Initially, Lambe was found guilty of the crime, but he received a royal pardon after an examination by the Lord Chief Justice Sir James Ley and an exchange of letters

⁹⁷ LMA WJ/SR/N/020 F.27.

⁹⁸ Mark Eccles, “Elizabethan Actors IV: S To End”, *Notes and Queries* 40, no. 2 (1993): 165.; *Annals*, 18 December 1627, 242.

⁹⁹ TNA, SP 16/102 ff.104-111v.

¹⁰⁰ “Early Stuart Libels:” Oiii5.

¹⁰¹ Anonymous, *Doctor Lambs darling: or, strange and terrible news from Salisbury* (London, 1653).

between Ley and the Lord President of the Privy Council, Edward Conway.¹⁰² The conviction was not forgotten by those who wrote about Lambe – in his letter to Dudley Carleton about Lady Purbeck’s case, John Chamberlain introduced Lambe as “a notorious old rascal that was condemned the last sommer at the k[ing]s bench for a rape and arraigned some yeare or two before at Worcester for bewitching my L[ord] windsors ymplement”, placing the rape charge first and foremost in his account of Lambe.¹⁰³ The case formed a large part of the text of *A Briefe Description* also, with far more detail – including purportedly verbatim copies of witness testimonies against Lambe – being given on this than on any other aspect of Lambe’s “notorious life”.¹⁰⁴ It was recalled also in many of the chronicles which mentioned Lambe in the decades following his death. As Alistair Bellany argues, the pamphlet seemingly seeks to draw a direct line between the unpunished rape and the (implicitly justified) killing of Lambe several years later, which is indicative of the centrality of the accusation to Lambe’s infamy.¹⁰⁵ Laura Levine goes further, suggesting that managing the perceived relationship between witchcraft and sexual crimes as drawn by the pamphlet was critical for magicians like Lambe and a key determinant in their ability to avoid hostility.¹⁰⁶ This perhaps overstates the prominence of the connection, but disordered and violent sexuality might be added to the list of masculine failings commonly associated with male witches and disreputable magical practitioners in the period, much as sexual incontinence was often associated with female witches.

Politics and Corruption

Lambe’s reputation also had an impersonal, or perhaps ‘less personal’ aspect, that is his role in public discourse as a symbol of corruption and dissolution. The political resonance of Lambe’s perceived relationship with the Duke of Buckingham and, through him, the King and the state, demonstrates an important element of seventeenth-century thinking about magic. That Buckingham could be attacked through his perceived connection to Lambe, or that the magical reputation of a figure like Lambe could be used to voice discontent, demonstrates some of the significance of such a reputation.

George Eglisam’s polemic *The forerunner of revenge upon the Duke of Buckingham*, among many other accusations, claimed Buckingham was “infamous for his frequent consultations with the ringleaders of witches, principally that false Doctor Lamb publikly condemned for witchcraft”, and that for this reason among others the Marquis of Hamilton was reluctant to marry his son to Buckingham’s

¹⁰² TNA, SP 14/153 f.29; SP 14/164 ff.97-101v; SP 14/164 f.106; SP 14/214 f.63; SP 14/165 f.146; SP 14/167 f.25.

¹⁰³ TNA, SP 14/184 f.77.

¹⁰⁴ *A Briefe Description*, 15-21.

¹⁰⁵ Bellany, “The Murder of John Lambe”, 54.

¹⁰⁶ Laura Levine, “Wicked Mysteries and Notorious Conjurors”, 534.

niece.¹⁰⁷ While critics of Buckingham would in later years very frequently reference magic and witchcraft in general, and Lambe in particular, *The forerunner of revenge* demonstrates that by 1626 Eglisam and his intended readers were aware of Lambe as one of the “ringleaders of witches” and a confederate of the unpopular duke. When Lambe was killed in June 1628, it appears that in large part his killers saw him as a proxy for Buckingham, who would be assassinated two months later. Alistair Bellany argues that while Lambe’s murder could be read as collective violence against an unpunished witch and rapist, its political significance was revealed by the specific timing of the event (amidst uneasy debates in parliament and “an ominous spate of prophecy and prodigy” centring on the duke), as well as by the written accounts that followed.¹⁰⁸

Though nothing appearing in print could openly connect Lambe to Buckingham, the idea was recorded and circulated in manuscript for as well as, presumably, by word of mouth. Shortly after the murder, a libel began to circulate in London which drew a clear connection between the death of Dr Lambe and the desired death of the duke – “lett Charles & george doe what they can/yet george shall dye like Doctor Lambe”.¹⁰⁹ John Rous, a minister in Suffolk, recorded in his diary “doctor Lambe (called the duke’s wisard) was knocked on the heade... and so slaine. The devil is dead.”¹¹⁰ The closest any printed work came (as far as we know) to drawing this connection was a ballad by Martin Parker, *The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe*, which did not name Buckingham but reported that Lambe “by inchantments thrived,/While men of worthy fashion,/have connived” and celebrated the death of “The Devill of our Nation”.¹¹¹ Those involved in the distribution and performance of the ballad were arrested, indicating the political sensitivity of the matter.

With some years and the benefit of hindsight separating them from the event itself, writers were freer to make explicit the connection. *The court and character of King James* (1651) records Buckingham’s assassination as “a just judgement on him that forsooke God, to seeke to the Devill by Witches, and Sorcerers in his life; one whereof was Doctor *Lamb* (who was his great defensive preserver as he thought him)”.¹¹² *The history of Great Britain* (1653) notes that Buckingham’s mother “trafficked much with *Mountebanks*” and gives “*Doctor Lamb*, a man of an infamous conversation” as an example.¹¹³ *A compendious view, or Cosmographical, and geographical description of the whole world* (1659)

¹⁰⁷ George Eglisam, *The forerunner of reuenge Vpon the Duke of Buckingham, for the poysoning of the most potent King Iames of happy memory King of great Britan, and the Lord Marquis of Hamilton and others of the nobilitie* (Netherlands? 1626), 12.

¹⁰⁸ Bellany, “The Murder of John Lambe”, 67.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, SP 16/114/32; “Early Stuart Libels” Pi1.

¹¹⁰ Rous, *Diary*, 17.

¹¹¹ Parker, *The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe*.

¹¹² Weldon, *The court and character of King James* (London, 1651), 199.

¹¹³ Arthur Wilson, *The history of Great Britain being the life and reign of King James the First, relating to what passed from his first access to the crown, till his death* (London, 1653), 287.

summed up the entirety of 1628 as “Doctor Lamb murdered. London fined for his death. Duke of Buckingham slain by John Felton, for which he was executed at Tiburn. Parl. dissolved, and 10 of the members committed”, not explicitly connecting Lambe and Buckingham but placing them together (alongside the dissolution of Parliament) as part of the brief narrative of the year 1628.¹¹⁴ *England’s Worthies* (published February 1659/60) gave in its account of the life of George Villiers a list of “the warnings the Duke had of his end”, the first of which was that “some two moneths before, one Doctor Lamb (a creature of the Dukes) was by the rude multitude slain in the Streets; they telling him as they were belabouring him with stones and cudgels, *That were his Master the Duke there, they would give him as much*” (emphasis original).¹¹⁵ Evidently Lambe’s death retained a place in the memory of chroniclers, but was treated by them as by many modern historians particularly as an event ‘about’ the Duke of Buckingham.

Lambe’s actual closeness to Buckingham – taken at face value by earlier historians – has been called into question by Bellany and others.¹¹⁶ While it was certainly believed in the seventeenth century that Lambe was Buckingham’s close associate or ‘creature’, the sources point to a more complex relationship. For instance, Buckingham of course was no ally of Lambe’s when he believed the latter to have been instrumental in Lady Purbeck’s schemes against his brother. He wrote disparagingly of Lambe and urged that he should be frightened into surrendering whatever information he had.¹¹⁷ Regardless, though, the popular perception of their relationship is revealing of one of the symbolic roles of magic and its practitioners. In criticisms of the Duke of Buckingham, Lambe served as a symbol of moral corruption – he was “the Dukes Devil”, responsible for unnaturally preserving the duke by protective charms and enabling his wickedness.¹¹⁸ In a society where magical practitioners were understood to be employed to advance the ambitious above their station, the potential of magic to subvert the natural order of things formed a potent component of the image of the duke as a detestable and unnatural royal favourite.¹¹⁹

This sense of Lambe as a corrupting influence responsible for spreading wickedness was not confined to the duke. In 1627 he was committed to the Gatehouse on the suspicion of “causing a Westminster scholar to give himself to the devil” and in his examination by the Bishop of Durham, he was obliged

¹¹⁴ Thomas Porter, *A compendious view, or Cosmographical, and geographical description of the whole world* (London, 1659), 123.

¹¹⁵ William Winstanley, *England’s worthies. Select lives of the most eminent persons from Constantine the Great, to the death of Oliver Cromwel late Protector*, (London, 1660), 318.

¹¹⁶ Bellany, “The Murder of John Lambe”, 59.

¹¹⁷ TNA, SP 14/183 f.106.

¹¹⁸ Hamon L’Estrange, *The reign of King Charles an history faithfully and impartially delivered and disposed into annals* (London, 1655), 88.

¹¹⁹ Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 187.

to deny “that any children or boyes of Westminster schoale euer came vnto him; or that he euer had any Speech wth any of them”.¹²⁰ It was feared or suspected that Lambe had dealings with the scholars, perhaps that he might teach them his magic, and thereby lead them into sin. The pamphlet too touches on this theme, relating how Mr Wayneman had been drawn or persuaded into conjuring by Lambe, and was scared off only when he learned that Lambe had lied to him, and that the entity he called on was “a Spirit” rather than an angel as he had claimed.¹²¹ Seemingly, part of the significance of Lambe’s reputation was that it had the potential to overflow – he was not only seen as personally being dangerous or problematic; he and those like him had the potential to spread their negative qualities to others.

Lambe’s Notoriety

Criticisms of Lambe then presented a complex image of a ‘bad’ magical practitioner – he was a witch or witch-like, devilish figure, dangerous to those around him. He was either very foolish, very dishonest, or both. His complete moral dissolution encompassed sexual immorality; he was lecherous and sexually incontinent to a violent degree. He was a corrupting influence at the highest levels of state. These aspects of Lambe’s notoriety were in most cases attached to specific events from his life – he was suspected of bewitching Thomas Windsor; he was examined by the College of Physicians and found to be ignorant; he was suspected of the rape of Joane Seager – and in many cases these accusations were not only more specific and precise but also more extreme than those levelled at other magical practitioners. But the negative qualities that made up Lambe’s notorious reputation were not unique to him; they comprised a well-established image of what a wicked man who had or claimed to have supernatural capabilities and knowledge was or did. The dishonesty, ignorance, and lechery attributed to Lambe may have been important components of the image of the male witch in seventeenth-century England, and they certainly formed a readily understandable image of immoral conduct. There is also a certain ambivalence to Lambe’s reputation as understood through these factors (with the exception of his perceived sexual immorality). In Levine’s words he was “neither fish nor fowl... both an impostor and an invocator of spirits, both a fake to be dismissed and a witch to be feared...”¹²² Suggestions that Lambe really was in league with the devil and had bewitched Lord Windsor clashed with suggestions that he was no more than a ‘juggler’ or cozener, which clashed again with the notion that his greatest crime was ignorance, but all of these points were seemingly mixed in the popular imagination of Lambe and were deployed alongside one another in developed criticisms

¹²⁰ “Rev Joseph Meade to Sir Martin Stuteville – Christ College, December 15, 1627” in *The Court and Times of King Charles the First*, vol. II, ed. Thomas Birch (London: Henry Colburn, 1848), 304.; LMA WJ/SR/N/020 F.27v.

¹²¹ *A Briefe Description*, 6.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 543.

like *A Briefe Description*. Moreover, this complex ill-repute was readily understandable and usable – both in Lambe’s lifetime and afterwards, his name could be used as a byword for some or all of these qualities.

III. Reputation as News

In the preceding chapters, it has been shown that the reputations of magical practitioners could be discussed and propagated through talk at a local level; they were conversation-worthy. With the wide reach of his reputation, stories about Lambe were discussed on a much wider scale, in the form of anecdotes and news. Lena Liapi argues that a fuller understanding of seventeenth-century news is needed in order to understand what constituted “public affairs” in this period.¹²³ Far from privileging only high politics, seventeenth-century reporters and readers of news deemed other subjects, like crime, worthy of circulation and discussion. The events of Lambe’s life and death can be understood partly in this light. His reputation had political aspects, but not every account of him was political, and other elements of what was said and known about him, namely his magical reputation, were seen as fit subjects for circulation as news.

Life

Diaries and chronicles indicate that occasionally Lambe’s purported activities were deemed noteworthy in his lifetime; that his purported actions were a topic of discussion, correspondence, and record. In 1627 the prolific biblical scholar Joseph Meade wrote to his friend Sir Martin Stuteville on several occasions sharing news of Lambe. In July he reported “what tale they have at London” that the Duke of Buckingham’s mother had visited Lambe to see her son’s fate in Lambe’s “glass”.¹²⁴ In November he gave an account of Lady Purbeck’s hearing, including her meeting with Sir Robert Howard in Lambe’s chamber, and in December he reported that “The titular Dr. Lamb is committed to the Gatehouse, about causing a Westminster scholar to give himself to the devil, of which and some other of his fellows drawn in by this same like practice, is much but diverse report” – the imprisonment that led to his questioning by the Bishop of Durham later that month.¹²⁵ Though none of these mentions were as detailed as the account of his death, evidently Meade considered him a ‘newsworthy’ figure, his interactions with important courtiers and his own brushes with the law both being fit for his letters to Stuteville.

¹²³ Lena Liapi, “‘The Talke of the Towne’: News, Crime and the Public Sphere in Seventeenth-Century London,” *Cultural and Social History* 14, no. 5 (2017): 550.

¹²⁴ Meade to Stuteville, *Court and Times*, 252.

¹²⁵ Meade to Stuteville, *Court and Times*, 295; 304.

His magic was also seen to be worthy of record. Rushworth's *Historical Collections* records that in June 1626 "there was a terrible Storm and strange Spectacle upon the Thames", when a sudden storm arose and beat down on Buckingham's residence at York House.¹²⁶ Rushworth reports that the strange storm "occasioned the more discourse among the Vulgar, in that Doctor Lamb appeared then upon Thames, to whose Art of Conjuring they attributed that which had happened". According to this anecdote, the then-living Lambe was – in the context of Buckingham's impeachment – sufficiently present in the imagination of "the Vulgar" that Londoners connected him to the "strange Spectacle" and engaged in "discourse" about his role in events. Lambe was not simply connected with or blamed for the storm; rumour placed him personally at the scene. In 1626 Lambe was very much alive and physically present in London – Londoners could expect to see him in the flesh. As Lambe's death demonstrates – he was recognised by people in the street as he departed the playhouse – he was known in London not only by name but by face.¹²⁷ If the extravagant outfit worn by Lambe in the woodcut printed with *A Briefe Description* was based in reality then Lambe, a strikingly-dressed octogenarian, might have cut a particularly recognisable figure.

Of course, Rushworth's chronicle was compiled decades after Lambe's death, and Rushworth emphasises how the storm centred on "the then habitation of the Duke of Buckingham" and that "The Parliament was then sitting, and this Spectacle was seen by many of the Members...".¹²⁸ Clearly he situated the event in his narrative of the development of the Civil War, between Buckingham's answer to his impeachment and the Commons' petition to the king "concerning Recusants". It is hard, then, to separate Rushworth's account of this "discourse" about the living Lambe from Lambe's posthumous reputation. Other, contemporary records, however, demonstrate that Lambe's activities in life were known and discussed. The diary of the Anglican clergyman Thomas Crosfield also associated Lambe with a storm; Crosfield's entry for 18th December 1627 reports "A great wind at ye execution of Dr Lamb".¹²⁹ Crosfield further records that "Upon a relation of Dr. Lambes execution, the question disputed whether spirits really and substantially appeare, i.e. the ghosts of the deceased. See Plinies Epistles. Dr Benson molested once w[ith] an importunate woeman craveing his direction to find her clothes that were lost, sent her to a hedge where she found them." Seemingly Crosfield, writing in Oxford, had received an inaccurate report that Lambe had been executed (six months prior to his

¹²⁶ Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, 393.

¹²⁷ *A Briefe Description*, 20 reports that "the boyes of the towne, and other vnruely people" began to flock to Lambe and attack him "hauing obserued him present".

¹²⁸ Rushworth, *Historical Collections*, 393.

¹²⁹ Crosfield, *Diary*, 16. It is perhaps conceivable that Crosfield had heard of a great wind at Lambe's execution in the sense that the wind was executed or achieved by Lambe – perhaps the storm on the Thames of several months earlier, or a different story of weather magic. But the further discussion of "Dr. Lambes execution" makes it clear that Crosfield understood that Lambe had been executed and a wind had marked the event.

actual death) and this event prompted further discussion in his circle – a relation of the news of Lambe’s execution had led to a broader conversation about the reality of spirits and experiences of the supernatural.

Lambe was also sufficiently well-known in his lifetime for his name to carry weight on stage. Two plays, *The Fair Maid of the Inn* (first licensed 1626) and *The Staple of Newes* (performed 1625) made explicit reference to Lambe.¹³⁰ In *The Fair Maid of the Inn*, attributed to John Fletcher and several others, Forobosco, a comically villainous magician and mountebank, once lived in England as “Doctor Lambestones”. Here, Lambe is portrayed primarily as a cozener (though Forobosco also performs genuine magic), and the play seems to suggest that his success in England was particularly noteworthy – Forobosco wishes to travel to India, but is reminded “traunce the world over you shall never purse up so much gold as when you were in England”.¹³¹ The play appears to suggest either that Dr Lambe’s activities were singularly profitable (as Matthias Evans’ testimony would seem to suggest) or that England was a singularly lucrative market for a magician like “Doctor Lambestones”.¹³² In either case, it does appear that the playwrights were familiar with Lambe’s costly services and expected this reference to be meaningful to the audience.

In Ben Jonson’s *The Staple of Newes*, Lambe is a subject of discussion for the Gossips, whose satirical conversations punctuate the play. Following the first act, the gossip Mirth foolishly criticises the play, and labels Jonson “a prophane Poet” whose devil-obsessed plays would make conjurers and cuckolds of the audience – “he kept schole upo’ the *Stage*, could coniure there, above the *Schole* of *Westminster*, and *Doctor Lamb* too”.¹³³ Here Lambe is invoked as a conjurer of renowned skill. After the third act, Mirth again discusses Lambe. Her mastery of London gossip, she says, includes “which Boy rode upon *Doctor Lambe*, in the likenesse of a roaring *Lyon*, that runne away with him in his teeth, and ha’s not devour’d him yet”, allowing Tattle and Censure to discuss the corrupting influences of school-masters, cunning men, and poets.¹³⁴ Interestingly, *The Staple of Newes*, first performed in 1625, predates Lambe’s imprisonment and questioning about the Westminster scholars, suggesting that the suspicion he taught magic to boys went beyond a single incident. The reference to a boy riding on Lambe in the shape of a lion may simply be a pun on his name (a ‘lamb’ taking the form of a lion); if it referred to a story that had been told as true, it appears no other account of it survives.¹³⁵ But it would seem to fit

¹³⁰ Beaumont and Fletcher, *Comedies and tragedies*; Jonson, *The staple of newes*.

¹³¹ Beaumont & Fletcher, *Comedies and tragedies*, 48.

¹³² Bellany, “The Murder of John Lambe”, 49.

¹³³ Jonson, *The staple of newes*, 20.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 49.

¹³⁵ Lambe’s critics did not waste the punning potential of his name – a libel verse that circulated after his death included the “The Divell did show himselfe a Glutton/In taking this Lambe before he was mutton” (“Early

alongside other attention-grabbing stories of Lambe's magical capabilities. Jonson evidently does not put much stock in Lambe's magical reputation, portraying it as the stuff of foolish gossip and employing it for comic effect. But clearly he was a figure with whom Jonson's audience was expected to be familiar, and someone around whom shocking stories and moral outrage circulated.

Death

Lambe's death in June 1628 was (and is) the most widely attested and well-known event in his existence. Accounts of his killing survive in *A Briefe Description*, the ballad *The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe*, and several letters and diaries. The details of the accounts, the spread of talk about the event, and the consistencies and differences in the surviving versions all give a sense of the 'newsworthiness' of Lambe's death and the significance of his reputation. Though the precise details vary on some points, accounts broadly agree on the general course of events – on 13th June 1628, Lambe had attended a play at the Fortune playhouse and was recognised (by "boyes" or apprentices in several accounts), and a crowd began to form and follow him. Pursued by this increasingly hostile crowd, Lambe travelled some distance through the City, seeking refuge in alehouses and private residences and paying others to protect him. Eventually, he was attacked by the crowd and fatally wounded. He was carried to the Poultry Compter where he died of his injuries the following morning.

Versions of this story appear in several places, demonstrating the level of interest in the event and some of the ways in which the news spread. Two accounts were published – the pamphlet, *A Briefe Description*, and a broadside ballad by Martin Parker, *The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe*. The pamphlet's account is narrative and detailed, and has been the main source for historians writing about the event in most cases.¹³⁶ The ballad opens with a triumphant announcement of Lambe's wickedness and deserved death, and then provides a similarly detailed account in rhyme.¹³⁷ The incident was considered to be politically sensitive at the time which may have limited the circulation of the news in print; as discussed above, the pamphlet was published anonymously, and while Parker's name was not displayed on the broadside, he was arrested in connection with it. Nonetheless the news also circulated in manuscript form, and accounts are recorded in several letters and diaries. Sir William Spring, later a prominent parliamentarian, wrote to the antiquary Sir Simonds D'Ewes to report the "butchery of Lamb" and the "outrage" of his killers against Buckingham.¹³⁸ The barrister and later

Stuart Libels" Oiii6), and couplet on Buckingham's death read "The Shepheards struck, The sheepe are fledd,/For want of Lambe the Wolfe is dead." ("Early Stuart Libels", Pi6).

¹³⁶ *A Briefe Description*

¹³⁷ Parker, *The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe*.

¹³⁸ "Sir William Spring to Sir Simonds D'Ewes [1628]" in James Orchard Halliwell (ed.) *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Sir Simonds D'Ewes, Bart. During the Reigns of James I and Charles I*, vol. II (London, 1845), 198.

regicide Gilbert Millington received word from his brother John, reporting briefly that “Doctor lambe is knocked on the head by the prentizes ag[ain]st the Comter”.¹³⁹ Meade provided Stuteville with a lengthy account of the event.¹⁴⁰ In a letter to Elizabeth, Electress of the Palatinate and former Queen of Bohemia (sister to King Charles I, then living in the Hague), the diplomat Sir Francis Nethersole informed her of the “straunge accident” that had occurred when “Dr Lambe of whom your Ma[jes]ty hath heard so much” was killed.¹⁴¹ References to the incident are recorded in at least five diaries also: those of Edward Burghall, John Rous, William Whiteway, and Walter Yonge, as well as an anonymous “Diary of public events, principally respecting the proceedings in the House of Commons”, preserved in the State Papers.¹⁴² These records show that while Lambe’s death was a subject of lively reporting in London, word spread quite swiftly outside of the city. Edward Burghall resided in Cheshire, John Rous in Suffolk, Walter Yonge in Devon, and William Whiteway in Dorset. In Francis Nethersole’s letter, the news reached across the sea to Elizabeth in the Hague. Though invariably brief and so short on detail, a number of libel verses were also circulated at the time of the killing, sometimes providing information about the circumstances and invariably celebrating his death.¹⁴³

Some commonalities emerge among those whose accounts survive. Several were clergymen – Edward Burghall was, at the time of the killing, a schoolmaster but was later one of the many Puritan ministers forced out of the Anglican church during the “Great Ejection” in 1662; John Rous was the vicar of Santon Downham in Suffolk; Thomas Crosfield, whose diary erroneously recorded Lambe’s death six months early, was also a clergyman.¹⁴⁴ Many others were or later became political figures – William Whiteway, Walter Yonge, Gilbert Millington, Simonds D’Ewes, and William Spring all sat in parliament.¹⁴⁵ Of course, many of these trends likely reflect the survival and publication of diaries and letters more than their writing, but there appears to be a preponderance among those who recorded or wrote about Lambe’s death of anti-royalist sentiment, likely reflecting the political relevance of the

¹³⁹ TNA, SP 16/107 f.191.

¹⁴⁰ Meade to Stuteville, *Court and Times*, 364.

¹⁴¹ TNA, SP 16/107 f.152

¹⁴² Burghall, “Providence Improved”, 2.; Rous, *Diary*, 17.; William Whiteway, *William Whiteway of Dorchester*, 97, 128.; BL, Add. MS 35331; TNA, SP 16/102 ff.104-111v, f.107v.; John Bruce, *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the reign of Charles I, 1628-1629, preserved in the State Paper Department of Her Majesty's Public Record Office*. Vol. [3], Entry no. 57, (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1859).

¹⁴³ “Early Stuart Libels” Oiii6; Oiii7; Oiii8; Oiii9; Pi1.

¹⁴⁴ C.B. Phillips, “Burghall, Edward (bap. 1600, d. 1665), clergyman and ejected minister, and schoolmaster,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 23, 2025.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/4003>

¹⁴⁵ Richard L. Greaves, “Millington, Gilbert (c. 1598–1666), regicide,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 23, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18761>; J.M. Blatchly, “D’Ewes, Sir Simonds, first baronet (1602–1650), diarist and antiquary,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 23, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7577>; Douglas Brunton and Donald Pennington, *Members of the Long Parliament* (Archon Books, 1968), 73, 103, 109.

event. This was not universally true, however. Martin Parker, though his ballad was deemed impolitic, was a noted royalist in the Civil War era, best known for his royalist ballad *When the king enjoys his own again*.¹⁴⁶

Generally, the accounts are consistent regarding the broad facts of the matter, and some specific details recur over several accounts, giving some sense of the elements of the story contemporaries deemed important or interesting. Several sources record that Lambe had been at a play on the day of the incident – the pamphlet, the ballad, Nethersole’s letter, and the anonymous diary all name the Fortune playhouse specifically, while Burghall, Rous, and Meade simply report that he was coming from a play or a playhouse. While in part this is a simple matter of fact, the consistency with which this particular detail was recorded may indicate that it stuck out to those who reported the story – not all, for instance, felt it necessary to name the streets by which Lambe travelled or the location in which he was severely beaten. John Higgins argues that plays alluding to Lambe had helped to provide the materials that gave political meaning to Lambe’s death, and that the early modern theatre engendered an imperfect sense of collectivity that allowed social disruption.¹⁴⁷ Though Higgins is working towards a broader argument regarding the relevance of Lambe’s death to the history of theatre and theatrical riots, the relevance of the Fortune in accounts of the killing makes sense in the context of the theatre as a particularly charged site for collective action. That Lambe’s primary attackers were boys or apprentices is also reported in most accounts – the pamphlet refers to “the boyes of the towne, and other vnruely people”, Nethersole names “certayne Prentises”, Millington “the prentizes”, the anonymous diary “some boyes”, Yonge “Boyes”, Whiteway “the boyes and apprentices”, and Meade “some boys and such like”. Alistair Bellany suggests that while the accounts of ‘boys’ – young men, teenagers, and apprentices – likely underplays the diversity of the people involved, they contextualized the story alongside other apprentice-led disorders in Early Modern London.¹⁴⁸ For contemporary writers, the image of an unruly crowd of young men was familiar and accessible, perhaps accounting for how reliably it was recorded in accounts of Lambe’s death.

Other consistent elements of accounts were the most dramatic parts of the story. While the briefest accounts say no more than that Lambe was “knockt over the head” or similar, the longer ones tend to lavish detail on the nature of Lambe’s injuries. The pamphlet reports that

the people had had him downe, and with stones and cudgels, and other weapons had so beaten him, that his skull was broken, one of his eyes hung out of his head, and all partes of

¹⁴⁶ Joad Raymond, “Parker, Martin (fl. 1624–1647), ballad writer,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 23, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/21326>.

¹⁴⁷ Higgins, “The Killing of John Lambe and the Subjectivity of the Crowd in the Early Modern Theatre,” 226.

¹⁴⁸ Bellany, “The Murder of John Lambe”, 42.

his body bruised and wounded so much, that no part was left to receive a wound. Whereupon (although Surgeons in vaine were sent for) hee neuer spoke a word, but lay languishing vntill Eight a clocke the next morning, and then dyed.¹⁴⁹

The ballad devotes several stanzas to describing injuries, reporting that Lambe was attacked “With cudgels and with stones”, that “His scull in piteous wise,/Was battered and brused,/They put out both his eyes,” and that he was carried to the Compter “Where all that night he tary'd,” until his death in the morning.¹⁵⁰ Meade writes

they struck him down to the ground, giving him divers blows and wounds, and quite beat out one of his eyes. Thus being left half dead, and in such a case, that he never spoke after he was carried to the Compter, in the Poultry, (no other house being willing to receive him) where the next morning he ended a wretched life by a miserable and strange dream.¹⁵¹

This detailed account of violence and death – Lambe struck down by his attackers, losing an eye, and languishing speechless and “half dead” until morning – suggest a kind of lurid interest in the event, placing the pamphlet in particular alongside the ‘murder pamphlets’ that were a popular genre of cheap print in the seventeenth century.¹⁵² Peter Lake describes how such pamphlets portrayed their subjects in the context of a struggle between good and evil, and how despite their moralising they “nevertheless luxuriated in the details of the crimes they described”, seeking to shock and titillate readers with gore and violence.¹⁵³ Much of the reporting of Lambe’s death reflects similar dynamics – these vivid descriptions of the violence he was subjected to, placed alongside accounts of his wicked deeds or bad living frame the murder implicitly or explicitly as a just reward for such an evil figure. Lambe’s well-established infamy then not only motivated his attackers but influenced the ways in which the attack was understood and reported as news.

Several accounts also report that Lambe had predicted his own death. The pamphlet noted that Lambe had “before prophecied (although hee were confident hee should escape Hanging,) that at last he should die a violent death”; the anonymous diary that “he had form[er]ly sayd hee should nev[er] beehanged but should die a violent death”; and Meade wrote that he had heard from a friend that “Lamb himself should say, he should be killed by the people in the streets, or to that effect” and that it was

¹⁴⁹ *A Briefe Description*, 21.

¹⁵⁰ Parker, *The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe*.

¹⁵¹ Meade to Stuteville, *Court and Times*, 364-365.

¹⁵² Peter Lake “Deeds against Nature: Cheap Print, Protestantism and Murder in Early Seventeenth-Century England” in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 260, 258.

this prophecy that made him so afraid when accosted outside the playhouse.¹⁵⁴ Here again Lambe's magical reputation fed the ways in which his death was understood and reported – as an infamous magical practitioner, the notion that his death fulfilled his own prophecy made for a compelling and narratively satisfying ending to these accounts. It demonstrates also that while the Duke of Buckingham was very much in the thoughts of many reporters Lambe's own identity as a magical practitioner was a crucial element in what was interesting and newsworthy about his death. Other magical details in different accounts, though less consistent, demonstrate this – the anonymous diary reported that Lambe threatened to make his attackers “daunce naked if they dep[ar]ted not” and that “great flyes” were seen to buzz around him while he took refuge in the Windmill tavern.¹⁵⁵ The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe emphasised Lambe's magic throughout, suggesting that Lambe's attackers “bad him save him-/selfe by's charmes” and repeating several times that he died despite his magical skills.¹⁵⁶

In other respects, however, accounts differ. Specific details change between accounts or are present in some but not recorded in others, and different writers use different terms and labels to describe Lambe himself. Several accounts refer to Lambe hiring sailors as bodyguards when the ‘boys’ began to follow him from the playhouse – the pamphlet has Lambe hiring “a company of Sailors” as his “guard”, and the anonymous diary recorded that he “got some saylors to garde him”.¹⁵⁷ In other accounts, the role of the sailors is reversed, and they appear as Lambe's chief attackers in place of the apprentices. Both Rous and Yonge refer to “watermen” and “Marryners” as Lambe's attackers, and the ballad attributes the killing to “A crew of Sea-men bold”.¹⁵⁸ This speaks to the complexity of the transmission of the news – that sailors played an important role was transmitted to many of those who recorded the news, but the precise details were garbled or reconstructed in the transmission. Significant details that appear in only a single source also underline the point that the range of accounts available to modern historians represents only a tiny fraction of the actual circulation of news of the event; the anonymous writer of the State Papers diary had access to a detailed list of the contents of Lambe's pockets – knives, “a rounde christall ball”, portrait miniatures (including that of Frances Carr, Countess of Somerset, the woman at the centre of the Overbury scandal discussed in the previous chapter), a gold nightcap and some forty shillings – that surely originated somewhere and was transmitted in retellings of events, but goes unnoticed or unremarked in all the other surviving accounts.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ *A Briefe Description*, 21.; TNA, SP 16/102 f.107v.; Meade to Stuteville, *Court and Times*, 365.

¹⁵⁵ TNA, SP 16/102 f.107v.

¹⁵⁶ Parker, *The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe*.

¹⁵⁷ *A Briefe Description*, 20-21.; TNA, SP 16/102 f.107v.

¹⁵⁸ Rous, *Diary*, 17; BL, Add. MS 35331; Parker, *The Tragedy of Doctor Lambe*.

¹⁵⁹ TNA, SP 16/102 f.107v.

Reputation as News

Considering Lambe's reputation as news offers an excellent case study of how reputations and news could function across a variety of media in the period. In the form of *A Briefe Description* and Parker's broadsheet ballad, the story of Lambe's death was part of the growth of cheap print that characterised the late-sixteenth and early- to mid-seventeenth century.¹⁶⁰ But this did not mean that manuscript circulation of the news disappeared; the many surviving letters and diaries that record not only Lambe's death demonstrate that newsworthy stories were still written down by hand, and many of the surviving verse libels were circulated in writing and even publicly posted up. But diaries like Thomas Crosfield's contain records of private conversations spreading and discussing news of Lambe, the libels were also meant to be spoken aloud, and the ballad of course was intended to be sung. As Fox argues, word of mouth remained the primary means of sharing and exchanging news, rumours, stories, and other information, but these could "migrate promiscuously between these three vehicles of transmission as it circulated around the country, throughout society and over time".¹⁶¹ In the surviving records of news about Lambe we can perceive how the spoken, scribed, and printed word all operated alongside and in conversation with one another. News about Lambe was spoken (and sung), written, and printed, and transmitted into other media, with reports of libellous speeches entering diaries, handwritten accounts sharing details with printed ones, and so on. The discussion of and commentary on Lambe's life and death also underlines the extent to which a 'public sphere' or perhaps simply 'public opinion' could be found in seventeenth-century England. Studying the libels that followed the death of Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury, Pauline Croft argued that such material demonstrates how informed and opinionated people outside of the elite could be in the period, and how readily they scrutinised and criticised influential and well-known figures, and Adam Fox likewise finds that even people at the "lowest social level" were increasingly well-informed and opinionated thanks to verbal and written news reporting.¹⁶² Lena Liapi's work meanwhile emphasises how public opinion was particularly influenced by the movement of information across different media, and the different ways in which people actively engaged with news beyond passively reading printed texts.¹⁶³ All of this is apparent in the sources on Lambe; clearly many people felt that they knew enough about Lambe and magical practitioners like him to comment on his life and death, to gather, record, circulate, and

¹⁶⁰ Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf, "Introduction" in *The spoken word Oral culture in Britain, 1500–1850*, ed. Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 22-23.

¹⁶¹ Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.

¹⁶² Pauline Croft, "The Reputation of Robert Cecil: Libels, Political Opinion and Popular Awareness in the Early Seventeenth Century," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* no. 1 (1991): 44.; Adam Fox, "Rumour, News and Popular Political Opinion in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England," *The Historical Journal* 40, no. 3 (1997): 598.

¹⁶³ Liapi, "The Talke of the Towne," 550.

comment on information about him. They had access to an idea of Lambe, which is to say his reputation, and as was the case for all kinds of news according to Liapi, they were able to engage with this not only passively but by appropriating it for various purposes.¹⁶⁴

In the form of news, Lambe's reputation – that is to say, things said and known about Lambe – had a geographical reach far beyond that of most magical practitioners or indeed most people. Diarists and letter writers not only in London but across the country knew who John Lambe was and what was significant or interesting about what he had done or experienced. People wanted to discuss and to record events they learned of involving Lambe, and this discussion and recording brought out many meanings from his reputation. He could be discussed in the context of a debate about the reality of spirits, in a cautionary tale about the terrible fate of a sinner, in politically-charged reflections about the state of the country, or in scandalous stories of disorder and violence in the capital. The precise detail of some of these accounts speaks to their 'connectedness' – various features apparently stuck in the minds of many of those who heard about and recorded Lambe's death, resulting in the multiple references to, for instance, Lambe employing bodyguards against the crowd, or his eye coming out of its socket. This may reflect how spectacle – an important part of Lambe's own practices as discussed above – was a part of how others beyond his immediate surroundings engaged with his reputation. People exchanged shocking stories about Lambe, whether they centred on mysterious storms he conjured or graphic violence inflicted upon him. While his body lay in the prison after death, Londoners paid to visit and look at it; part of how they engaged with the news of Doctor Lambe's death was by seeing it for themselves, experiencing the spectacle by viewing the corpse firsthand.¹⁶⁵ It may be that almost any famous (or infamous) corpse would attract a similar degree of attention under the circumstances but it is striking that in the immediate aftermath of Lambe's dramatic death, the sense of spectacle and shock that had often characterised his reputation in life apparently intensified. Liapi argues that eagerness to discuss crime was an important part of seventeenth-century "news culture", and the complexities of the reporting and discussion of Lambe's life and, especially, his death underline this.¹⁶⁶ While Lambe's reputation had an important political dimension, the roles of magic, disorder, and violence in news about him demonstrate that interest in his life and death was not only due to interest in the Duke of Buckingham. This is an important example of the interest that seventeenth-century people took in famous (or infamous) magical practitioners, but it also demonstrates the complexity of how fame and infamy more generally could interact with news culture and the interpretation of newsworthy events.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ BL, Add. MS 35331 f.21

¹⁶⁶ Liapi, "The Talke of the Towne," 550.

IV. Afterlife and Legacy

Though Lambe's death was perhaps the high point of his fame, the resonance of his reputation did not end in 1628; his name was referred to over the next century for a number of purposes. Perhaps Lambe's most enduring legacy was as a symbol of corruption and disorder in the political sphere, but he also joined the many historical magical practitioners whose names could be invoked posthumously as touchstones for magic and the supernatural.

Politics and Disorder

Many works of history printed in the seventeenth century make reference to Lambe, often in connection to the Duke of Buckingham. The earliest example was *Annales, or, a generall chronicle of England* (1631) by John Stowe and Edmund Howes.¹⁶⁷ Published in 1631, *Annales* recorded "Doctor Lamb killed by the multitude". The account given here of Lambe's life and death follows closely that of *A Briefe Description*. Indeed, the author makes reference to the pamphlet, writing that Lambe had "bene formerly condemned of sorcery, witchcraft, and a rape, as you may read in a book published of his life and death". As in the pamphlet, the *Annales* report that Lambe was pursued and "assailed", paid sailors for protection, was beaten (including "over the eye") and carried to the Compter where he never spoke and soon died. Other sources were clearly used, however, as details are provided (such as Lambe's age – estimated rather highly at "sevenscore yeares", i.e. one hundred and forty - and the name of the owner of the tavern in Moorgate where Lambe took refuge) not included in the pamphlet. This account then emphasises Lambe's notoriety and the collective violence it provoked – again, very much like the pamphlet – as well as giving Lambe a 'larger-than-life' quality by exaggerating his advanced age. Later chronicles and histories, however, tended to emphasise the political dimensions of his death.

The court and character of King James (1651) recorded Buckingham's assassination as "a just judgement on him that forsooke God, to seeke to the Devill by Witches, and Sorcerers in his life; one whereof was Doctor *Lamb* (who was his great defensitive preserver as he thought him)".¹⁶⁸ *The history of Great Britain* (1653) noted that Buckingham's mother "trafficked much with *Mountebanks*" and gives "*Doctor Lamb*, a man of an infamous conversation" as an example.¹⁶⁹ *A compendious view, or*

¹⁶⁷ John Stow and Edmund Howe, *Annales, or, a generall chronicle of England. Begun by Iohn Stow: continued and augmented with matters forraigne and domestique, ancient and moderne, vnto the end of this present yeere, 1631.* (London, 1632), 1043.

¹⁶⁸ Weldon, *The court and character of King James* (London, 1651), 199.

¹⁶⁹ Wilson, *The history of Great Britain*, 287.

Cosmographical, and geographical description of the whole world (1659) included Lambe's death in its summary of the year 1628.¹⁷⁰ *England's Worthies* (published February 1659/60) gave in its account of the life of George Villiers a list of "the warnings the Duke had of his end", the first of which was that "some two moneths before, one Doctor Lamb (a creature of the Dukes) was by the rude multitude slain in the Streets; they telling him as they were belabouring him with stones and cudgels, *That were his Master the Duke there, they would give him as much*" (emphasis original).¹⁷¹ Many of these repeated the "lett Charles & george doe what they can" libel and note Lambe's predictions of his own death and Buckingham's. Some, like *England's Worthies* also included other presages of the Duke's death such as the predictions of the prophetess Lady Davis, the appearance of a "Daemon" in the shape of Buckingham's father, and the duke's portrait falling from the wall in the High Commission Chamber on the day of Lambe's death.¹⁷² Many libels on the subject of Buckingham's own death, two months after Lambe's, invoked the perceived relationship between the two, with some suggesting that Lambe's death had robbed Buckingham of his protection, for instance "The Shepherds struck, The sheepe are fledd,/For want of Lambe the Wolfe is dead", and others imagining the two meeting in hell, for instance *Hell's Hurlie-Burlie* which narrated how "When neere to Pluto's palace-gate he came,/Who should he meet withall but Dr. Lambe".¹⁷³ The political interpretations of Lambe's death owed much to the context in which they were written. While chronicles published during the Interregnum moralised on the theme of Lambe's deserved end the presage of Buckingham's, the post-Restoration text *The Forfeitures of Londons charter* (1682) gave a very different account of Lambe's death in which King Charles personally rode out to "appease the Tumult", but could not stop the "insolent Varlets" from killing Lambe.¹⁷⁴ In the political climate of the Restoration, rather than a wicked character emblematic of the corruption of the late Stuart monarchy, the anonymous author of *The Forfeitures of Londons charter* seemingly attempted to rehabilitate as the victim of false accusations and envy.

Lambe's name was also referenced more abstractly, purely in reference to his manner of death; *The Censure of the Rota upon Mr Miltons book* (1660), a royalist satire, suggested that Sir Arthur Haslerig "had gone the way of Doctor *Lamb* infallibly", had he not fought off the boys who assaulted him.¹⁷⁵ In *The Welsh hubub* (1660), a satire against regicide Hugh Peter, the writer begged not to be confused with Peter lest "The incenst many hearing of my name/ Like Doctor *Lamb* should stone me for the

¹⁷⁰ Thomas Porter, *A compendious view* (London, 1659), 123.

¹⁷¹ William Winstanley, *England's worthies*, 318.

¹⁷² Winstanley, *England's worthies*, 318-319.

¹⁷³ "Early Stuart Libels" Pi6, Pi16, Pi17, Pi23, Pi30, Pi31, Pi35, Pi36, Pii3, Pii8.

¹⁷⁴ Anonymous, *The Forfeitures of Londons charter, or, An impartial account of the several seisures of the city charter* (London, 1682), 34.

¹⁷⁵ Anonymous, *The Censure of the Rota upon Mr Miltons book, entituled, The ready and easie way to establish a free common-wealth* (London, 1660), 7.

same”.¹⁷⁶ *A curse against Parliament-ale* (1649) expressed a wish that Miles Corbett “be stoned through *Loathbury*:/and like Doctor *Lambe*, be sent from whence he came”.¹⁷⁷ In these cases, unlike *The Forfeitures of Londons charter*, *Lambe*’s ill-repute (perhaps ‘fresher’ from 1649-1660 than in 1682) was put to royalist purposes, with a focus more on the hatred of the people for *Lambe* himself than on any thread of corruption running from *Lambe* to Buckingham and thence to the king himself. Even in the political realm then the legacy of *Lambe*’s name was complex and could be put to a range of purposes.

Magic and Witchcraft

In many of these texts *Lambe* appears primarily as a symbol of Buckingham’s corruption and/or the victim of collective violence. But his reputation for magic remained salient also. In 1646, *Astrologo-mastix, or A discovery of the vanity and iniquity of judiciaall astrology* (1646), moralising against astrology, called it “one of the blackest staines of our corrupt times, that that infamous Wizard Doctor *Lamb* was countenanced, and protected by some”.¹⁷⁸ In the early 1650s, following the ‘Black Monday’ eclipse, a number of texts with the same purpose were printed specifically attacking William Lilly, another London astrologer, doctor, and magical practitioner. *Against William Li-Lie* (1652) labelled “that devellish Doctor *Lamb*” his “elder Brother”, and *Lillyes Lamentations* (1652) similarly cast *Lambe* (along with Dr Faustus, the Witch of Endor, and several other conjurers from popular print) as Lilly’s “Predecessors”, and reminders of the fate that awaited him if he failed to repent.¹⁷⁹ *The wizard unvisor’d* (1652) ended with a wish that those “Heathens” who believed in astrology “fear the dismal end which came/ To Faustus, may be theirs with Doctor *Lamb*.”¹⁸⁰

Towards the end of the century, *Lambe*’s name would again be invoked in debates about the reality of witches and spirits. In his influential anti-demonological text, Webster decried those who deceived “by pretending to reveal things in Crystalglasses or Beryls, as was well known to be pretended by Doctor *Lamb*”.¹⁸¹ On the opposite side of the contemporary debate about the reality of magic and witchcraft, *The kingdom of darkness* (1688) made reference to Doctor *Lambe* via the story of cunning woman and accused witch Anne Bodenham, and Increase Mather’s 1693 *further account of the tryals of the New-*

¹⁷⁶ Anonymous, *The Welsh hubub, or the Unkennelling and earthing of Hugh Peters that crafty fox* (London, 1660).

¹⁷⁷ Anonymous, *A curse against Parliament-ale. With a blessing to the juncto; a thanksgiving to the council of state; and psalm to Oliver* (London, 1649), 5.

¹⁷⁸ Gere, *Astrologo-mastix*, 20.

¹⁷⁹ Vicars, *Against VWilliam Li-Lie*; Anonymous, *Lillyes lamentations, or Englands feigned prophet discovered* (London, 1652). 4.

¹⁸⁰ Anonymous, *The wizard unvisor’d: or, A clear display of the madnesse of judicial astrology* (London, 1652), 5.

¹⁸¹ Webster, *The displaying of supposed witchcraft*, 26.

England witches likewise reported that “That horrid Witch of *Salisbury*, *Ann Bodenham* who had been Servant to the Notorious Conjurer Dr. *Lambe*, could not bear the sight of one that was Bewitched by her”.¹⁸²

Much of Lambe’s afterlife was as a symbol of corruption or disorder, but his identity as a magical practitioner was not irrelevant, and his name was sometimes attached to living practitioners, even sometimes by the practitioners themselves. Thomas Randolph’s poem *An Apologie for his false Prediction that his Aunt Lane would be deliver’d of a Sonne*, subtitled “The Best Prophets are but good Guessers” invoked Lambe alongside a range of other magicians, astrologers, fortune-tellers, and prophetesses as mocking symbols of the failures of divination, asking “is all witchcraft braind with Doctor *Lambe*?”¹⁸³ Here Lambe (with his violent death as a distinguishing feature) was set alongside other famous figures like Roger Bacon, Eleanor Davies, Merlin, and John Dee in order to playfully question whether, since his own prediction had proven false *any* prophecy could be relied upon.

More concretely, Lambe’s name was raised twenty five years after his death by a cunning woman who used his name as part of her own reputation-building strategy. The trial and execution of Anne Bodenham in 1653 was the subject of two pamphlets – *Doctor Lamb Revived* and *Doctor Lambe’s Darling*.¹⁸⁴ As the titles of these pamphlets suggest, Lambe’s reputation had an impact on the case as according to Edmund Bower, author of *Doctor Lamb Revived* and Bodenham’s confessor ahead of her execution, Bodenham boasted that her skills exceeded those of William Lilly, and that she had first learned them as Lambe’s servant.¹⁸⁵ While an actual relationship between the two cannot be proven, Lambe’s was clearly a sufficiently potent name either for Bodenham to trade on it or for Bower to incorporate it into his godly narrative. Malcolm Gaskill argues persuasively that Bower’s account of the trial made Bodenham an emblem of all that parliament and the Republic opposed, and used Lambe’s name to reinforce this connection to the corrupt Stuart past.¹⁸⁶ More broadly he argues that witches, while seldom prosecuted after the 1630s, remained relevant as symbols of disorder and that, understood in context, stories of their lives and deaths were part of the process by which those involved made sense of the past.¹⁸⁷ This theme emerges strongly not only in Bodenham’s case but in

¹⁸² Nathaniel Crouch, *The kingdom of darkness: or the history of dæmons, specters, witches, apparitions, possessions, disturbances, and other wonderful and supernatural delusions, mischievous feats, and malicious impostures of the Devil Containing near fourscore memorable relations, forreign and domestick, both antient and modern* (London, 1688), 17.; Increase Mather, *A further account of the tryals of the New-England witches with the observations of a person who was upon the place several days when the suspected witches were first taken into examination* (London, 1693), 25.

¹⁸³ Thomas Randolph, *Poems with the Muses Looking-Glasse: And Amyntas* (Oxford, 1638), 53.

¹⁸⁴ Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*; Anonymous, *Doctor Lambs darling*.

¹⁸⁵ Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*, 8, 26-27.

¹⁸⁶ Gaskill, “Witchcraft, Politics, and Memory in Seventeenth-Century England,” 301.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 303.

references to Lambe written around and since his death. More specifically, Bodenham's case and the writings that emerged from it revived the theme of Lambe as a corrupting influence. Bodenham had learned magic from Lambe having been drawn in by "curious sights", with of course the tragic result that she was finally hanged as a witch. What was more, Bodenham herself was portrayed as a corrupting influence, enticing in turn the young Anne Styles with spectacular sights and bewitching her. Just as Bodenham had fallen into her wicked lifestyle by being 'infected' by Lambe, she threatened to 'infect' Styles in turn. Only by repentance did Styles break the cycle, according to Bower. The notion of the disordering power of magic, embodied in a socially dangerous figure like Lambe or Bodenham and flowing out from them, is one way in which the stories about these people could be understood. Lambe's reputation, in other words, reached beyond him and was even perceived as something that could spill over and spread the iniquity that made up its substance.

Lambe's afterlife in the Bodenham case also speaks to the discussion above of Lambe as a male witch. Diane Purkiss suggests that Bodenham "established herself not as a run-of-the-mill country cunning woman, but as a kind of female wizard".¹⁸⁸ This, she suggests, was "a much more theatrical role", and a more masculine one, deriving authority and gravity from the masculinised appearance of learning. She argues that "Anne Bodenham seems to have been able to borrow the role of male magus from Lambe, and with it the mage's authority".¹⁸⁹ This perhaps overestimates the authority that Lambe held in the eyes of many; as discussed above, his detractors insisted he was profoundly *unlearned*, and the building blocks of his ill repute can largely be read as failures to live up to contemporary masculinity. But of course, while Lambe had many detractors and it was they who wrote the most about him, he was by all appearances a famous and commercially successful magical practitioner. The clients who paid him so well for his services must indeed have perceived him as learned and authoritative – or at least as able to provide a service worth paying for – just as Anne Bodenham's clients must have perceived her before her trial for witchcraft. Bodenham, with her direct claimed link to Lambe, speaks to the nuance of magical reputations from a gendered perspective. Lambe's reputation in many ways consisted of masculine failings, but Bodenham in turn committed a gender transgression by coopting the empowering masculine aspects of the male practitioner. If the 'male witch' of Lambe's type was feminised as a man but masculinised as a woman, the question must be asked if the type is of a 'male witch' at all, or if male and female practitioners appeared as practitioners in many of the same ways, transgressing codes of behaviour that included but were by no means limited to gender roles.

¹⁸⁸ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: early modern and twentieth-century representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 148.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Conclusions

Lambe's use as a symbol before and after his death constitutes an important part of understanding his reputation, but there is value in understanding him not only as a symbol but as an active magical practitioner in his own right. Lambe offered many of the same services as other practitioners and was in some ways a 'normal' magical practitioner. He was, however, uncommonly famous and successful in his lifetime for a number of reasons. Part of his success may be attributed to his capabilities as an entertainer and showman – he gained fame by evoking wonder, drawing people to him who wished to see 'strange sights', and stories about him from the storm on the Thames to his own death turned on drama and spectacle. This was not unique to Lambe but appears to have been a particular focus or skill of his and something for which he was famous. While Lambe was atypical among practitioners (insofar as 'typicality' is a useful concept) the way in which his mastery of spectacle contributed to his uncommon degree of renown is suggestive of how significant the evocation of wonder could be to magical reputations more broadly. His widespread reputation may also be traced partly to his London residence and his elite clients. His supposed relationship to the Duke of Buckingham was an important part of his infamy, but beyond this he was known to be resorted to by gentlemen and countesses. This was true before he came to London based on the anecdotes in *A Briefe Description*, but his fame doubtlessly benefitted from London's dense population and lively urban culture of drama and libel poetry, contributing to Lambe's becoming a figure who could be recognised on the street or referred to for effect on stage.

Studying Lambe is in part an exercise in reading against the grain, as most of what is known about him comes from writers intending to denounce him. This leads to two conclusions. Firstly, reading and understanding these hostile sources gives a sense of what, in a magical practitioner, was worthy of denunciation; what qualities made for a 'notorious' or infamous practitioner. Lambe was portrayed (both in published texts like the pamphlet and in talk and news) often as a witch, in particular as a specifically masculine witch figure – a worker of dangerous and harmful magic for evil purposes. But he was also associated with more mundane wrongdoings – dishonesty, ignorance, and lechery for example, all qualities with which other practitioners were at times negatively associated. His sinister magical reputation also made him a compelling symbol of corruption in politics and elsewhere – he was cast as an unnatural influence infectious and harmful to wider society. This complex image of infamy was consistent and easy to understand, digest, and make reference to – the infamous figure of Lambe clearly resonated with his contemporaries and with those who remembered him after his death. While this was not, most likely, a reputation Lambe sought to construct for himself, this accessible image was a major part of how he was thought, talked, and written about.

Secondly, examining the negative assessments of Lambe invites consideration of the extent to which he was, nonetheless, popular with clients and successful as a magical practitioner. While the surviving textual sources suggest that Lambe was widely despised for the crimes with which he was charged, the qualities with which he was associated, and his perceived malign political influence, they also make it clear that Lambe consistently drew in clients, many of whom paid highly for his services. Clearly then such ill repute did not necessarily mean a practitioner could not also be successful or hold different elements of reputation simultaneously; Lambe could be known to many as a liar and cheat or a dangerous witch, but prospective clients could still know him as a practitioner capable of healing their sickness, telling their future, or simply showing them 'strange sights'. To an extent, Lambe's notoriety may even have fed his 'positive' reputation; *A Briefe Description* laments that following his questioning on suspicion of witchcraft "the condemnation of lewdnesse in those assemblies of Iustice, did raise an opinion of his abilitie among the people, no lesse then some vnlearned and foolish Bookes in our time haue gotten credit among the people, onely because Authoritie hath censured them bad".¹⁹⁰ The pamphlet's author believed that Lambe's public condemnation for witchcraft, far from hindering Lambe's career, made him more famous, publicising the idea of his "abilitie" in magic. The boasts of John Mortemer of Somerset reflect a similar dynamic – Mortemer was said to have boasted to his neighbours that he had the power to control them, and that no Justice of the Peace (presumably in the context of a trial at the Quarter Sessions) could condemn his efficacious magic.¹⁹¹ The aspect of danger lends further credence to the significance of wonder and spectacle for practitioners – Lambe's public trial and the frightening things it was alleged he could do made him a more compelling figure, someone interesting to prospective clients and someone they felt could provide the magic they needed or simply wished to see.

None of this is to deny, however, that Lambe served a symbolic purpose for many of those writing about him. His recognisable public persona held meaning, allowing his name to serve as a symbol of political corruption and disorder, as well as of magic and witchcraft. Often, both before and after his death, references to Lambe had little to do with him as an individual, instead using him as a recognisable representation. In this way, Lambe serves as an example of one way a practitioner's reputation could 'drift' beyond the individual themselves. Just as the names of other practitioners could form part of a practitioner's reputation, a name like Lambe's could stand in for magic and witchcraft, for trickery and fraud, and for corruption on the political stage.

¹⁹⁰ *A Briefe Description*, 2.

¹⁹¹ Somerset Q SR/21/9-10

The coherency of Lambe's reputation and its capacity to exist beyond him, both by outliving him and by achieving wider relevance beyond the man himself, speak to the vitality of magical reputations. This was a feature not only of infamy but of all kinds of fame. While Lambe's reputation is recorded mostly in hostile sources, other practitioners had more control over the version of their reputation that was spread in their lifetime and remembered after their deaths. The second chapter in this section will deal with one such practitioner.

Chapter 4. Accuracy, Honesty, and Restoration; William Lilly's Ideal Astrologer

Introduction

William Lilly (1602-1681) was likely the most famous astrologer of the Civil War era and an important figure in the landscape of Restoration astrology. While John Lambe in his old age was a successful cunning man and an infamous conjurer, readily available in the imagination of ordinary people across the country, Lilly was a public figure for some four decades. His work as a consulting astrologer and almanac-writer brought him commercial success, with his almanac selling an estimated 30,000 copies a year at its height.¹ Astrology also secured him several influential patrons and contacts, and his political predictions in the context of the Civil War and the Commonwealth brought him recognition as an unofficial parliamentarian "State Astrologer".² It also made him famous. Lilly's name, appearing on his yearly almanacs and other publications, as well as in discussions of astrology, politics, and current affairs, was known across the country and beyond. Given that his portrait appeared on the front of every copy of his almanac, Bernard Capp suggests (perhaps hyperbolically) that his features "were probably the best known of anyone in England after the king".³ Lilly was also known in his lifetime and after his death to have had knowledge of things "beyond astrology"; besides interpreting non-astrological prophecies (some attributed to saints like Thomas Becket, and others to less pious prophets like Mother Shipton and Merlin), Lilly's writings demonstrate an interest in ceremonial and popular magic that has typically been seen as at most a footnote to his astrological career. While astrology certainly was the most important feature of Lilly's work – and perhaps his life – the more magical aspects of his work and reputation are also worthy of consideration.

The literature on Lilly's life, practice, and especially his politics is extensive. He is discussed at length in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, and also features prominently in landmark studies of astrology in the Civil War and the Restoration, and its 'decline' in the latter half of the seventeenth century, for instance in Bernard Capp's *Astrology and the popular press* and Patrick Curry's *Prophecy and Power*.⁴ Capp presents Lilly as the most successful of the many English astrologers who flourished in what he

¹ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 348.

² Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the popular press: English almanacs, 1500-1800* (London: Faber, 1979), p.19.

³ *Ibid.* 19.

³ *Ibid.* 23.

⁴ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*; Capp, *Astrology and the popular press.*; Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and power: astrology in early modern England* (Oxford: Polity P. 1989).

calls “the golden age of English almanacs” between 1640 and 1670, pointing to the mass appeal of his political predictions and his sensitivity to the demand for “sensationalism, violence and bawdiness”.⁵ He was perceived, Capp suggests, as the head of his profession, and certainly Lilly’s admirers wrote of him in such terms.⁶ Curry makes the case for Lilly’s significance in the history of astrology more broadly, putting him at the centre of ‘democratic’ astrology in the middle of the century, drawing the attention of his contemporaries with astrological judgements, traditional prophecies, and a keen sense of moment.⁷ He points to Lilly’s high fees and highly influential clients, and suggests that even his enemies within the discipline recognised the primacy of his position.⁸ There have been a handful of monographs dedicated entirely to Lilly, with Derek Parker’s 1975 *Familiar to all: William Lilly and astrology in the seventeenth century* laying out a fairly comprehensive biography, perhaps superseded by Catherine Blackledge’s *The man who saw the future: the 17th-century astrologer who changed the course of the English Civil War* in 2015.⁹ Both of these however are directed primarily at a more general audience, making strong cases for the historical interest of Lilly’s life and work but having less concern for the specifics of their significance.

Perhaps the most significant modern work on Lilly is Ann Geneva’s *Astrology and the seventeenth century mind: William Lilly and the language of the stars*, a highly detailed study of Lilly’s work and in particular the ways in which he used astrological language and symbolism to encode political sentiment in his published works.¹⁰ Geneva argues that elements of astrological writing that have been read by historians as metaphorical were in fact more significant to contemporary readers as encoded symbolism. Lilly’s political beliefs and the political significance of his astrology have often been the focus of historians studying him, but recent work has increasingly considered other aspects. Recently, following Lauren Kassell’s use of Lilly’s papers for a thoroughgoing study of the life and career of Simon Foreman (1552-1611), Vittoria Feola has identified a need to study Lilly’s “mental world” more closely, as Kassell did for Foreman, and has begun to carry forward Geneva’s analysis by considering Lilly’s relationships and use of print as part of his self-fashioning as an astrological “grandee”.¹¹ This will be

⁵ Capp, *Astrology and the popular press*, 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Curry, *Prophecy and Power*, 28.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹ Derek Parker, *Familiar to all: William Lilly and astrology in the seventeenth century* (London: J. Cape, 1975); Catherine Blackledge, *The man who saw the future: the 17th-century astrologer who changed the course of the English Civil War* (London: Watkins, 2015).

¹⁰ Ann Geneva, *Astrology and the seventeenth century mind: William Lilly and the language of the stars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

¹¹ Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman: astrologer, alchemist, and physician* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2005); Vittoria Feola, “Antiquarianism, Astrology, and the Press in William Lilly’s Network (?)” in *Antiquarianism and Science in Early Modern Urban Networks*, ed. Vittoria Feola (Paris: Blanchard, 2014), 187.

taken as the 'jumping off' point for this analysis; the scope of this chapter is of course much narrower than to answer in full Feola's call to action, but building on Feola's work on Lilly's collecting and self-fashioning it is possible to set out the significant features of Lilly's reputation and his position as a famous person and astrologer.

This reputation makes for another valuable case study for several reasons. Firstly, like Lambe, Lilly's reputation had an uncommonly wide reach, both spatially and temporally – his name and indeed his face were known across the country and beyond for the last thirty or so years of his life and for a long time afterwards, and his astrological predictions, works of prophecy, and magical talents were a subject of thought, discussion, and debate. Unlike Lambe, however, a large body of evidence exists for Lilly's own thoughts and hopes regarding his reputation. In the previous chapter, much of the analysis of the reputation of John Lambe was based on primary sources hostile to and highly critical of the man himself, necessitating a degree of reading 'against the grain'. Lilly's prolific writing in life, and the large volume of surviving correspondence from his clients and admirers change this dynamic. These sources mean that Lilly's reputation can be analysed with more of a sense of Lilly's own perspective. Vittoria Feola describes Lilly's career as "an amazing self-fashioning campaign", and the rich body of sources available make this "campaign" and the responses to it more accessible to the historian than those of perhaps any other magical practitioner.¹²

The major sources for this chapter bear introduction before the analysis can proceed. Lilly's printed works are an invaluable source for his self-representation and will provide much of the primary evidence for this chapter. His almanac, *Merlini Anglici* was published annually from 1647 until Lilly's death in 1681, and he wrote a number of other tracts on specific astrological occurrences (eclipses, conjunctions, and other such phenomena) and on prophecies which he claimed or understood to be historical. Perhaps his most substantial published work was what he called his "Introduction", *Christian Astrology Modestly Treated of in three Books* (1647).¹³ This was the first major astrological textbook to be published in English, and offers some insight into what Lilly conceived of as his project as an astrologer. Another vital source for Lilly's self-perception and self-representation is *Mr. William Lilly's history of his life and times, from the year 1602, to 1681 Written by Himself, in the sixty-sixth year of his Age, to His Worthy Friend, Elias Ashmole, Esq*, an autobiography penned by Lilly at the behest of Elias Ashmole, who also edited and completed the work to cover the last years of Lilly's life and the details of his death.¹⁴ The *Life* was not published until 1715, after the deaths of both Lilly and Ashmole.

¹² *Ibid.* 194.

¹³ William Lilly, *Christian Astrology Modestly Treated of in three Books* (London, 1647).

¹⁴ William Lilly, and Elias Ashmole (ed.) *Mr. William Lilly's history of his life and times, from the year 1602, to 1681 Written by Himself, in the sixty-sixth year of his Age, to His Worthy Friend, Elias Ashmole, Esq.* (London, 1715, re-printed London, 1822).

The exact intent behind the book cannot then be known for certain – Ashmole likely intended to publish it, in line with his antiquarian interests in notable lives, but it is hard to know whether Lilly expected it to be published in his lifetime, after his death, or not at all. In any case, Lilly’s account of his own life appears to be fairly candid in some respects, freely confessing to magical operations and acts of deception that were at best questionably legal, while still making a concerted effort to present himself in a positive light. To these sources will be added a few further printed texts by other authors, particularly those critical of Lilly, which give a sense of the context of Lilly’s reputation-building and the response to it.

In addition to these printed sources, some archival material will be used, primarily papers that belonged to Lilly at the time of his death and are now preserved as part of the Ashmole Manuscripts. The most useful of these for a study of reputation are the letters sent to Lilly by friends, admirers, colleagues, and would-be clients or students, as these provide insight into the engagement of some others with Lilly’s reputation. These papers were among those acquired by Elias Ashmole after Lilly’s death, and became part of the collections of the Bodleian Library when Ashmole himself died. There are a great many of Lilly’s letters spread across the Ashmole manuscripts, and for the purposes of this study I have taken a sample, focusing primarily on letters sent to Lilly bound in MS Ashmole 423, along with other letters to, from, or concerning Lilly drawn from other manuscripts, including those collected in *Elias Ashmole: His Autobiographical and Historical Notes, his Correspondence, and Other Contemporary Sources Relating to his Life and Work* and *Early Modern Letters Online*.¹⁵

MS Ashmole 423 is a large folio volume containing a wide range of material touching on astrology. The first part consists of excerpts from the works of the Elizabethan astrologer-physicians Richard Napier and Simon Forman, which are followed by assorted papers by Ashmole and Lilly and letters to them both. In all, there are over seventy letters to Lilly in the volume, along with several poems which appear to have been sent to him but which are not accompanied by letters. These letters come from a variety of correspondents and touch on several common themes – praise for Lilly, requests for favours or patronage, and news about celestial phenomena (typically with requests for Lilly’s astrological judgements thereon). Lilly’s correspondence is one of the most promising sources for analysing how people (especially people who did not know him personally) engaged with Lilly’s reputation. Thanks to Ashmole’s collecting practices, every major work on Lilly has made at least some use of his papers. Feola in particular has considered Lilly’s correspondence as part of his reputation, noting how his “data

¹⁵ Oxford, Bodleian Libraries MSS. Ashmole 423.; C.H. Josten (ed). *Elias Ashmole: His Autobiographical and Historical Notes, his Correspondence, and Other Contemporary Sources Relating to his Life and Work, Vol. 2: Texts 1617–1660*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967); Howard Hotson and Miranda Lewis, eds, *Early Modern Letters Online*, <http://emlo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>, accessed Oct 17, 2024.

feeders” (i.e. those who wrote to Lilly with news of astrological phenomena they had observed) both contributed to Lilly’s fame and engaged with it, united as they were by their understanding that Lilly could do something with their information if they only sent it to him.¹⁶ Other aspects of Lilly’s reputation have not been fully examined with the help of these papers, however.

Most of the letters are dated from 1647 to the mid-1650s, but a few later letters are also present, with the last dated 1676. The order is roughly chronological, with several letters appearing out of ‘sequence’, and with several letters not addressed to Lilly interspersed with them. While on this basis it is safe to say the current ordering of the letters is something more (or at least something *other*) than a stack of Lilly’s post as it arrived, it is probably impossible to say how the letters came to be in their current organisation and order, and under whose custody this came about. While we know *that* Lilly kept these letters and Ashmole acquired them, we do not know *how* Lilly kept them and can only speculate as to why. How representative this sample is of Lilly’s correspondence in general is also hard to determine – Lilly, of course, may well have chosen which letters to keep, and so might his widow Ruth, and the collection may have been further winnowed or rearranged by Ashmole or since his bequest. In general, the letters in Ashmole MS 423 are from friends and admirers and highly positive in tone. Only one or two feature conflict or dispute. Given Lilly’s many rivals, detractors, and adversaries, it seems quite plausible that the survival of these letters was at least partially conditional on Lilly’s personal response to them; when reading letters as historical sources it is important to bear in mind the many factors influencing the survival of the small fraction of correspondence that survives to the present.¹⁷

Most of the named correspondents in Ashmole MS 423 appear only once, though as Michelle Pfeffer notes, some letters were printed in Lilly’s almanacs that do not survive in manuscript form including, for example, a second letter from Robert Sterrell, who appears only once in the Ashmole MSS.¹⁸ For many of these correspondents, little or no biographical data is available. But some can be identified and some general observations can be made. Almost all of the named correspondents in this volume appear to be men, but the volume includes a sheet of paper entitled “A true relation of what has beene seene by Mary Sidway and her mayd on Wednesday the 16 of Aprill a little before the setting of the sunne 1651”.¹⁹ Of those writers for whom an occupation is known or can be deduced, most seem to

¹⁶ Feola, “Antiquarianism, Astrology, and the Press in William Lilly’s Network (?)”, 202.

¹⁷ James Daybell and Andrew Gordon, “Introduction” in *Cultures of Correspondence in Early Modern Britain*, ed. James Daybell and Andrew Gordon (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 9.

¹⁸ Michelle Pfeffer, “The Society of Astrologers (C.1647–1684): Sermons, Feasts and the Resuscitation of Astrology in Seventeenth-Century London.” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 54, no. 2 (2021) 142.

¹⁹ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423. f.180.

have been relatively educated individuals – there are several physicians and ministers, and some writers on mathematics-adjacent subjects.

Of those for whom biographies can be easily traced, most were astrologers, almanac makers, and scholars with printed works to their names – people who moved in some of the same circles as Lilly. A brief overview of some of these individuals highlights some degree of diversity (these men varied in status, occupation, age, and career stages) while also displaying some of the commonalities that will emerge from the correspondence. William Andrews (1634/5–1712/13) was an astrologer, almanac maker, and teacher of mathematics. When he wrote to Lilly in 1656 he had recently published his first almanac, and wrote with regard to his then forthcoming book, *The Astrological Physitian* (for which Lilly provided a foreword).²⁰ Another letter is from Sir Kenelm Digby, (1603–1665), a natural philosopher and courtier who was later involved with the Royal Society.²¹ He wrote to Lilly to say he had read his work, and to pass on some information he had found regarding the sixteenth-century astrologer Valentine Naibod and the angel Samael, whom Lilly had identified as the guardian angel of the English commonwealth but whom Digby had found to be connected to Beelzebub and Belial. John Heydon (b. 1629, d. in or after 1670), astrologer, alchemist, occultist, and grandson of Sir Christopher Heydon, author of the influential *A Defence of Judiciall Astrologie* (1603) wrote to apologise to Lilly for his recent harsh words in print.²² The Richard Morris who wrote to report on a comet he witnessed in Barbados was likely the brother and son to the prominent Barbados merchants Lewis Morris junior and senior.²³ The mathematician William Oughtred (bap. 1575, d. 1660), around 82 years old at the time of writing, expressed his admiration for Lilly and requested he use his influence to untangle Oughtred from a vexatious lawsuit.²⁴ Jeremiah Shakerley (1626–1653?), the most regular correspondent in the volume, was at the time of writing a young astronomer in the early stages of a

²⁰ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423. f.227.; Bernard Capp, “Andrews, William (1634/5–1712/13), astrologer and teacher of mathematics,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/531>

²¹ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423. f.251.; Michael Foster, “Digby, Sir Kenelm (1603–1665), natural philosopher and courtier,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Jan 8, 2009, accessed Jan 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7629>

²² Bodleian, MS Ash. 423. f.242.; Patrick Curry, “Heydon, John (b. 1629, d. in or after 1670), writer on astrology and alchemy, and occultist,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Jan 7, 2010, accessed Jan 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/13169>

²³ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423. f.244.; Barbara Ritter Dailey, “Morris, Lewis (1613?–1691), merchant and colonist in America,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Jan 3, 2008, accessed Jan 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/71108>; Thomas L. Purvis, “Morris, Lewis (1671–1746), politician in America,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/68712>

²⁴ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423. f.216.; Frances Willmoth, “Oughtred, William (bap. 1575, d. 1660), mathematician,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Jan 3, 2008, accessed Jan 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20950>

career that would see him publish almanacs and other works.²⁵ Abraham Wheelocke (c. 1593–1653), who wrote two letters in praise of Lilly, was in his sixties and a well-established linguist and librarian.²⁶ Vincent Wing (1619-1668) was an established astrologer, astronomer, and almanac-maker in his own right when he wrote to Lilly for a commendation for his book.²⁷

Taken together, all of these sources build a strong image of Lilly's reputation as he understood it or desired it to be understood, and as it was experienced or interacted with by others. These elements of the construction and impact of Lilly's reputation will structure the chapter in four sections. The first outlines Lilly's biography and the practices with which he was associated, as relevant background to his career and reputation as an astrologer. The second discusses in depth Lilly's self-representation, considering the collection of qualities with which he sought to be associated. The third considers these qualities as a kind of 'brand' and Lilly as a kind of 'celebrity', and the final section discusses in more detail some of the ways in which others engaged with this 'brand-like' reputation.

Lilly emerges as a man keenly aware of and invested in his personal reputation and the good name of his discipline of astrology, sensitive to the criticisms levelled at both. He used the tools at his disposal to cultivate an image that functioned on several levels - technical and professional, moral-religious, and political – to bring prestige to himself and his discipline. Those who aligned with his positions and admired the qualities he claimed to espouse proved receptive to this brand-like image, and interacted with his reputation in a number of ways, ranging from expressing admiration, even devotion, to identifying themselves with Lilly and his project to a personal level.

I. Biography and Practices

Before discussing the specific elements of Lilly's reputation and self-representation, a brief discussion of Lilly's biography and some of the practices he engaged in will help to ground the discussion by situating him in the context of seventeenth-century astrology and magic.

Lilly's Biography

William Lilly's biography is well known to historians, having been set out in his *Life* and cross-referenced from many other sources. He was born in Leicestershire to yeoman farmers, and was

²⁵ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423. ff.111-129v.; Willmoth, "Oughtred, William".

²⁶ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423. ff.170-173v.; Alistair Hamilton, "Wheelocke, Abraham (c. 1593–1653), linguist and librarian," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/29191>

²⁷ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423. ff.174-175v.; Bernard Capp, "Wing, Vincent (1619–1668), astronomer, astrologer, and land surveyor," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/29731>

educated in Ashby de la Zouch by a teacher known to “breed up many scholars for the universities”, and Lilly writes that due to his father’s relative poverty only he among “those scholars who were of my form and standing” was unable to attend Cambridge.²⁸ Instead, in 1620, he moved to London as the servant of the Wrights – Gilbert, an attorney, and his second wife, whose name is not known. According to Lilly’s account of this time, he took an early interest in magic, medicine, and astrology – his mistress’ habit of consulting cunning folk to learn if she would outlive her husband sparked in him “a little desire to learn something that way” though he could not afford books to do so, and when his mistress fell ill, he took charge of her care and treatment.²⁹ When she died, among her possessions were several golden “sigils” – magical talismans against spirits and misfortune – prepared for her by Simon Forman, the famous astrologer, magician, and physician. Gilbert’s third wife, Ellen Whitehaire outlived him and married her servant Lilly in 1627.³⁰ This was Ellen’s third marriage and she appears to have been a fairly wealthy widow. On her death in 1633 Lilly inherited £1000 from Ellen, a significant increase in his fortune. In 1632 he had begun to study astrology, having been introduced to John Evans, an astrologer, cunning man, and seller of antimonial cups used to administer purges for medical purposes. In 1634 he secured his first influential patron, the MP William Pennington, and married his second wife, Jane Rowley. Between 1636 and 1640 he lived in Hersham, Surrey, due to what he described as a period of melancholy, and it was on his return to London that his astrological career began to pick up.³¹

In 1643 he caught the attention of Sir Bulstrode Whitelock, a prominent parliamentarian, who credited Lilly’s astrological medicine with saving his life, and in 1644 he published the first edition of *Merlinus Anglicus Junior*, which would continue yearly until the 1690s.³² In the Civil War era he became well-known for the parliamentarian politics of his astrological publications, in particular for accurately predicting the royalist defeat at the Battle of Naseby in 1644, but though he appears to have developed considerable political connections, he was an avowed opponent of Presbyterianism, and was questioned by a parliamentary committee regarding his political predictions in 1645. Besides publishing, he practised as a highly successful consulting astrologer from his home on the Strand throughout the 1640s and 50s, and became deeply embedded in the astrological community of

²⁸ Lilly, *Life and Times*, 16-18; 22.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 29-31.

³⁰ Patrick Curry, “Lilly, William (1602–1681), astrologer,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Sep 23, 2004, accessed Jan 20, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/16661>

³¹ Lilly, *Life and Times*, 83.

³² *Ibid.*, 103.

London, including taking a leading role in the Society of Astrologers.³³ In 1654, Jane died and Lilly quickly remarried, this time to Ruth Needham, who outlived him.³⁴

After the Restoration, Lilly's parliamentary prestige unsurprisingly became a liability, and he was arrested on several occasions, and was even suspected of playing a part in the Great Fire of London in 1666 as he appeared to have predicted it in *Monarchy or No Monarchy* (1651).³⁵ He was able to avoid any serious legal difficulties due in no small part to the influential connections he still maintained, such as Elias Ashmole who, while a committed royalist, had been a close friend of Lilly's for many years. In the later 1660s, however, he left London for Hershams, where he lived for the rest of his life. He continued to publish his almanac while living in Hershams, even after his ill-health and failing eyesight required him to employ the astrologer Henry Coley as his amanuensis, and he also practised in Surrey as an astrologer and astrological physician. Most of the evidence for his later life, and his death in 1681 following a period of illness, comes from the letters and writings of Elias Ashmole, who corresponded with and often visited Lilly towards the end of his life. After his death, Ashmole purchased Lilly's books and papers from the widowed Ruth for £50.³⁶

Astrology and Almanacs

Much has been written on the rising and falling fortunes of astrology as a 'respectable' discipline over the course of the seventeenth century in England. Patrick Curry notes that the decline in Lilly's political cachet with the Restoration coincided with the beginning of the discipline's decline in 'respectable' English society, but if Lilly was cognisant of this shift he and his allies remained committed.³⁷ Wolfgang Hübner describes astrology across Europe as having "fallen on hard times", elite, university-educated astrologers of the sixteenth century having been largely supplanted by those of humbler origins (like, in England, Lilly, John Booker, and John Gadbury).³⁸ But while figures such as Lilly perhaps lacked the academic credentials of John Dee or his continental contemporaries, in terms of the broad popularity of judicial astrology, the 1640s have been identified as a high-water mark in England.³⁹ In the decades

³³ Curry, "Lilly, William".

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Curry, "Lilly, William"; William Lilly, *Monarchy or no monarchy in England. Grebner his prophecy concerning Charles, son of Charles, his greatnesse, victories, conquests.: The Northern Lyon, or Lyon of the North, and chicken of the eagle discovered who they are, of what nation* (London, 1651).

³⁶ Geneva, *Astrology and the seventeenth century mind*, 43.

³⁷ Curry, "Lilly, William"

³⁸ Wolfgang Hübner, "The Culture of Astrology from Ancient to Renaissance," in *A Companion to Astrology in the Renaissance*, ed. Brendan Dooley (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 150-152.

³⁹ Curry, *Prophecy and power*, 7.

following the Restoration, most historians of astrology agree that the discipline's respectability and relevance declined sharply, though the reasons for this have long been a subject of debate.⁴⁰

For most of Lilly's career, however, astrology was both widely accepted and widely criticised. Astrology was taught in universities and many people consulted astrologers and purchased almanacs. But at the same time, many were sceptical as to the accuracy of astrological predictions, and satirised astrologers and almanac-makers as cheats or fools. Others, especially divines, argued that astrology peddled "fatal necessity" in defiance of free will and divine providence, or encouraged the credulous to rely on astrology rather than God.⁴¹ From the Restoration onwards, astrology was increasingly seen, at least by those of higher social status, as superstitious and 'vulgar'. For Curry, Lilly was "the last great English astrologer who could unselfconsciously advocate astrology as a divinatory craft, and issue his predictions as prophecies", succeeded by astrologers like John Gadbury and John Partridge in the later seventeenth century who focused on demonstrating its 'rational' and scientific credentials.⁴² Lilly then operated in a context where the status of astrology as a discipline, and thus the reputation of its practitioners, was contested and insecure. For him and his discipline, the stakes were high when it came to trust and reputation.

Astrology was not an undifferentiated mass of beliefs and practices. The primary distinction was between 'natural' astrology – which dealt with astral influences on natural phenomena such as the weather, as well as mass human events (predictions of epidemics, wars, sweeping political changes, and the like) – and judicial astrology, which dealt with more specific and individual predictions.⁴³ Judicial astrology in turn comprised many divinatory practices – nativities (making predictions based on a 'figure', 'scheme', or horoscope for the questioner's time of birth), horary questions (using a horoscope drawn up for the time of asking the question), elections (astrologically determining promising times to carry out an activity such as beginning a journey, starting a business venture and so on) and many others.⁴⁴ While it is important to note the distinction – particularly as it was judicial astrology that was the focus of most debates over astrology's validity – it should not be overstated. Most astrologers, Lilly included, practised both natural and judicial astrology, and did not always make explicit distinction between them.

⁴⁰ Geneva, *Astrology and the seventeenth century mind*, p.12. gives a good summary of the debate over the 'decline of astrology'.

⁴¹ Phebe Jensen, "Astrology and Religion in the Long Reformation: "Doctor Faustus in Swadling Clouds"," *Reformation* 24, no. 2 (2019): 97.

⁴² Curry, *Prophecy and power*, 31.

⁴³ Curry, *Prophecy and power*, 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Almanacs were one of the most popular forms of cheap print throughout the seventeenth century. They were not exclusively astrological texts; besides prognostications they contained a wealth of utilitarian information such as calendars, astronomical data, and medical advice.⁴⁵ 'Almanac' could even be used to describe a book of reference in general.⁴⁶ But as a medium and genre they were closely tied to astrology and the promise of knowledge about the future. All the most prominent astrologers of the period compiled or at least put their names to almanacs, and satirical works mocked almanac readers for their credulous belief in astrological predictions.⁴⁷ Much scholarship has investigated the influence of almanacs, and Bernard Capp estimates that in the seventeenth century one in three households purchased one regularly.⁴⁸ The market for almanacs was huge, and astrologers could gain wealth and prestige by placing their predictions in the hands of this potentially wide readership. Almanacs were, then, both a means of developing a reputation and an incentive to do so.

Lilly published his first almanac, *Merlinus Anglicus Junior* in 1644, selling out in the space of a week.⁴⁹ This was to be the first of many works Lilly took to print. Also in 1644 he published *A Prophecy of the White Kings Dreadfull Dead-Man Explained* (a gloss on a prophecy which he took to refer to King Charles) and *Englands Propheticall Merline* (a pamphlet on several recent astrological events and royal nativities).⁵⁰ In 1645 he published *Anglicus, Peace or No Peace*, and *The Starry Messenger*, both of which contained astrological predictions relating to the Civil War.⁵¹ He published ephemera for 1645 and 1646, and in 1647 he first published *Merlini Anglici Ephemeris*, the almanac series which would continue annually until his death. 1647 also saw the publication of *Christian Astrology*, Lilly's English textbook of astrology.⁵² Between *Merlini Anglici Ephemeris* (typically shortened to *Anglicus* by Lilly) and his other pamphlets on astrological phenomena and prophecies, Lilly continued to publish for the rest of his life, and as will be shown in sections II and III below, his nearly forty year long career in print was the means by which, in large part, he fashioned his reputation.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press*, 23.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁰ William Lilly, *A prophecy of the white king, and dreadfull dead-man explained* (London, 1664).; William Lilly, *Englands propheticall Merline foretelling to all nations of Europe untill 1663 the actions depending upon the influence of the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter, 1642/3* (London, 1644).

⁵¹ William Lilly, *Anglicus, Peace or No Peace, 1645 a probable conjecture of the state of England, and the present differences betwixt His Majestie and the Parliament of England now sitting at Westminster, for this present yeer, 1645* (London, 1645); William Lilly, *The starry messenger; or an interpretation of that strange apparition of three suns seene in London, 19. Novemb. 1644. being the birth day of King Charles* (London, 1645).

⁵² Lilly, *Christian Astrology* (1647).

Astrological Medicine

Like many astrologers, Lilly at times practised astrological medicine, making diagnostic and therapeutic decisions guided by astrological factors. From a fairly young age he appears to have had considerable confidence in his medical capabilities – he performed an ambitious (and ultimately unsuccessful) surgical procedure on his first mistress the unnamed Mrs Gilbert in the early 1620s, and practised medicine to some degree alongside his other astrological activities during his time in London. Notably, his name does not appear in the Annals of the College of Physicians, but as discussed in Chapter 2, that his practice never drew this kind of official attention could have any number of reasons. During his ‘retirement’ in Surrey from the 1660s, astrological medicine appears to have been a significant component of his work. Ashmole helped him to secure a licence to practise physic from the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Lilly wrote to him on several occasions making reference to his work.⁵³ When ill, he appears to have treated himself, dismissing Ashmole’s suggestion that he contact a doctor, and he also prescribed pills and syrups for friends like Elizabeth Ashmole (wife of Elias).⁵⁴ His interest in medicine may have begun with his treatment of Mrs Gilbert, though he also notes in his autobiography that his teacher in astrology, John Evans, was well known as a seller of “the antimonial cup”. While he appears to have had a high opinion of his ability to heal, his practice of physic appears not to have been a major element of his fame – it is very rarely referred to in the admiring letters that survive in the Ashmole manuscripts, or in the many printed works praising or criticising him. Nonetheless, it is worth bearing in mind that his horary astrology and almanac-writing were part of a wider field of activities associated with astrologers like Lilly.

Magic

The same might be said for Lilly’s interest in magic. As discussed above, Lilly’s eye was caught by the “cunning or wise men” consulted by Mrs Gilbert in the 1620s, though he did not at that time begin to practice or study magic. When he was directed to John Evans by an acquaintance, he was told that he was “an excellent wise man, and studied the Black Art”, and Lilly wrote in his *Life* about Evans’ skill in the invocation of spirits and angels.⁵⁵ He also wrote that in 1632 he had participated in an attempt, guided by “Mosaical rods” (divining rods used to discover hidden things) in Westminster Abbey, and that when a terrible wind arose after the searchers unearthed a coffin, it was he that “gave directions and command to dismiss the dæmons”, ending the project unsuccessfully but safely. In 1634 or 35 he was engaged by a pregnant woman “who had tried all the known artists in London” to help her see

⁵³ Josten (ed.) *Elias Ashmole: His Autobiographical and Historical Notes*, Vol. 3, 1197; 842.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 842, 1359.

⁵⁵ Lilly, *Life and Times*, 54.

the young lord whose baby she was carrying and who “could not or would not endure her sight”. He did not elaborate on how he accomplished the operation, but claimed that thanks to his help, she found all the doors between her and her former lover at the Kings Bench prison open and unguarded.⁵⁶ After this, he claimed, he tired of “these curiosities” and burned his magical books, as his period of melancholy was beginning. But his interest in magic appears to have survived, as he received letters discussing his knowledge of magic, and wrote in his *Life* of later magical operations, such as when he summoned the Queen of the Fairies in Hurst Wood.⁵⁷ Published works discussing Lilly and, especially, criticising him, also pointed to his involvement with magic – as discussed in the previous chapter, for example, he was likened to the “wizard” John Lambe in works, and the cunning woman Anne Bodenham who invoked Lambe as her teacher used Lilly as her yardstick, boasting that with all her magic books she “could do more than master *Lilly* or any one whatsoever”.⁵⁸ Like medicine, Lilly’s magic appears to have been of less importance to him than astrology, but it certainly comprised a part of his self-image, and contributed to his reputation as an astrologer and more generally. Again as with medicine, his interest in treasure-divining, invoking spirits, and the like reflect the breadth of practices that could actually make up the activities of people readily identified as “astrologers”.

II. Self-Representation

Lilly’s self-representation was complex and largely consistent. Across his writings he sought to associate himself with certain qualities and with a sense of mission as the ‘restorer’ of English astrology. This section will discuss some of the most prominent elements of Lilly’s self-representation and some of the ways in which Lilly’s admirers engaged with them.

Technical Skill and Accuracy

Perhaps the most consistent aspect of Lilly’s self-representation was an image of consummate skill. Perhaps unsurprisingly it was his skill as an astrologer that he most keenly defended in print. He compared himself favourably to other astrologers, for instance recalling in his autobiography how Nicholas Fiske, a former student of the famous astrological physician Richard Napier, deferred to Lilly’s superior judgement on “his most doubtful questions”.⁵⁹ He expressed a willingness also to debate any

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 78-83.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 230; Josten (ed.) *Elias Ashmole: His Autobiographical and Historical Notes*, Vol. 3, 1115.

⁵⁸ For example: Anonymous, *LILLY Lash’t vvith his ovvn ROD. / OR, AN / EPIGRAM / On the Quaint Skill of that Arch Temporizing ASTROLOGER / MR. WILLIAM LILLY. / Collected out of his ALMANACKS, from 1647, to this present year, 1660*, (London, 1660) – this broadside ballad calls Lilly a “cunning-man” and likens him to “Great Faustus, [Roger] Bacon, [John] Lamb”; Edmund Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived, or, VVitchcraft condemn’d in Anne Bodenham a servant of his, who was arraigned and executed the lent assizes last at Salisbury, before the right honourable the Lord Chief Baron Wild, judge of the assise*, (London, 1653), 8.

⁵⁹ Lilly, *Life and Times*, 72-75.

astrologer who disagreed with him; in the preface to his first almanac, *Merlinus Anglicus Junior*, he wrote “If any Astrologer of this or any other Nation, carpe at any judgement in the subsequent Discourse, I offer to maintaine against one or all the verity thereof, according to the fundamentals of Astrology”.⁶⁰ This confident (even aggressive) entrance to the world of astrological print illustrates well the self-assurance with which he wrote about his own skill. His ‘Introduction’ or astrological textbook, *Christian Astrology* (1647), featured many such assertions of his capabilities.⁶¹ He claimed his credentials as a teacher of astrology, writing that he “never undertook the instruction of any, whom I have not abundantly satisfied, and made very capable of the Art, in lesse time then any could expect...”, and that “I know I have made more Schollers in this Profession, then all that professe this Art in England.”⁶² Here again he compared himself (though less explicitly) to his contemporaries, representing himself not only as a skilled practitioner, but as the greatest teacher of astrology in England. He also gave examples of his previous accurate predictions, citing for example his earlier prediction (in *Anglicus, Peace or No Peace*) that “before I am sixteen thousand four hundred twenty two dayes old, I shall be in great hazard of my life, but that yeer which afflicts me will stagger a Monarch and Kingdom”, explaining that he had indeed suffered several ailments in 1647 and that “The latter part of my prediction concerning Monarchy, is now upon the stage and eyes the [sic] of millions attending what shall become of it”.⁶³

Lilly’s accuracy of judgement also figured in his correspondents’ praise. On 28th July 1650 Vincent Wing wrote to Lilly on behalf of “A woorthy Gentlewoman” whose linens had been stolen.⁶⁴ Wing, who had recently published his first work, *Urania practica, or, Practical Astronomy* and who would later become well-known as an astrologer and astronomer, explained that “I set one Figure... but I forbore to give judg[emen]t, and the rather because shee hath (not undeservedly) so good a confidence of you and yo[u]r writings, for which (I must say) wee are all much obliged to you.” While he was an astrologer in his own right, Wing claimed he had declined to give his own astrological judgement on the gentlewoman’s problem because her faith in Lilly’s work was so great. In the letter Wing self-deprecatingly deferred to Lilly’s superiority as an astrologer, flattering him by comparison. Wing *did* “set one Figure” (that is he calculated the position of the stars and drew up a horoscope that could be used to answer the gentlewoman’s query) but declined to give his judgement on it. There would, of course, be nothing to prevent him from giving a judgement as well as securing Lilly’s opinion, but he

⁶⁰ William Lilly, *Merlinus anglicus junior, the English merlin revived, or, His prediction upon the affaires of the English Common-wealth and of all or most kingdomes of Christendome this present year, 1644* (London, 1644), N.P. “To the Reader”

⁶¹ Lilly, *Christian Astrology*.

⁶² Lilly, *Christian Astrology*, N.P. “To the Reader”

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423 f.174.

“forbore” – perhaps it would have seemed improper (or a risk to his own reputation) to have offered his own judgement before risking being gainsaid by such a prominent astrologer. Equally though it is possible that Wing forbore to give judgement because to seek Lilly’s answer to this very mundane astrological query gave a pretext for politely writing to Lilly; in the second half of his letter he requested “a line in Com[m]endac[i]on” for his forthcoming tract, and raised the matter of a dispute between him and Lilly’s protégé the astronomer Jeremiah Shakerley, discussed further in Section IV below.

More than any other element of his craft, it was the accuracy of his predictions that Lilly emphasised in writing about himself. While the skillset of an astrologer was complex, and Lilly’s *Christian Astrology* made clear that students must master the technical fundamentals, Lilly frequently looked to his past predictions as testaments to his skill and accuracy. He wrote in his first almanac, *Merlinus Anglicus Junior* for 1644, that those who had manuscript copies from several months previous “may perceive thereby, whether any material accidents have happened, as by me predicted, and then expect the same verity from the succeeding Months, [since] all the judgement was drawne from the same fountaine of Learning.”⁶⁵ According to the rules of judicial astrology, most of the predictions in Lilly’s almanacs concerned large-scale events, such as the course of politics and war, international incidents, great storms, and other kinds of disruption largely out of the control of ‘ordinary’ readers but likely to affect them. Readers could judge whether his predictions aligned with such events as they were in their own right ‘newsworthy’. Where *Merlinus Anglicus Junior* covered the earlier part of the year that had already passed by the time it went to print, marginal annotations were given such as “This I conceive fulfilled by the accesse of the Scottish Army” and “I thinke it was in February a Message came of peace”.⁶⁶ Prognostication, for Lilly, offered the proof of “verity” in astrological judgement; quite simply, if his past predictions had come true, his work could be relied on to continue to be true. Astrology claimed to translate what was shown in the stars into knowledge about the world and the future, and Phebe Jensen suggests that this could make the almanac “an empowering artifact”.⁶⁷ The almanac that promised the most accurate judgement, and that drew from the best “fountaine of Learning”, was then perhaps the most empowering, giving the reader the surest protection against uncertainty.

Truthfulness and Moral Conduct

This raises certain questions about the ‘truth’ of predictions and the astrologer’s reputation. Prognostications were a ‘bet’ on the future, an investment in a future outcome. If the astrologer’s

⁶⁵ Lilly, *Merlinus anglicus junior... 1644*.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 5.

⁶⁷ Phebe Jensen, *Astrology, Almanacs, and the Early Modern English Calendar* (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 9.

judgement proved correct, their skill was vindicated and their reputation elevated (or at least so Lilly appears to suggest), and the client's money well spent and trust well-placed. There is evidence of negotiation around the 'truth' of predictions, with supporters and detractors both seeking to control the narrative of the prediction's success or failure, and the credit afforded to the astrologer. Opponents of astrology published pamphlets drawing attention to predictions that had failed to come true, and astrologers and their supporters in turn emphasised those which had been borne out as promised. Certain astrological commonplaces like Lilly's motto "*Non Cogunt*" (or *Agunt Non Cogunt*) – meaning "the stars do not compel" – show an awareness of the possibility that predictions would be proven inaccurate in the course of time.⁶⁸ Lilly also on occasion made precautionary excuses, as in *Anglicus, Peace or No Peace* (1645), when he wrote:

Admit these my succeeding Predictions should fail, as they well may, it breeds no Heresie or Schism: Consider, we that live within this City know not the daily passages thereof in every part thereof, nor can any relate them truly. For Gods sake, let us then have some favour assigned us, if we misse, that fetch our judgements from the Stars, seated in the Heavens: It's a great way thither, you all know.⁶⁹

Arguing that the fallibility of given predictions did not invalidate astrology as a whole, he emphasised the complexity and difficulty of the astrologer's work; there was a chance a prediction might "fail", but this did not indicate bad faith on the astrologer's part, only that they had been unable to comprehend all that passed among the distant stars. Such negotiations of the truth sought to preserve the astrologer's reputation and credit, and ward off the criticisms of those who denied astrology's power to predict.

Besides technical instruction, in *Christian Astrology* Lilly created what Geneva refers to as "an astrological Hippocratic oath", laying down a code of conduct for would-be practitioners to preserve the honour of their discipline.⁷⁰ This included provisions for godliness (to "consider and admire thy *Creator*" and never "neglect that *Divine Providence*..."), civility and sociability ("learn all the ornaments of virtue... be humane, curtius, familiar to all, easie of access"), charity ("give freely to the poor both money and judgment"), honesty ("let no worldly Wealth procure an erroneous judgment from thee, or such as may dishonour the Art"), and discretion ("[b]e sparing in delivering judgment against the Common-wealth thou livest in", "avoyd law and controversie", "betray no ones secrets", "be not

⁶⁸ Geneva, *Astrology and the Seventeenth Century Mind*, 10. This motto, while it gave room for predictions not to come true, also served the theologically important purpose of demonstrating that astrology was compatible with free will – the stars could not compel human action, only incline and influence.

⁶⁹ William Lilly, *Anglicus, peace, or no peace* "To all of the English Nation..."

⁷⁰ Geneva, *Astrology and the Seventeenth Century Mind*, 11.

dismaid if ill spoken of”).⁷¹ The figure of Lilly’s ideal astrologer was godly, knowledgeable, and truthful, seizing on important qualifications for trust. In *A Social History of Truth*, Stephen Shapin demonstrates how piety, truthfulness, and civility became essential components in the trustworthy ‘character’ of the Christian virtuoso in experimental philosophy.⁷² While in practice astrologers were often far from conforming to these gentlemanly ideals (neither Lilly nor most of his contemporaries were gentlemen, and in their published disputes they certainly do not appear to have valued what Shapin calls “dissension without disaster,” publishing unmitigated vitriol at times), Lilly’s ideal astrologer evokes similar virtues.⁷³ Much as Robert Boyle was, according to Shapin, instrumental in popularising and modelling the Christian virtuoso in the fields of experimental philosophy, Lilly envisaged a respectable and trustworthy figure for astrology.

The importance of truth and honesty, and the perceived moral aspects thereof, can be seen in Lilly’s correspondence. In September 1648 Arthur Clowes, even while discussing a disparity between Lilly’s predictions (unwelcome news from the southwest) with his experience (unwelcome news from the northwest) contrasted Lilly’s prognostications with the “horable lyes” of royalist astrologers.⁷⁴ While Clowes looked favourably upon Lilly and his predictions (even when they seemingly had not quite come true) and signed his letter “your freind to comand”, cavalier astrologers were not ‘good’ in the ways that Lilly claimed to be – royalist predictions were “horable lyes” and their authors should be “sev[e]rely punisht”. For Clowes, the difference between royalist and parliamentary predictions appeared to be *not* a matter of accurate calculations, judgement, or interpretation, but of the untruthfulness of those astrologers with whom he disagreed, who wrote their predictions “to hartten the caveleares & meake them to live in hope”. Clowes’ brief letter shows to some degree what was at stake for astrologers working to maintain their reputation – the moral character of the astrologer and the truthfulness of their predictions could be treated as one, and could even be collapsed into political positions.

Competence in Magic

Lilly’s self-representation as unfailingly competent perhaps went beyond simply assuring would-be clients that he got results. In his autobiography particularly he emphasised his skill in activities he described as “beyond astrology”, particularly elements of ceremonial magic.⁷⁵ His interest in these

⁷¹ Lilly, *Christian Astrology*, N.P. “An Epistle to the Student in ASTROLOGIE”

⁷² Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁷³ *Ibid.* 66.

⁷⁴ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423 f.134.

⁷⁵ Lilly, *Life and Times*, 56.

matters was seemingly longstanding. He was introduced to his first teacher, Evans, by reputation as “an excellent wise Man, [who] studied the Black Art”, and he found that “He had some Arts above, and beyond Astrology, for he was well versed in the Nature of Spirits, and had many times used the circular Way of Invocating, as in Time of our Familiarity he told me.”⁷⁶ Evans, he wrote, had on multiple occasions invoked angels or spirits to work spectacular effects, and Lilly himself recalled several magical operations in his autobiography. In 1632 (the same year he began learning under Evans), he assisted one Davy Ramsey in a search for buried treasure in Westminster Abbey with the help of “Mosaical rods”⁷⁷. When the treasure-seekers were faced with a preternatural wind, Lilly “gave directions and command to dismiss the dæmons”, calming the storm before damage was done.⁷⁸ Lilly reports that he “could never since be induced to join with any in such-like actions”, but evidently he retained an interest in spirits, and was acquainted with many astrologers and others skilled in calling spirits, divination by crystal, and other magical operations.⁷⁹ He also related an anecdote “as it happened not many years since with us”, when a “very sober discreet person, of virtuous life and conversation” went with a friend into Hurst Wood (Lilly’s property) to invoke the Queen of Fairies.⁸⁰ According to Lilly, the Fairy Queen appeared (a great success as “it is not for every one, or every person, that these angelical creatures will appear unto”) but the friend lost his nerve and bid the invocation end.⁸¹ Lilly stopped short of explicitly placing himself at the scene – the operation described would have been illegal – but it is hard not to read the story as coyly autobiographical.⁸² Ashmole at least understood it to be so, questioning in the margins of the original manuscript “Who it was that was with Mr. Lilly, when he invoked the queen of faries in the Hurst wood”.⁸³

While ceremonial magic was the subject of its own debates, it certainly was not astrology, and risked inviting not only legal troubles but public approbation and labels such as ‘conjurer’ which Lilly worked to disavow in many of his writings.⁸⁴ But the relationship between judicial astrology and magic was well-established in the seventeenth century, with astrology featuring in the repertoire of many cunning folk and conjurers, and professional astrologers frequently engaging in (and/or being accused of engaging in) magical practices.⁸⁵ Besides astrological predictions, many interpreted or wrote on non-

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 78-80.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 116, 228-233.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 229-231.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁸² Owen Davies, *Popular Magic: Cunning-folk in English History* (London: Hambledon, 2007), 8-9.

⁸³ Josten (ed.) *Elias Ashmole: His Autobiographical and Historical Notes, Vol. 3*, 1115.

⁸⁴ For example: Lilly, *Englands propheticall Merline* “To the reader”. Lilly writes: “they yoake us with Sorcerers, Negromancers, Magitians... do we raise the dead, or require respension from the deceased: do we invoke Spirits?”

⁸⁵ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 756.

astrological prophecies – for instance Lilly’s *A Prophecy of the White King* (1644), glossing a medieval prophecy as a reference to Charles I – as well as prodigies and apparitions.⁸⁶ Others used a crystal, or other divinatory methods. These did not necessarily require astrological learning, and had no obvious basis in the academic foundations of the discipline. Perhaps because of these mixed practices, people in the seventeenth century often appear to have drawn little distinction between astrologers and cunning folk or other magical practitioners. This was especially when attacking astrology, as for instance in John Melton’s *Astrologaster* (first published in 1620 and reprinted in 1653 as part of *Judicial Astrologie, Judicially Condemned*), which featured a cozening astrologer-cunning man.⁸⁷ Printed texts blurring the lines between astrologers and conjurers, wizards, or witches were very common, mostly deriding or demonising self-professed astrologers by the comparison.⁸⁸ However, given the overlap in practices and so many astrologers’ approval of magical operations, it appears that the lines between astrology and magic could be blurred by astrologers and their supporters, or were not universally recognised at all. This being the case, a reputation for knowledge in these areas could be mutually reinforcing.

Though during his lifetime Lilly did not boast of his skills in magic in print, he was evidently known by some to be knowledgeable about such things. One correspondent who gave no name but trusted that Lilly would “know my hand” wrote from Naples to follow up on advice previously received from Lilly’s.⁸⁹ Lilly, they wrote, had advised them that in order to discover “the sublimest science” and that which “approacheth nearest to the divine knowledge” they should apply themselves to “learne of some Capuchins in Florence”. However, the unnamed correspondent had in fact visited Florence and, having been unable to find the Capuchins described in any part of Italy, wished Lilly’s advice on what steps to take. The secrecy of the letter (its anonymity, and the author’s assurance that Lilly’s reply would be “so saffe as in your owne Cabinet”) would seem to imply that the “sublimest science” the author believed Lilly kept in his “own brest” was more explicitly magical than the astrology he set in print.⁹⁰ The secrecy around this letter is highly suggestive, but unfortunately makes it very difficult to say much more about the interaction that occurred. I have not been able to find any clues as to the identity of the writer, and

⁸⁶ William Lilly, *A prophecy of the white king*.

⁸⁷ Sir John Melton, *Astrologaster, or, The figure-caster Rather the arraignment of artlesse astrologers, and fortune-tellers, that cheat many ignorant people vnder the pretence of foretelling things to come, of telling things that are past, finding out things that are lost, expounding dreames, calculating deaths and natiuities, once againe brought to the barre* (London, 1620), p.17 ; William Rowland. *Judiciall astrologie, judicially condemned* (London, 1651), 157-244.

⁸⁸ For example: Anonymous, *Lillyes lamentations, or Englands feigned prophet discovered: being a brief narration of the severall proceedings of our famous country-man Mr. William Lilly the star-gazer* (London, 1652), p.4.; John Allen, *Judicial astrologers totally routed, and their pretence to Scripture, reason & experience briefly, yet clearly and fully answered* (London, 1659), 6.

⁸⁹ Bodleian, MS Ash 423 f.185.

⁹⁰ Bodleian, MS Ash 423 f.185v.

the hand does not obviously match any other in the volume (though it may bear comparison with others of Lilly's papers), and it is hard to know what knowledge it was exactly that Lilly had allegedly sent the writer abroad to seek. It seems probable though that it bore some relationship to the various kinds of divination and "the circular Way of Invocating" Lilly mentions in his *Life*; possibly the "sublimest science" dealt with the invocation or summoning of angels, as Lilly wrote that his teacher Evans had at times done.⁹¹ Whatever the exact nature of this knowledge, however, the anonymous correspondent evidently held a clear impression of Lilly as a learned astrologer, but one whose knowledge possessed hidden, secret depths, not to be generally shared. The works Lilly published in his lifetime did not emphasise this possibility or 'tease' magical knowledge, but Lilly's autobiography certainly portrays him in this manner, and it appears from this letter that it was an impression held at least by some. This highlights a key problem for the intersection of magic and reputation and a complication for this discussion of Lilly's self-representation, namely that much magical knowledge and practice was not (and, for fear of legal and perhaps social repercussions, could not be) touted in print as was astrological skill. Reputations for proficiency in these kinds of secretive knowledge would have to spread by less public and more ephemeral means.

Lineage

Like many astrologers and magical practitioners, Lilly's reputation also encompassed a sense of lineage and connection to the fame of his perceived predecessors. The first and perhaps most obvious of these predecessors was invoked in the name Lilly chose for his almanac – *Merlinus Anglicus*, the English Merlin. In tying his work to the name of the Arthurian wizard, one of the most iconic magicians of British myth and legend, Lilly claimed for himself and his almanac an ancient English lineage.⁹² By the seventeenth century, Merlin had lost his status as a historical figure and was, according to Stephen Knight, of "decreasing interest".⁹³ In a change marked by Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590-96), Merlin had transitioned from a historical political figure to a cultural figure with, Knight argues, the deep "wisdom" that characterised earlier interpretations replaced by a particularly Renaissance technical "cleverness".⁹⁴ Nonetheless, Merlin as a character was still "capable of validating power, both royal and more generally national".⁹⁵ He fulfilled this role in 1641, a few years before Lilly's first almanac, in Thomas Heywood's *The life of Merlin, sirnamed Ambrosius his propheties and predictions*

⁹¹ Lilly, *Life and Times*, 56.

⁹² Arthurian myth is, of course, culturally significant across Britain, but in Lilly's context he was represented as a specifically English figure.

⁹³ Stephen Knight, *Merlin: Knowledge and Power through the Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 103.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

*interpreted, and their truth made good by our English Annalls.*⁹⁶ Heywood's book gave accounts of many prophecies attributed to Merlin concerning major events for England as a country or nation, compared against the historical events which showed them to be accurate. Heywood asserted that Merlin "though he lived in the time of profane paganisme, was a professed Christian, and therefore his Auguries the better to be approved, and allowed", bringing him closer into alignment with contemporary England as a Christian kingdom, and demonstrating the same religious justification for prophecy that might be seen at work in the title of Lilly's *Christian Astrology*.⁹⁷ The short verse shown on the frontispiece of Heywood's work also highlights his conception of Merlin as an English prophet whose predictions concerned England:

*Merlin well verst in many an hidden spell,
His Countries Omen did long since foretell,
Grac'd in his Time by sundry Kings he was,
And all that he predicted came to passe.*⁹⁸

Lilly often made reference to prophecies attributed to Merlin in his work, particularly *The vworld's catastrophe, or Europes many mutations untill, 1666* (1647), in which he presented the translation of such a prophecy into English alongside his astrological predictions for international events in Europe and the fate of the English monarchy.⁹⁹ Many of Merlin's appearances in seventeenth-century texts made use of him as a legitimising royalist figure, but prophecy, especially when directed at the future rather than retroactively applied to the past, had inherent radical potential and a long history of use by rebellions and risings.¹⁰⁰ The prophecies of Merlin had been deployed in service of Protestantism during the Reformation, and by early seventeenth-century puritans, but Lilly "did as much as anyone to bring the ancient prophecies back into circulation", combining different genres of prognostication in a Civil War context.¹⁰¹ In his use of Merlin, Lilly, who frequently signed his name as *Anglicus* in his published works and in his personal correspondence with Elias Ashmole, and who referred to his almanac in the same way, sought to present himself as a particularly English and patriotic astrologer. His civil war predictions, like Merlin's prophecies in Heywood's book, concerned the fate of the commonwealth, and works like *Christian Astrology* emphasised his contribution to English astrology for instance lamenting that "*The Citizens of London make small reckoning of Astrology*" (a problem the

⁹⁶ Thomas Heywood, *The life of Merlin, sirnamed Ambrosius his prophesies and predictions interpreted, and their truth made good by our English Annalls* (London, 1641).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, N.P.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, N.P.

⁹⁹ William Lilly, *The vworld's catastrophe, or Europes many mutations untill, 1666* (London, 1647).

¹⁰⁰ Knight, *Merlin*, 117.; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 398.

¹⁰¹ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 408-409.

book set out to remedy) and stating proudly that he had trained more “Schollers” in astrology than any other man in the country.¹⁰²

Lilly also connected himself to prominent figures of more recent memory. The most immediate of these connections was his brief period of tutelage under John Evans. In his *Life* he wrote that Evans possessed a “piercing judgement” when it came to astrology, and that he was “well versed in the nature of spirits”, and recounted a story of Evans’ successfully conjuring a spirit that transported him instantaneously across London.¹⁰³ But he also reported that Evans was “much addicted to debauchery, and then very abusive and quarrelsome”, owned very few books, had come to London fleeing “some offences very scandalous, committed by him”, and “for money he would willingly give contrary judgments” (i.e., he would tell his clients what they wanted to hear, rather than answering their questions truthfully by the rules of astrology). Lilly wrote that he was so displeased with Evans (and so quick to learn) that he left his tutelage after seven or eight weeks, or as few as six according to *Christian Astrology*, and had no further contact with him. Though Lilly wrote disapprovingly of his teacher, the idea of tutelage played a role in his self-image as it did for other practitioners, like Anne Bodenham who claimed to have learned magic from John Lambe.¹⁰⁴ Despite his damning assessment of Evans’ character and practices, Lilly nonetheless established that he was skilled in astrology and magic, and had accomplished noteworthy feats.

Several other magical practitioners were discussed at length in Lilly’s *Life*. As discussed above, Lilly traced one of his earliest brushes with magic to finding the gold sigils prepared for his mistress by Simon Forman (1552-1611). He followed his mention of Forman with a digression to give an account of his life, and some stories told to him by “his widow, whom I well knew”.¹⁰⁵ He also noted that Forman had been the teacher of “Dr. Napper”, i.e. Richard Napier (1559–1634), another famous astrological physician.¹⁰⁶ Napier also warranted a brief digression in Lilly’s *Life*, covering a few stories demonstrating his skill, but Lilly also noted that he had met him “upon occasion” in the early 1630s and visited his well-furnished library.¹⁰⁷ As with Forman’s widow, Lilly seemingly wished to point out he had second- if not first-hand knowledge of the most notable astrologers of the previous generation. Most of the connections Lilly drew between himself and earlier figures in his *Life* were of this kind. He wrote that his sister at one time lived in the Minories, “in that very house where formerly had lived

¹⁰² Lilly, *Christian Astrology*, B-C.

¹⁰³ Lilly, *Life and Times*, 54-58.

¹⁰⁴ Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*.

¹⁰⁵ Lilly, *Life and Times*, 33-44.

¹⁰⁶ Jonathan Andrews, “Napier, Richard (1559–1634), astrological physician and Church of England clergyman,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 21 May, 2009, accessed Jan 28, 2025.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/19763>

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 44, 122-125.

one Evans, not my tutor, but another far exceeding him in astrology, and all other occult learning, questioned for his life about 1612” – possibly the “Matthias Evans of the Minorities” who reported John Lambe to the College of Physicians in 1619, and was questioned at the Middlesex Sessions for invoking spirits in 1618.¹⁰⁸ In the course of renovating the house, Lilly’s sister found “Evans’s secret manuscripts”, which he bought from her. Lilly did not make much reference to such figures in his published works – though lineage appears to have been a significant component of his self-image at the time of writing his *Life*, in his career as a writer of almanacs and other astrological works he more often presented himself as singular, standing apart from practitioners of the previous generation, more likely to be a teacher than a student.

The Restoration of Astrology

This positioning of Lilly as not so much inheriting from the previous generation as superseding it may be a result of his conception of the condition of astrology and his role as its ‘restorer’. He acknowledged that astrology as practiced in England in his lifetime did not always live up to the lofty expectations he set for it of accurate predictions and trustworthy moral conduct. Like many others (in astrology and other fields) he was keen to distinguish respectable practitioners like himself from cheats and rogues that brought the discipline into ill repute. Lilly’s autobiography, written around 1668 but not published until after his death, demonstrated retrospectively his dim view of London astrology before his own arrival on the scene. He wrote that upon becoming interested in the subject in the early 1630s, he found astrology to be “very rare in London”.¹⁰⁹ Besides his teacher, Evans, Lilly reported on the other practitioners he then knew of. These included among others Alexander Hart who was “but a Cheat”; Captain Bubb, who was “withal covetous, and of no Honesty”; and William Poole who was “good company for drolling” but more noteworthy for his scatological sense of humour than his astrological skill.¹¹⁰ A few astrologers then active received more approving treatment in the autobiography: Nicholas Fiske was described as “a Person very studious, laborious, of good Apprehension, and... singular Judgment” and John Booker, an astrologer with whom Lilly was often aligned and friendly, despite occasional frictions, was written of approvingly as “an excellent Proficient in Astrology” and “a very honest Man [who] abhorred any Deceit in the Art he studied...”¹¹¹ These fortunate few aside, Lilly’s portrayal of London’s astrologers at this time had less in common with his ideal astrologer than

¹⁰⁸ *Archives of the Royal College of Physicians, 1518-1988: Typescript Translation of the Early Latin Annals 1518-1915*. Marlborough: Adam Matthews, (tr. J. Emberry, C. Heathcote and M. Hellings), 7 May 1619, 125.; William le Hardy (ed.) *Middlesex Sessions Records: Calendar to the Sessions Records New Series, vol 4. 1616-1618* (London: County of Middlesex, 1941), 309.

¹⁰⁹ Lilly, *Life and Times*, 61.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 61-67.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 69-74.

with the “figure-caster” of John Melton’s *Astrologaster*, who was said to “cousen the poore blinded people... by defrauding them of their Money”.¹¹² Far from being the virtuous, honest, godly men he wished astrologers to be (and be seen as), astrologers like Evans, Hart, and Bubb were presented as cheats and rogues, who lied to their clients to separate them from their wealth.

Lilly’s assessment of his fellow astrologers and of the state of the discipline in their hands is suggestive of the extent to which he considered individual reputations to be critical for astrology as a whole. He introduced Hart, Bubb, and the others as “a short digression of such persons as then professed astrology, that posterity may understand in what condition I found it, and in whose hands that little that remained was lodged.”¹¹³ For Lilly, the condition of astrology rested in the qualities of the people who professed to practise it and the reputations they held; when London’s astrologers were primarily unskilled, untrustworthy, or simply unserious, the discipline of astrology was in a poor state. Lilly found “that little that remained” in the hands of a few astrologers, many of whom were objectionable, some of whom had “a smattering of astrology” only, and just one or two of whom were to be admired. Astrologers like his ally Booker were not only proficient and skilful, but well-known and well-regarded, with “much Reputation all over England”. Not only was he honest and capable, but he was, Lilly claimed, known to be so, famous in the way that Lilly himself wished to be.

Lilly’s damning judgement particularly of his own first teacher highlights his self-representation as the reformer of astrology; while Evans’ false judgements embodied the iniquity of London astrologers as Lilly found them in 1632, he presented his younger self as choosing a better path by parting with such a teacher. In contrast to Evans, the bad astrologer, Lilly presented himself as the *good* astrologer, who worked to improve and elevate astrology. Lilly frequently referred to this theme of restoration in his writing, with *Christian Astrology* in particular presenting itself as the vehicle of this process. He dedicated the work to Sir Bulstrode Whitelocke without whose patronage “my carkasse and Conceptions had been buried in eternall silence; so that Students in this Art must acknowledge the Restauration of *Astrologie* unto [Whitelocke’s] goodness”.¹¹⁴ He worked to portray *Christian Astrology* as a high-minded, even self-sacrificial work, writing that:

Had I respected my owne private lucre, I need not have wrote at all; who could have compelled me? my owne fortune is competent: but this thing we call the publick good, was ever, and shall be my maxime to guide me in such like actions.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Melton, *Astrologaster*, 17.

¹¹³ Lilly, *Life*, 61.

¹¹⁴ Lilly, *Christian Astrology*, N.P. “Epistle Dedicatory”; N.P. “To the Reader”

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

According to Lilly, he wrote not only without avarice, but without respect for his wealth at all, desiring only to elevate astrology for the common good.

Part of the blame for astrology's 'decayed' state he laid on bad practitioners who failed to live up to his standards, but he also attributed it to the malice and stupidity of those who opposed astrology on intellectual grounds. In *Christian Astrology* he also wrote that he wished to "undeceive those, who misled by some Pedling Divines, have upon no better credit than their bare words, conceived Astrology to consist upon Diabolical Principles: a most scandalous untruth".¹¹⁶ He implicitly invited the reader to weigh the "bare words" of astrology's detractors against the trust- and credit-worthy contents of *Christian Astrology*. As Geneva has argued, the greatest obstacle to astrology's respectability in the seventeenth century was theological – the "Pedling Divines" of whom Lilly spoke argued that the belief in astrology undermined free will by suggesting that humans were driven to act by astral influences, and that placing faith in astrological predictions detracted from proper faith in divine providence.¹¹⁷ Lilly and other astrologers were frequently obligated to dispute this point and demonstrate that their discipline was Christian, but Lilly's framing of the issue as a deliberate lie put about to stifle astrology (in fact, he claimed that the divines wished to "reserve it intyre unto their own selves") speaks to his sense of the narrative. He represented astrology as a noble and beneficial discipline maliciously under attack by liars who wished to destroy it, and claimed for himself the mission of restoring it to a fit state by setting an example for practitioners and educating his readers to "undeceive" them. His 1645 publication *Anglicus, peace or no peace*, in which Lilly weighed in on the "present differences betwixt His Majestie and the Parliament", opened with perhaps the clearest statement of Lilly's perceived mission.¹¹⁸ He addressed the preface "To all of the English Nation, that are Lovers of Astrologie, His Majestie, the Privileges of Parliament, just Liberties of the City of *London*, and Commonalty of *England*", aiming to establish his commitment to England and to astrology, and he issued a challenge to his critics and critics of astrology as a discipline. He claimed to be motivated by the "*native affection I bear to my King and Countrey*", and lamented that "*Astrologie, for many yeeres, what with the prevaricate opinion of some scrupulous Clergie-men, and the impostures of some other pretended Astrologers, was cast into that obloquie, few would believe any such thing was in rerum natura*". He explained that as the "*small conceit and opprobrious judgement the English Nation have of Astrologie*" was in his view a result of "*want of Books fitted for the capacities our English*" rather than wilful ignorance, he had set out to "*make this Art hereafter perceptible to the meanest, and useful for every vulgar capacity, I hope to the content of the whole Kingdom*". In this brief passage, he concisely set

¹¹⁶ Lilly, *Christian Astrology*, N.P. "Epistle Dedicatory"

¹¹⁷ Geneva, *Astrology and the seventeenth century mind*, 9.

¹¹⁸ Lilly, *Anglicus, Peace or No Peace*.

out his view that astrology had been given a bad name by bad practitioners and “prevaricate” clergymen, that the state of astrology in England concerned England as a country and commonwealth, and that by his writing he could remedy the situation, restoring astrology to a respectable position. This moralistic, patriotic, religious conception of the ‘problem’ of astrology fit readily alongside Lilly’s claims to accurate predictions and technical precision, as well as moral and truthful conduct.

Lilly’s self-proclaimed programme of restoring astrology also did not go unremarked upon in the letters he received. Many of the strangers, associates, and would-be students who wrote to Lilly expressed their approval of or excitement for Lilly’s restoration of astrology. The astronomer Jeremiah Shakerley frequently fell back on praise and well wishes for Lilly’s “restoration”, and in 1651 the librarian Abraham Wheelocke wrote that “all parts of the world... should w[i]th much expression of thankfulness acknowledge you, who have made the advent to the superior world more facile then all that have gone before you.”¹¹⁹ Among the letters is a collection of poems sent to Lilly by admirers, many of which echo the theme of restoration. Nicholas Murford wrote that Lilly “Hath made, once heathen, Christian Astrology,/He’s vindicated that celestial Study”, while John Lane’s acrostic proclaimed astrology’s “resurrection” in Lilly, and complained of the “whining priests” who wished him ill-will.¹²⁰ The restoration of astrology – the correction and democratisation of astrological practice and its reestablishment as a respectable and divine art – was a constant theme in Lilly’s work and a key concern for astrologers in a period where the discipline was increasingly seen as disreputable. Lilly’s correspondence suggests that this theme of restoration was to some degree persuasive; those who wrote to Lilly were (or felt) invested in the good name of astrology as a discipline, and agreed with Lilly and others that this proposed ‘restoration’ was to the good of the commonwealth. Several correspondents explicitly referenced the divinity of astrology and represented Lilly’s ‘restoring’ mission in religious terms. Abraham Wheelocke wrote (from Cambridge, dated 4th April 1651) he would “endeavour... to keep pace with [Lilly’s students] in lovinge and honouringe of you whom god hath raised up, to be soe happie a raiser & promoter of these admired studies”, and a physician, Gilbert Schill, wrote (from Honiton, 1st February 1650) that “it is a divine Art” that “doth make a man... admire the wonderfull workes of our blessed god, to make his will knowen to us”.¹²¹ This is consonant with the religious justifications typically given by proponents of astrology, not least the annual sermons given at the feasts of the Society of Astrologers studied by Michelle Pfeffer.¹²² Lilly’s *Christian Astrology* emphasised this divine calling of astrology. In his *Epistle to the Student in ASTROLOGIE* he wrote “thou talkest with Angels, yea with God himself; thou hast all Creatures within thy dominion, and keepest

¹¹⁹ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423 f.170.

¹²⁰ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423 f.141.; f.145.

¹²¹ Bodleian, MS Ash 423 f.176.

¹²² Pfeffer, “The Society of Astrologers”, 135.

the *Devils* in subjection: Doe not then for shame deface thy Nature, or make thyself unworthy of such gifts..." characterising the practice of astrology as a conversation with God to uncover his will, very much in line with Schill's description of the "divine Art".¹²³

Lilly's Self-Representation

A picture then emerges of Lilly's ideal astrologer, a figure he identified closely with himself. This ideal astrologer was a skilled and competent practitioner, able to erect a figure and give sound and accurate judgements upon it, and thereby make accurate predictions for the future. While Lilly was less explicit about the ideal astrologer's other skills, it seems he admired other, more magical forms of learning, especially the ceremonial magic of spirits. Beyond these technical competencies, Lilly's ideal astrologer had also to be a person of good credit and conversation; godly, honest, humble, and discrete. The astrologer, Lilly argued, should be a person worthy of trust. Lilly connected himself to a lineage of admirable practitioners, but to a lesser degree than some; instead, he emphasised his own prime position within the discipline of astrology. He presented himself as the restorer of a divine and admirable but regrettably decayed discipline, an image with which his admirers were able to identify, and which attached a sense of historic prestige to Lilly's name.

III. Lilly's Brand

Lilly's self-representation then comprised a complex and fairly consistent set of characteristics with which he hoped the readers of his printed works would identify him and associate the discipline of astrology. The means by which Lilly communicated this ideal astrologer figure – the morally upright and trustworthy 'restorer' of the discipline – were also complex and consistent. In the ways that Lilly used his name and face we begin to see the emergence of a coherent astrological 'brand', contributing to Lilly's celebrity-like status and to the ways in which others could access and co-opt elements of his reputation.

Name

Lilly was keenly aware of the importance of controlling the communication of his work and image from the beginning of his career in print. The opening to his first printed almanac, *Merlinus Anglicus Junior* (1644) is suggestive of this, explaining that "divers Coppies [of his manuscript astrological judgments for the year] have been obtained from me; insomuch, that fearing some Copy might surreptitiously be printed: I have given leave to a Friend for this Impression."¹²⁴ According to Lilly, one of his main

¹²³ William Lilly. *Christian Astrology Modestly Treated of in three Books* (London, 1647).

¹²⁴ Lilly, *Merlinus Anglicus Junior* 1644.

concerns in printing his work was to ensure that no one else would do so without his knowledge. He also, like many other astrologers, resented alterations to his work, complaining when this first almanac went to print of the many “impertinent obliterations” and objections of John Booker who was then the licenser for all mathematical books.¹²⁵ Beyond this, piracy was a real issue for almanac-makers as for other writers in the period, and Lilly was no exception. On the inside cover of his *Anglicus* for 1650 he declared:

A Counterfeit *Anglicus* is already come forth in Print, under the name of *A. Lelee*, and in his second Epistle he subscribes *Anglicus*. Had the Boy-Printer, *J.R.* subscribed his own name, the *Commonwealth* had not been cheated. I disavow that Bastard brat, and hereof give the World notice, That This, and none other, is owned by

*William Lilly.*¹²⁶

Like other individuals seeking to keep control of their reputation under the threat of counterfeits, Lilly gave a warning of how to know the counterfeit from the true *Anglicus*, and avoid being “cheated” by the piracy, pointing to the name used and ‘disavowing’ all copies beside those in which the notice appeared. Unlike some other writers, however, he does not appear to have employed such anti-piracy declarations with any regularity, suggesting perhaps that counterfeits of this kind were rare for Lilly’s work or that this instance concerned him more than any others. This kind of concern was not, of course, unique to astrology or astrologers. Jeffrey Wigelsworth’s work on early eighteenth century scientific literature illustrates the importance for authors of certain kinds of texts of keeping a tight grip on what was published in their name.¹²⁷ Taking as a case study a dispute between the Royal Society’s curator of experiments John Theophilus Desaguliers and two booksellers, Wigelsworth argues that Desaguliers dismay at the misuse of his name and the existence of a competing edition of his book (a translation of a Dutch text of Newton’s *Principia*) went beyond the loss of the (relatively insignificant) revenue from sales of his book. Desaguliers was concerned, Wigelsworth argues, with the damage a less accurate and less well edited book would do to his reputation if it came to be associated with him. Considering not only his printed works but his career as a public lecturer and his position as curator of experiments, it was of paramount importance that Desaguliers be known to be trustworthy and reliable as a natural philosopher.¹²⁸ As an astrologer Lilly was not subject to all of the same pressures as Desaguliers (he did not, for instance, have to manage his reputation before a body

¹²⁵ Lilly, *Life and Times*, 103-104.

¹²⁶ William Lilly, *Merlini Anglici ephemeris or, general and monethly predictions upon several eminent conjunctions of the planets, for the year 1650. By William Lilly, student in astrology.* (London, 1650).

¹²⁷ Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth, *Selling Science in the Age of Newton: Advertising and the Commoditization of Knowledge* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 147-148.

like the Royal Society), but he had similar cause to preserve trust in his name. The marketplace for almanacs and astrological consultation (and instruction) was highly competitive, and association with works that were less accurate, less in line with Lilly's own beliefs, or otherwise 'inferior' risked diluting the association Lilly hoped to establish between his name and accuracy, morality, and astrology restored. If this set of associations was undermined, Lilly's self-constructed reputation and the career he built on it would be in jeopardy.

Lilly's control over what carried his name could also be flexible and strategic. In 1653 he was arraigned before a committee in parliament for writing "that the Parliament stood upon a tottering Foundation, and that the Commonalty and Soldiery would join against them".¹²⁹ To avoid further trouble, he had a printer make six copies of the almanac which excluded the objectionable paragraphs, and said of the true text: "[t]his is none of my book, some malicious Presbyterian hath wrote it, who are my mortal enemies; I disown it."¹³⁰ In this remarkable story Lilly committed an act almost of self-piracy, printing a counterfeit copy of his own work and labelling the original a malicious fraud, disowning his own work when owning it posed a material risk. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, there was nothing unusual about astrologers or magical practitioners flatly denying having made any claims about their practices or capabilities when to stand by them posed risks, but with the hard evidence of Lilly's printed predictions, this strategy of pleading ignorance required a much more complicated manoeuvre. Here again his concern was to control what qualities and values were associated with his name, but in this case the matter had become one of culpability, and he sought to disassociate himself from positions he otherwise would have supported because to be provably associated with them was to risk legal repercussions.

Almanacs were typically (though not always) identified by the name of the supposed compiler (not only genuine living writers like Lilly, but fictional and dead ones too), suggesting that this was the primary distinguishing feature between them.¹³¹ While surviving collections indicate that readers tended to purchase almanacs by multiple compilers, readers also sought and requested particular works.¹³² The compiler's name was clearly important; with relatively few exceptions it appeared prominently on the title page, and when people referred to an almanac they typically referred to the compiler, contributing to what Adam Smyth called a "slippage between text and compiler"; one could read "Wharton" or "Gadbury", for instance.¹³³ Lilly referred to his own almanac as *Anglicus*, shortening

¹²⁹ Lilly, *Life and Times*, 158.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 160.

¹³¹ Adam Smyth, "Almanacs, Annotators, and Life-Writing in Early Modern England", *English Literary Renaissance* 38, no. 2 (2008): 202.

¹³² Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press*, 65-66.

¹³³ Smyth, "Almanacs, Annotators, and Life-Writing in Early Modern England", 203.

the title, though he also adopted Anglicus as a form of pen name, subscribing it to his prefatory epistles and referring to himself by it in personal correspondence.¹³⁴ The value of certain names (or perhaps the continuity they promised) is evinced by the fact that many almanacs were published under the same name years after the original compiler's death, as for instance Edward Pond, who died in 1629 and yet continued to be credited with writing almanacs until the eighteenth century, so profitable was his almanac to the Stationers' Company.¹³⁵ The names could also be specifically styled; *Merlinus Anglicus Junior*, Lilly's first almanac, identified him only as "W.L.", but following this the vast majority of Lilly's publications styled him "William Lilly, student in astrologie". Many almanac-writers, as well as authors of other 'popular' texts such as vernacular medical books, adopted similar personalised characterisations and used them consistently across their careers.¹³⁶

Almanacs then exemplify the questions of trust in print raised by Steven Shapin and Adrian Johns – perhaps even more than other printed texts, the credit of an almanac relied on readers' perceptions of the credit and testimony of the stated author.¹³⁷ Almanacs were texts about the future; the reader would eventually know if a prediction was unreliable (Smyth notes instances of almanacs annotated to mark such disappointments), but to take advantage of the almanac's advice they were forced to make their judgements before (perhaps long before) this happened.¹³⁸ It would then not be until it came time to purchase the next year's almanac that the reader could make a decision about whether to repeat the purchase. There are parallels to be drawn with books on credit and interest; like the 'ready reckoners' studied by Natasha Glaisyer, almanacs offered information useful in daily life, and relied on accurate arithmetic to do so.¹³⁹ The texts offered information (otherwise unavailable to most readers) to resolve uncertainty, and relied on the expertise of individuals who dealt in trust and belief, but could not always themselves be trusted.¹⁴⁰ The credibility of the almanac was then closely tied to the reputation of the astrologer whose name was on the cover. Readers were obliged to trust in the almanac-compilers' technical expertise, astrological judgement, and truthfulness, if they were to benefit from knowledge of the future. This trust would doubtless have been easier for many when an astrologer like Lilly took such pains to represent himself as both skilled and principled – not only a

¹³⁴ For example: Josten (ed.) *Elias Ashmole: His Autobiographical and Historical Notes, Vol. 3*, 1078. Lilly signs a note to Ashmole "Anglicus—or—William Lilly".

¹³⁵ Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press*, 43.

¹³⁶ Mary E. Fissel, "The Marketplace of Print" in *Medicine and the Market in England and Its Colonies, C. 1450-C. 1850*, ed. Mark Jenner and Patrick Wallis (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2007), 118.

¹³⁷ Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, p.xxv; Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 31-32.

¹³⁸ Smyth, "Almanacs, Annotators, and Life-Writing in Early Modern England", 232.

¹³⁹ Natasha Glaisyer, "Calculating Credibility: Print Culture, Trust and Economic Figures in Early Eighteenth-century England", *The Economic History Review* 60, no. 4 (2007): 685-711.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 697.

competent astrologer but a (perhaps *the*) leading astrologer, the reformer of the field to whom his fellows deferred.

Face

Alongside his name, Lilly used his face as part of his print-based reputation-building. Portraits of the author were less common in almanacs than prominent displays of the author's name, but far from unheard of, and Lilly's were among those that prominently displayed a portrait alongside the title. Lilly began using his portrait with the publication of *Christian Astrology* (1647), which featured an elaborate frontispiece image engraved by William Marshall, showing Lilly draped in a cloak, seated at a table.¹⁴¹ One hand rests on a large astrolabe, while the other rests beside an astrological figure upon which is written Lilly's motto "*Non Cogunt*". Beside this is a book, open to reveal a table of astrological symbols. In the background is a rural scene with a distant church, and a representation of the zodiac in the sky above. Lilly was depicted as a learned astrologer according to an established tradition.¹⁴² Lilly, seemingly, was happy with this image, as a simplified version (minus the elaborate background) signed "WM" for William Marshall appeared on the cover of *Merlini Anglici Ephemeris* for 1649.¹⁴³ From then, a portrait of Lilly appeared on the cover of *Merlini Anglici Ephemeris* each year. The Marshall image was reused several times, sometimes with alterations, but several artists seem to have been employed to provide frontispieces. Many, but certainly not all, mimicked to some degree the composition of Marshall's image – Lilly seated at a table with his book, horoscope, and writing implements, with or without a background. While some featured more complex elements, for instance the edition for 1651 which depicted Lilly under the zodiac in the sky, most were relatively simple, showing Lilly in a bust or half-length portrait, and while the difference of artists led to some significantly different images, Lilly's features were generally recognisable throughout the print run of *Anglicus*.¹⁴⁴ While in a longer, more learned (and more expensive) text like *Christian Astrology*, a finely detailed engraving could deploy richer symbolism, for his almanacs Lilly appeared to rely primarily on the recognition of his face, but still the continuity and recognisability of his portrait connected his almanacs with *Christian Astrology* and several of his other works.

By including an image of his face in *Christian Astrology* and his almanacs, Lilly deployed another means of being known. Readers could know his face, like Robert Sterrell who wrote to him in 1649 to ask

¹⁴¹ Lilly, *Christian Astrology*.

¹⁴² Richard Dunn, "Instruments and the Astrologer's Image" in *Heaven and Earth United: Instruments in Astrological Contexts*, ed. Richard Dunn, Silke Ackermann, and Giorgio Strano (Boston: Brill, 2018), 232.

¹⁴³ William Lilly, *Merlini Anglici ephemeris. Or Generall and monthly predictions upon severall eclipses and celestiall configurations for the yeare 1649* (London, 1648).

¹⁴⁴ William Lilly, *Merlini Anglici ephemeris or, Astrological predictions for the year, 1651* (London, 1650).

“whether I shall attaine unto any Competent skill in Astrologie” and compared his own appearance to Lilly’s, noting “markes of my body I conceive neere like your owne” in particular a “Red, little, wart on the left side of my nose”.¹⁴⁵ Bodily and facial characteristics and marks like warts held astrological significance, and could be used as a guide to the individual’s traits as well as the kind of details often given in response to horary questions (for instance, the astrologer might judge that stolen goods were taken by someone who was short, dark-haired, or of a sanguine complexion). But in addition to this, portraits like Lilly’s had an identity-constructing function, as established by Ludmilla Jordanova.¹⁴⁶ Lilly’s portrayal in these frontispiece images evoked conventional depictions of learning, with books and scholarly dress, and specifically called out astrology with astrological instruments, the horoscope, and astrological books.¹⁴⁷ He is, in Marshall’s engraving for *Christian Astrology* at least, a writer, with ink and pen on his table. While Lilly’s books, clothing, and pose were very conventional, a more unusual aspect of his portraits was the horoscope displaying his motto, *Non Cogunt*. This could be said to serve multiple purposes – as an instantly recognisable (to anyone familiar with astrology in the seventeenth century) fundamental feature of the astrologer’s work, it signalled Lilly’s identity as an astrologer. Its label, *Non Cogunt*, firmly connected the image to the text, establishing Lilly’s constant argument that free will represented a limit on the power of the stars, and an explanation for the fallibility of astrologers.¹⁴⁸ Lilly made this claim in his writings, and here it was displayed in his portraits – the unity of the text and image were reinforced, and the astrology invoked by the picture became specifically the astrology practised by Lilly in his printed works.

Images of famous people could also be identity-forming for the viewer. Laura Engel argues that looking at magazine miniatures of actresses and royal women could serve as a kind of self-fashioning that did not require putting oneself on display – readers could imagine themselves in connection with the images they perused, connecting with the style and presence of the woman on the page.¹⁴⁹ Lilly’s fame must have operated somewhat differently from that of an eighteenth century actress or princess – highly visual qualities like fashion and beauty were not major components of his reputation – but images of a well-known astrologer could still serve this purpose, or one like it. Robert Sterrell at least certainly appears to have identified himself with the Lilly he saw on the page. He highlighted the similarities of their physical marks in a letter which begged Lilly’s friendship and queried “whether I

¹⁴⁵ MS. Ash. 423. f.147.

¹⁴⁶ Ludmilla J. Jordanova, *Defining Features: Scientific and Medical Portraits, 1660-2000* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 18.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

¹⁴⁸ Geneva, *Astrology and the Seventeenth Century Mind*, 10.

¹⁴⁹ Laura Engel, “Magazine Miniatures: Portraits of Actresses, Princesses, and Queens in Late Eighteenth-Century Periodicals”, in *Women’s Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690-1820s: the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Jennie Batchelor and Manushag N. Powell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

shall attaine unto any Competent skill in Astrologie, w[hi]ch I have ever loved, and honoured, in despite of malitious Ignorance”.¹⁵⁰ As he identified himself with Lilly on a physical level, he also sought to identify himself with Lilly on other levels – he wished to be an astrologer like Lilly and, like Lilly, he defended his beloved astrology from the “malitious Ignorance” of its detractors. While Lilly’s portraits presumably would not have encouraged “fashionable consumption” of the same type as Engels’ magazine miniatures, people who read Lilly’s work, especially *Christian Astrology* which promised to confer the skills of the astrologer upon the dedicated reader, could identify themselves with the man depicted on the frontispiece or feel that to some extent they ‘knew’ him better than they otherwise might, in an astrological reputation-forming mechanism so far understudied by historians. Sterrell’s identification of his features as “neere like” Lilly’s would seem to suggest as much.

Lilly as a Celebrity

Lilly’s self-representation as a skilled, moral, trustworthy astrologer, and the agent of the discipline’s restoration, contextualised by his story of his early engagement with astrology and break with Evans, might characterise Lilly to some extent as a ‘celebrity’. Historians have made casual use of the term to describe well-known individuals like Lilly – Bernard Capp, for instance, writes that Lilly achieved “instant celebrity as the leading political astrologer” in the 1640s.¹⁵¹ But ‘celebrity’, understood more precisely, denotes a particular kind of fame and status. While modern historians and social scientists have tended to characterise this status as a more recent phenomenon inherently rooted in the rise of modern capitalism, historians have identified forms of celebrity in the seventeenth century and earlier, and Lilly’s fame certainly shows some of the hallmarks of celebrity emphasised by Kurzman *et al.*¹⁵² Lilly’s account of his own life, for instance, largely complies with the established narrative arc of the celebrity’s life – the development of extraordinary characteristics (Lilly’s excellence in school, and the medical care he gave to his master’s wife), the celebrity’s “discovery” (Lilly’s introduction to Evans and his beginning to study and practise astrology), and the ascent (Lilly’s break from Evans’ corrupt and unlearned astrology and his rise as a ‘good’ astrologer).¹⁵³ This celebrity arc might also be arranged around the Battle of Naseby, when Lilly’s prognostication was famously vindicated and his position as a parliamentary astrologer secured.¹⁵⁴ Lilly also enjoyed to a certain degree all four of the privileges Kurzman *et al.*, following Weber, attribute to status groups and which the former identify in celebrity.

¹⁵⁰ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423. f.147.

¹⁵¹ Capp, *Astrology and the popular press*, 73.

¹⁵² Charles Kurzman, Chelise Anderson, Clinton Key, Youn Ok Lee, Mairead Moloney, Alexis Silver, and Maria W Van Ryn, “Celebrity Status”, *Sociological Theory* 25, no. 4 (2007), 347.; M.G. Aune, “Thomas Coryate versus John Taylor: The Emergence of the Early Modern Celebrity”, *Cahiers élisabéthains* 101, no. 1 (2020), 85.

¹⁵³ Kurzman et al., “Celebrity Status”, 354.

¹⁵⁴ Curry, *Prophecy and Power*, 28.

The first of these is interactional privilege, how ‘normal’ people interact with status groups.¹⁵⁵ Celebrities receive attention they would not if they were ‘normal’ – we take an interest in their ordinary activities and non-famous people feel “honoured” by celebrity interactions, which reinforce the status differential. Traces of this privilege can be seen in the tone of letters to Lilly; many correspondents thank him profusely for condescending to reply, or indeed even to read and not be displeased by, their words, and a few relate or refer to in-person interactions they previously shared. But to some extent this tone was conventional in early modern letter writing.¹⁵⁶ The extent to which ‘ordinary’ people were interested in the minutiae of Lilly’s life is also much less evident, however – where Lilly is written of, people took interest in what he wrote or said, in the astrological work for which he was famous. The partial exception is interest in Lilly’s biography – he relates in *Christian Astrology* that having been “*traduced by some halfe-witted fooles*”, he must “*deliver my selfe to Posterity who I am, and of what profession*” and thus gives a brief account of his upbringing, religion, and politics.¹⁵⁷

Second is normative privilege, whereby celebrities are emulated or mimicked, and attributed an authoritative voice.¹⁵⁸ As Robert Sterrell and other aspiring “scholars” of Lilly demonstrated, he was certainly seen by some to be imitable and worthy of imitation. Also certainly, through his published works he assumed a voice of authority to speak, with reference to astrology, on a range of important issues – in his almanacs he discussed the major issues of the day in war, politics, and religion. This privilege is perhaps an imperfect fit, however, as Lilly was, after all, famous for astrology, which inherently (by its own logic at least) conferred authority to speak on a range of subjects. For M.G. Aune, an early modern celebrity was “famous for being famous”, which Lilly certainly was not – while his name carried broad currency, it was never entirely detached from astrology and prognostication.¹⁵⁹ Celebrity cannot, however, consist entirely of fame for its own sake; musicians, actors, athletes, and the like – perhaps the most iconic ‘celebrities’ of the twenty-first century – are famous not only for being famous, but for their mastery (real or perceived) of their metiers. Celebrity may be, to use Kurzman’s phrase, “status on speed” but it frequently references or depends upon the perception of more conventional kinds of status.¹⁶⁰

The third privilege is economic privilege.¹⁶¹ While arguably the economic gains Lilly made from his publications and consulting were simply the product of his astrology as an economic activity, I would

¹⁵⁵ Kurzman et al., “Celebrity Status”, 356.

¹⁵⁶ Susan Fitzmaurice, *The Familiar Letter in Early Modern English: a Pragmatic Approach* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002), 1-6.

¹⁵⁷ Lilly, *Christian Astrology*. N.P. “To the Reader”

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 357.

¹⁵⁹ Aune, “Thomas Coryate versus John Taylor”, 86.

¹⁶⁰ Kurzman et al., “Celebrity Status”, 363.

¹⁶¹ Kurzman et al., “Celebrity Status”, 359.

suggest that Lilly's self-representation and the connection between his works and his famous name and face made his work more lucrative, just as a celebrity performer, writer, or athlete today sees economic rewards far greater than a 'normal', non-famous performer, writer, or athlete. Lilly also saw other fringe economic benefits as a result of his astrological fame – in 1648/9 he briefly received a pension from the government (likely reflecting the propaganda value of his work), and in 1659 he received a gold chain from the king of Sweden as thanks for the praise Lilly had heaped on his nativity in the preceding *Anglicus* – it is hard to imagine that the king would provide this kind of “swag” (to use Kurzman's term) to every astrologer who paid him a compliment.¹⁶²

The final privilege is legal. Kurzman et al. argue that in the twenty-first century, celebrities are just beginning to lay claim to this final marker of status through the right of publicity and ownership of their 'likeness'.¹⁶³ While Lilly's concern for the use of his name and piracy of his work suggests he would have dearly loved to have had some such legal protection, it was not available to him in the seventeenth century. He did enjoy some legal privileges owing to his status, however, or rather to the status of those he knew; in his autobiography he relates several occasions on which he escaped legal difficulties with the help of MPs or other important people whom he counted friends. He in turn sometimes had the sway to resolve legal difficulties for others – William Oughtred, as discussed above, wrote to him for his assistance with a lawsuit, and in 1649 Lilly was able to secure the release from jail of his long-time rival, George Wharton, who had been imprisoned for his royalist political predictions.¹⁶⁴ Lilly's prominence and the weight that his particular reputation carried certainly contributed to giving him access to powerful friends, but patronage and interpersonal relationships do not, of course, necessarily imply 'celebrity'.

While these privileges, outlined with modern celebrities in mind to describe a modern development, are an imprecise fit for Lilly in the seventeenth century, measuring Lilly against them does give a sense of the 'special' status he at times enjoyed. Ulinka Rublack defines 'celebrity' more broadly than do Kurzman *et al.*, defining a celebrity as “a person whose image is significantly marketed in a broad public sphere”, while Laura Engel emphasises the role of “narrative” in creating a celebrity.¹⁶⁵ Though not all of the privileges enjoyed by modern celebrities were available to Lilly, a slightly broader and more historical view positions Lilly as a strong example of a seventeenth-century celebrity. Certainly he enjoyed privileges not available to less famous people (or less famous astrologers, almanac makers, or

¹⁶² Curry, "Lilly, William"; Kurzman et al., "Celebrity Status", 359.

¹⁶³ Kurzman et al., "Celebrity Status, 361.

¹⁶⁴ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423. f.216.; Lilly, *Life and Times*, 66.

¹⁶⁵ Ulinka Rublack, "Celebrity as Concept," *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 3 (2011): 399.; Laura Engel, *Fashioning Celebrity: Eighteenth-Century British Actresses and Strategies for Image Making* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), 2.

magical practitioners), and certainly his image was marketed in the public sphere through his astrological works. Specific kinds of reputation like ‘celebrity’ have been applied only patchily to the seventeenth century and seldom if ever to magical practitioners, but as concepts they offer a more complex view of the functions of reputation before the eighteenth century.

Reputation as a Brand

Lilly appears to have had a clear idea of what qualities made a good astrologer – they should be competent in astrology (and other pursuits), should dispense accurate predictions, and should conduct themselves in a morally upstanding, godly, truthful, and discrete manner in order to be worthy of trust. These ideals figured prominently in his self-representation, as did a proclaimed sense of mission, the idea that by his skill, learning, and moral rectitude he worked to restore astrology, elevating it from a state of disrepute in England. These qualities he sought to attach to his name and face in print so that would-be readers (and, likely, querents) would find his claims to knowledge convincing, his predictions credible, and him worthy of their trust. Like John Lambe and other practitioners, Lilly’s reputation was circulated in different and interconnected media. Word of mouth was still the chief means of communication in the seventeenth century, but increasingly this was supplemented by all kinds of texts, both in manuscript and print.¹⁶⁶ Lilly’s consultations worked alongside his hand-written astrological schemes, and his printed almanacs. He even actively used the intersection these media when he prompted readers of his first printed almanac to compare it to a manuscript copy already circulated.¹⁶⁷ And of course, like Lambe, Lilly was discussed, praised, and critiqued in all manner of media, from private conversations to printed tracts. But as an astrologer with a successful almanac and other publications to his name, Lilly was far more able to influence the circulation of his reputation, especially using the medium of print – distinguished by its capacity for mass circulation from the centre – to actively publicise his self-representation. Mario Biagioli argues that Galileo’s name “functioned a bit as a ‘brand name’”, attached as it was to his several interconnected activities (making and selling instruments, giving instruction in how to use them, providing lodgings for students, etc.) to explain why in disputes over credit and piracy Galileo’s stated concern was for his honour rather than for any monetary damages.¹⁶⁸ As with Desaguliers in Wigelsworth’s example, for people who traded on their

¹⁶⁶ Adam Fox, “Rumour, News and Popular Political Opinion in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England,” *The Historical Journal* 40, no. 3 (1997): 613.

¹⁶⁷ Lilly, *Merlinus anglicus junior... 1644*.

¹⁶⁸ Mario Biagioli, *Galileo's Instruments of Credit: Telescopes, Images, Secrecy* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 8-9.

name in print and in connected activities, reputation and trust were vital because they were bound up in a 'brand' with meaning for those who knew their name and read their works.¹⁶⁹

'Brand' is a potentially fraught term with many meanings, and one which is not typically invoked with reference to the seventeenth century. It can refer to physical marks and what we would now call logos, and in this sense seventeenth astrologers did not have fully articulated brands. As has been discussed, Lilly did make fairly consistent use of his portrait, which served as a visual sign in a brand-like way. Particular details of the images may heighten this sense, such as the recurrent use of the astrological figure labelled "*Non Cogunt*" in some of Lilly's portraits, or even noticeable physical markings like the moles and warts visible in most of the portraits and referred to by Robert Sterrell's letter. But 'brand' can also be used more broadly to refer to a constructed brand identity.¹⁷⁰ Historians of science have suggested that individual identities could serve as 'brands' in the seventeenth century. Biagioli argues that Galileo's name unified his many scientific and economic activities and that his particular concern over his image was because damage to that image endangered the integrity of his wider brand.¹⁷¹ Similarly, Wigelsworth suggests that Desaguliers traded to an extent on the brand of a 'Newtonian Lecturer'.¹⁷² If Lilly consistently deployed his self-representation as an ideal astrologer and astrological reformer, and if his readers associated this representation with the printed texts they purchased and with Lilly as a figure, Lilly's constructed, self-represented reputation might loosely be considered as something approaching a brand. Lilly was active as a consulting astrologer, answering questions posed in person and by post, as well as a publisher of almanacs and other cheap astrological printed works. With *Christian Astrology*, he also aspired to a more 'learned' form of authorship. His self-representation then would have to operate across these distinct but connected areas, with his cultivated qualities of accuracy, morality, and restoration carrying consistently through his activities. Based on the consistency of his reference to these qualities it is certainly possible to conceive of the identity by which Lilly sought to be known (and thus by extension his fame) as something coherent and intentional. The question remains then as to how and whether this construction resonated with others.

Lilly's Brand

Lilly certainly showed a concern to control what was printed under his name and by whom. He also appears to have made relatively consistent use of his style as "William Lilly, Student of Astrologie" and

¹⁶⁹Wigelsworth, *Selling Science in the Age of Newton*, 147-148.

¹⁷⁰J.L. Basford "'A commodity of good names': the branding of products, c.1650-1900," (PhD thesis, University of York, 2012), 5.

¹⁷¹Biagioli, *Galileo's Instruments of Credit*, 9.

¹⁷²Wigelsworth, *Selling Science in the Age of Newton*, 147.

of recognisable images of his own face. In at least some cases, other individuals hoped to make use of this recognition, whether through Coley's 'inheriting' Lilly's *Anglicus* 'brand' or the "Unauthorised *Anglicus*" piracy. Lilly's name and work were also the subject of discussions and debate, as well as fodder for figures like Anne Bodenham to use as emblems or comparisons. However, the fact that Lilly's name was well-known and could be co-opted falls short of clearly demonstrating that Lilly maintained a coherent personal brand. The consistency of the imitation by Coley and "W. Lele" may suggest though that Lilly's name was more useful as part of a brand-like package of reader expectations.

The consistency of Lilly's self-representation might then loosely be considered a 'brand', and the specific way in which he was famous and the status his fame brought him might loosely be called 'celebrity'. Of course, neither of these concepts can be seen in their modern forms in the mid-to-late seventeenth century, but certain key features are evident in Lilly's reputation. The consistent 'messaging' of Lilly's self-representation, in terms of the qualities and mission to which he laid claim and the means by which he did so – particularly recognisable aspects like the title of his almanac and his identity as 'Anglicus', as well as his face and his *Non Cogunt* motto – aimed at creating a solid, somewhat crystallised reputation that could be understood and 'consumed' by admirers. The narrative aspects of Lilly's self-representation mirror narratives of celebrity, and as a prominent public figure in his field he enjoyed many of the privileges inherent in that special reputational status. These concepts from eighteenth-century history and later offer productive ways to think about some seventeenth-century reputations like Lilly's as complex and constructed, with a degree of intentionality, with clear social currency, and with some emotive and persuasive aspects.

IV. Engaging with Lilly's Reputation

The elements of Lilly's self-representation, made coherent and accessible as a pseudo 'brand', were visible to those who took an interest. In several ways, Lilly's contemporaries demonstrated their awareness and understanding of Lilly's reputation as he intended to present it, and their correspondence with Lilly as well as references to his name in other writings demonstrate some of the ways in which they engaged with or made use of that reputation.

Requests for Patronage and Favours

Lilly's fame and his self-representation as a prominent and influential figure meant that just as he himself had benefited from the assistance of important and well-connected patrons, others wrote to him seeking favours and patronage that he was in a position to grant. The longest run of correspondence in the volume is a series of letters from Jeremy or Jeremiah Shakerley, dated from January 1647/8 to March 1650. Shakerley (1626-1653?) was a Yorkshire-born astronomer who wrote

to Lilly from Lancashire.¹⁷³ His first letter in Ashmole 423 is not the first he sent as it included reference to their previous correspondence – “Many daies have now outworne themselves, & given place to their vanishing successors, since first my presumptuous Pen attempted to trouble you, with its impertinent issues” – and thanked Lilly for condescending to read and reply to his first letter, which seemingly began their acquaintance and a patronage relationship.¹⁷⁴ Shakerley thanked Lilly profusely for his willingness to “count mee among your friends” and “as the first testimonie of my obligement” sent a calculation to assist Lilly in making judgements on eclipses in his next *Anglicus*.¹⁷⁵ In the context of the Society of Astrologers (of which Shakerley appears to have been a member or associate) Pfeffer characterises this relationship as a junior member being “put to work”, and indeed Lilly made use of Shakerley’s tables and calculations.¹⁷⁶ In exchange, Shakerley received many of the boons associated with patronage. In the postscript to one letter he sought Lilly’s advice, asking him “whether to Compose an Almanack or no, will be any thing for my profit or not”, and in another asked to borrow several books referenced in Lilly’s *Christian Astrology* for “a months perusal”.¹⁷⁷ He later sent Lilly a copy of his first almanac to seek his opinions, and sent a copy of his book *The Anatomie of Urania Practica* with his wishes that Lilly facilitate “its speedy passage into the world”.¹⁷⁸ He also asked Lilly if he might convey a copy to Major General Lambert, a most prestigious parliamentary contact, to whom he had dedicated the work. He also sought assistance for his friends; he asked Lilly to read his friend John Stephenson’s new book and “to procure it the best furtherance into the world you can”, and sent him a poem by his friend Mr Nathan Pighells (on the subject of Lilly’s virtues) and asked that Lilly lend his assistance to Pighells in his relocation to London.¹⁷⁹

That Shakerley approached Lilly for this kind of assistance is testament to Lilly’s prominence and reputation. Shakerley knew Lilly as a prominent London astrologer, a man who was respected in the astrological community and who had the connections to promote his and his friends’ writings and to assist him in securing a more formal patron in Lambert. When he asked Lilly’s advice as to whether he should write an almanac, he acknowledged that Lilly was a person who *knew* almanacs, and who could tell whether or not Shakerley would benefit from such an endeavour. That he later sent Lilly a copy of his first almanac to peruse suggests Lilly replied in the affirmative, and that Shakerley still desired Lilly’s guidance on the work. His requests that Lilly arrange for a small number of copies of his book to be

¹⁷³ Frances Wilmoth, “Shakerley, Jeremy [Jeremiah] (1626–1653?), astronomer,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 Sep, 2004, accessed Nov 26, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/25197>

¹⁷⁴ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423 f.117.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Pfeffer, “The Society of Astrologers”, 141.

¹⁷⁷ Bodleian, MS Ash 423 f.122v; f.118v

¹⁷⁸ Bodleian, MS Ash 423 f.119.

¹⁷⁹ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423 f.117v; f.119.

printed and sent to him might be seen similarly – perhaps Lilly simply had connections in the print trade, but perhaps Shakerley saw Lilly’s involvement in printing as pertinent in the same way as his astrological expertise. His requests to borrow books – which he knew Lilly could lend thanks to the library catalogue included in *Christian Astrology* – also supports Feola’s argument that Lilly’s library catalogue was a vital element in his self-representation.¹⁸⁰ She argues that the catalogue, entitled “A Catalogue of most Astrological Authors now extant, where Printed, and in what yeer” and then identified as a list of Lilly’s own books, served to demonstrate the richness of his astrological library and attract provincial correspondents through lending. While Feola does not list specific examples of requests to borrow, more than any other correspondent in MS Ashmole 423, Shakerley would appear to demonstrate this function of Lilly’s catalogue.

Others wrote for favours or acts of patronage seemingly without instigating a longer-term working relationship. Vincent Wing’s letter, discussed above, quickly moved on from the concerns of his proxy client to inform Lilly “I have a little Tract of Astronomy now in the Presse”, referring to his second publication, *Harmonicon Coeleste* (1651).¹⁸¹ This tract, far more than his first published work, *Urania Practica* (1649) would prove pivotal in Wing’s career as the first major English work of Copernican astronomy, and Wing requested that Lilly provide “a line in Comendac[i]on” in his almanac for 1651.¹⁸² Wing sought to borrow a little of Lilly’s fame in print, in this case in the form of an advertisement, almost a ‘celebrity endorsement’ of his book. Evidently he was working under the (not unreasonable) assumption that Lilly’s commendation would make *Harmonicon Coeleste* more appealing to his sizeable readership of astrology enthusiasts. It bears noting also that Lilly evidently agreed to this request. *Merlini Anglici* for 1651 included a page entitled “Astrological & Magicall Books, &c. Printed this year” including, along with several others, Wing’s book, which was described as “a laborious piece, and very usefull for those who professe Astrology”.¹⁸³ Wing evidently considered Lilly’s almanac particularly valuable in this regard – though *Harmonicon* itself contained several commendations, including from the astrologer John Booker, he seemingly did not request Lilly write one of these, instead specifically requesting a commendation in *Anglicus*. Lilly gave endorsements of this kind to other authors too, for instance his protégé and later amanuensis Henry Coley. The 1676 revised edition of his astrological textbook *Clavis astrologiae, or, A Key to the Whole Art of Astrology*, first published in 1669, carried a letter to the reader from Lilly “Upon my Respected Friend Mr. Henry Coley” which

¹⁸⁰ Feola, “Antiquarianism, Astrology, and the Press in William Lilly’s Network (?)”, 199.

¹⁸¹ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423 f.174.; Capp, “Wing, Vincent”

¹⁸² Bodleian, MS Ash. 423 f.174.

¹⁸³ Lilly, *Merlini Anglici, 1651*. (London, 1650).

did not appear in the first edition.¹⁸⁴ In it, Lilly writes that he had intended, had it not been for a period of sickness, to publish a more complete guide to astrology himself, to follow *Christian Astrology*, but that Coley, “the only Publick Person that I have hopes of”, had saved him the labour by creating “this most compleat piece of *Astrology*”. Lilly’s glowing recommendation assured readers that Coley’s work was methodologically sound, mathematically accurate, well written, and without “vain affected Expressions”, comprehensively assuring any reader positively predisposed towards Lilly and his work that Coley’s was of the same kind.¹⁸⁵

While Coley worked closely with Lilly towards the end of the latter’s life and appears to have benefited significantly from his patronage in that time, Wing’s case is particularly interesting as he and Shakerley were, in their own words ‘antagonists’. Shakerley wrote to Lilly in 1649 to inform him of his intention to “perform something against Wing”, referring to the work which would be published as *The Anatomie of Urania Practica* (1649), a refutation of Wing’s first publication, *Urania Practica* (1649).¹⁸⁶ Wing was well aware of Lilly’s relationship with Shakerley, writing of *Harmonicon Coeleste* that “I hope my Antagonist (your freind Mr Shakerley) will give a better Character of it, then hee did of U.P.”¹⁸⁷ He appears to walk a fine line on the subject of Shakerley, explaining that “The man I verilie thinke is well grounded in the fundamentalls of Astronomy, but for his Anatomy of U.P. there is in it more malice then matter, and nothing but what I well knew before Mr Shakerley”.¹⁸⁸ It is possible he need not have taken such care to appear fair in his criticisms of Lilly’s “freind”; in March 1650 (four months prior to Wing’s letter), Shakerley wrote to Lilly (for the last time in this set of letters) responding to Lilly’s last letter in which he found “what I neither expected, nor can imagine myself to deserve”.¹⁸⁹ According to Shakerley, Lilly had accused him of “conspiring w[i]th [Jonas] Moore against you, of giving him copies of yo[u]r letters, of deserving that Character some it seemes have given mee” and he writes bitterly that “Now you have rid your selfe of mee, you ~~may~~ need not long be separated from the friendship of Mr Wing & Mr Leybourne”. Lilly’s ‘friendship’ was evidently sufficiently desirable to these astronomers early in their careers that his patronage could be competitive, or that they conceived it as such.

Requests for Instruction

Lilly’s prominence as an astrologer in particular motivated many who, based on their understanding of his work and expertise, felt he was well positioned to instruct or advise them in the practice itself.

¹⁸⁴ Henry Coley, *Clavis astrologiae, or, A Key to the Whole Art of Astrology* (London, 1669); Henry Coley, *Clavis astrologiae elimata.; Key to the whole art of astrology new filed and polished* (London, 1676), A2.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* A2.

¹⁸⁶ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423 f.118.; Willmoth, “Shakerley, Jeremy [Jeremiah]”; Capp, “Wing, Vincent.”

¹⁸⁷ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423 f.174.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Bodleian, MS Ash. 423 f.128.

Requests for instruction must be separated from requests for patronage, as those who sought favours from Lilly may have asked his professional advice (as when Shakerley asked if an almanac might prove profitable) but not for technical instruction in astrology. Indeed, Shakerley and Wing were both astronomers more than astrologers. What they sought from Lilly was primarily his influence and the weight of his name for instance in advertising Wing's book. Others, however, sought his expertise as an astrologer. Edward Bishop, a physician with an interest in astrology, asked Lilly to "enlighten my understanding by a few lines of yo[ur]s" on how to set a table of houses for his latitude in order to make more accurate predictions.¹⁹⁰ Robert Billingsley introduced himself as one well-grounded in astrology but asked the advice of Lilly who had "attained to the very height of it & made [himself] as lasting as the stars", asking him how best to resolve certain questions and which authors and tables Lilly recommended.¹⁹¹ Billingsley's letter in particular highlights the connection between Lilly's reputation as the foremost of astrologers and the desires of those who wrote to him for instruction. Prospective students and astrological aspirants knew of Lilly as a master astrologer and believed that he could (and conceivably *would*) help them to follow in his footsteps. That so many of these letters make specific reference to *Christian Astrology* highlights the importance of Lilly's printed works and how these correspondents engaged with them. In *Merlini Anglici* for 1648 Lilly advertised that *Christian Astrology* would soon be published "for the encouragement of all Students" and for some, at least, it appears to have achieved its goal. From the text, these correspondents understood that Lilly was, as he claimed, a great teacher, and that he wished for them to study astrology. As discussed above with regards to images, a book like *Christian Astrology* could perhaps be self-constructing for the readers, who could identify themselves with the "student" imagined by Lilly's writing, and construct themselves as Lilly's "scholars".

Astrological Phenomena

Many of the letters in MS Ashmole 423 were from people who had witnessed phenomena in the sky – particularly comets, parhelia, and eclipses – and wished to know Lilly's astrological judgements on the event, whether by post or in his next almanac. Some of these survive in the volume as written accounts not obviously presented as letters, for example the untitled account of parhelia seen at Lymm in Cheshire (25th February 1649) and "A true relation of what has beene seene by Mary Sidway and her mayd on Wednesday the 16 of Aprill a little before the setting of the sunne 1651", and it is unclear if these were sent by post in their current format, enclosed with letters, or copied down by another hand (though they do not resemble Lilly's handwriting).¹⁹² Others are more clearly letters, for instance

¹⁹⁰ Bodleian, MS Ash 423 f.135.

¹⁹¹ Bodleian, MS Ash 423 f.152.

¹⁹² Bodleian, MS Ash. 423. f.180.

Richard Williamson's account from Sussex (30th January 1654) of a parhelion, which begins, like many of the letters, with a justification for his writing ("Although I am altogether unknowne unto you by Face and name, yet out of that honorable esteeme that I doe beare unto Astrologie and the honest and true practitioners thereof doe presume..."), and signed off politely.¹⁹³ Also typical of these letters was Williamson's expressed desire "to see yo[u]r predictions uppon it in printe". Seemingly, a key motivation for correspondents sending Lilly this kind of information was to see what he made of the phenomena, and more than that to see his thoughts on 'their' phenomena in print.

This was of particular importance to some correspondents, like Christopher Sawtell who sent word of an irregularity of the tides at Weymouth on 6th August 1666.¹⁹⁴ Sawtell wrote that he had written to Lilly on the matter on the 18th of the previous month, and that "I also wrote ye same to the Post office in London Notwithstanding which it was put into a Printed Intelligence in one manner and in ye Gazette in another manner and neyther of them aneere ye truth, and... made me to be derided here". Clearly, Sawtell's own credit (to say nothing of his pride) was tied up in his desire to report this phenomenon and have it be taken seriously – his neighbours laughed at his story in the *Gazette*, saying "if they print one that's so wonderful how may us believe ye rest &c". Not only did he desire to see his story in print, he wanted to ensure it was printed in the right way. He seemingly sought validation or vindication from Lilly, and attempted to persuade Lilly to respond. Having not received a reply to his previous letter he speculated that it might not have been received, and asked that even if Lilly "will not afford me no other account of it" that he would at least write to confirm receipt and begged Lilly's pardon if "by writing so p[re]sumptuously to you strangers to each other, I have offended you". He also noted that "I thought it worthy of publique note, to which end I sent it to London p[re]ferring you before Mr Gadbury who otherwise had had the account". This was perhaps meant to flatter Lilly – Sawtell had chosen to write to him above all other astrologers – but could perhaps have been meant to shame or threaten Lilly with the possibility that if he did not act, Sawtell's story would be passed to his rival Gadbury.

Some of these astrological informants expressed more explicitly their affinity for Lilly's 'brand', framing their reports in terms of the justification of Lilly's predictions work and the restoration of astrology. Michael Harword's letter (29th August 1648) made more specific reference than many to Lilly's predictions (and those of John Booker). In explaining why he wrote (and why he did not write sooner), Harword explained that just as Lilly had predicted "in page 656. chap. 158. of your Christian astrologie", he had experienced near fatal difficulties, and went on to relate how he had disputed with (and

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, f.200.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, f.250.

corrected) some “malignats demanding where ye peace was w[hi]ch Lilly, and booker, predicted”. He explained to them that certain astrological effects were still in motion, and pointed to the parhelia he had witnessed as evidence of “som greate accident” approaching “and so gave some of them satisfaction”. Like Williamson, Harword emphasised how his high-minded concern for the discipline of astrology had motivated his letter, requesting that “you will give your astrological judgement... and so vindecate ye arte through ye whole kingdom by adding it ye end of your next years merlini anglici”.¹⁹⁵ He also connected the story to Lilly’s own reputation, noting that his thoughts on the parhelion had satisfied some of those “malignats” that doubted Lilly’s predictions. Harword considered what he had seen to be important and persuasive, capable of shoring up Lilly and Booker’s predictions and thereby positively impact the credibility of astrology as a discipline, and felt that by communicating it to Lilly he could contribute to Lilly’s stated mission of upholding and ‘restoring’ astrology.

That these people, upon witnessing unusual phenomena, thought to send word to William Lilly (sometimes from great distances – on 29th November 1664 Richard Morris wrote to report on a comet he had observed in Barbados) speaks to Lilly’s fame.¹⁹⁶ He was known to them, and they felt that he would take an interest in what they had seen, and could do something with their information.¹⁹⁷ The common tone of mission and altruism – that these phenomena were matters of public concern, and that through Lilly’s publishing power they could benefit the discipline or the commonwealth – also suggests that their writers to some degree ‘bought into’ Lilly’s construction of the restoration of astrology. Feola suggests also that part of the reason for sending this kind of letter was for the reward of “ephemeral fame through a passing mention in Lilly’s printed works”.¹⁹⁸ This certainly appears persuasive, especially in a case like Christopher Sawtell’s, where Lilly’s engagement with his report held the promise of vindicating him in the eyes of his derisive neighbours. This type of ephemeral, borrowed fame is also interesting as it is suggestive of the particular type of fame which could be called ‘celebrity’. Chris Rojek proposes the term “celetoid” to refer to “compressed, concentrated, attributed celebrity”, distinct from celebrity in that these individuals while briefly famous do not gain any durable renown.¹⁹⁹ Lilly’s correspondents might be considered *less* than celetoids – if their information appeared in print, they might not be named or acknowledged, so while the apparitions they witnessed might briefly become known, they themselves were unlikely to do so beyond perhaps people who already knew them socially (we may safely assume, for instance, that Sawtell’s neighbours would swiftly have been made aware had his tidal observations been vindicated by Lilly). This was not always the case, however,

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, f.132.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, f.244.

¹⁹⁷ Feola, “Antiquarianism, Astrology, and the Press in William Lilly’s Network (?)”, 202.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 20.

Lilly did at times not only acknowledge his correspondents but print their letters in full, including the names or initials with which the writers signed off; for instance, in his *Merlini Anglici* for 1654, he included several letters (including some that do not survive in manuscript form) on the subject of a comet witnessed in 1652.²⁰⁰ The idea of these phenomena reporters as “celetoids” then is a potentially useful way to begin thinking about how individuals could seek to briefly borrow and share in the fame and reputation of a ‘celebrity’.

Co-Opting the Brand

One useful indicator of the weight of a reputation is how readily it could be used by others. In the world of printed almanacs and prognostications, many hoped to share in some of the success of Lilly’s own almanacs. As discussed above, popular almanacs could outlive their original compilers under the pretence that they were still living, allowing booksellers to secure a financial safe bet otherwise lost with the astrologer’s death.²⁰¹ After Lilly’s death, his protégé Henry Coley continued to produce almanacs under the *Merlini Anglici* name. The first two editions after Lilly’s death, for 1682 and 1683 bore Lilly’s face and the words “by WILLIAM LILLY, *Student in Astrology*”, though they included prefaces by Coley, and the 1682 edition explained that Lilly had died and his work would be continued.²⁰² The editions for 1684 and 1685 continued to carry Lilly’s portrait but were labelled “*according to the Method of Mr. WILLIAM LILLY, Student in Astrology*” with Coley’s name not appearing on the title page.²⁰³ From 1686, Coley’s name appeared on the title page along with Lilly’s, and the title changed from *Merlini Anglici ephemeris* to *Merlinus Anglicus junior*, but it was only in 1688 that Coley’s portrait replaced Lilly’s.²⁰⁴ No *Merlini Anglici* appeared again until 1691, when the portrait was absent entirely, possibly because this edition was printed by William Bonny (and those that followed by John Heptinstall) rather than John Macock, who had printed most of Lilly’s work and the earlier Coley almanacs.²⁰⁵ The transition from the first posthumous editions with covers indistinguishable from

²⁰⁰ William Lilly, *Merlini Anglici ephemeris astrological predictions for the year 1654, as also of the comet seen Decem. 1652* (London, 1654), N.P.

²⁰¹ Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press*, 43.

²⁰² Henry Coley, *Merlini Anglici ephemeris, or, Astrological judgments for the year 1682 by WILLIAM LILLY, Student in Astrology* (London, 1682).; Henry Coley, *Merlini Anglici ephemeris, or, Astrological judgments for the year 1683 by WILLIAM LILLY, Student in Astrology* (London, 1683).

²⁰³ Henry Coley, *Merlini Anglici ephemeris, or, Astrological judgments for the year 1684 according to the method of Mr. WILLIAM LILLY, Student in Astrology* (London, 1684).; Henry Coley, *Merlini Anglici ephemeris, or, Astrological judgments for the year 1685 according to the method of Mr. WILLIAM LILLY, Student in Astrology* (London, 1685).

²⁰⁴ Henry Coley, *Merlinus Anglicus junior: or, An ephemeris for the year 1686. With useful notes, and other furniture proper for such a work, &c. Continued by Henry Coley, student in the mathematicks and astrology* (London, 1686); Henry Coley, *Merlinus Anglicus junior, or, An ephemeris for the year 1688 according to the method of Mr. W. Lilly* (London, 1688).

²⁰⁵ Henry Coley, *Merlinus Anglicus junior, or, The starry messenger for the year of our redemption 1691... by HENRY COLEY, Student in the Mathematicks, and the Celestial Science* (London, 1691).

those printed in Lilly's lifetime to later *Merlinus Anglicus junior* editions bearing no explicit reference to Lilly at all suggests that Coley made use of the established name of the almanac and its famous compiler, as well as his recognisable portrait, to establish himself as an astrologer and almanac-maker in his own right. After several years of publishing as an obvious continuation of Lilly's work, he seemingly was willing and/or able to take full 'ownership' of *Merlinus Anglicus*. As John Macock died in 1692, it seems likely that he had ceased working when Coley brought the 1691 edition to print, and that it was because he was forced to change printers that Coley made some of the changes.²⁰⁶

Unauthorised use was also made of Lilly's name and face. In 1649 a pirate copy of Lilly's almanac was published under the name "*W. Lele Student in Astrology*", featuring what appears to be a cruder replication of the Marshal portrait which appeared on the cover of Lilly's *Anglicus* for that year.²⁰⁷ This may have been the "*Counterfeit Anglicus*" discussed above, though Lilly wrote that this had been published under the name "*A. Lelee*". The image, the title, the author's name, and the illustration all closely but not exactly imitated those of Lilly's own edition, and while the contents differ significantly the counterfeit uses turns of phrase similar to Lilly's own, for instance referring to "restoring to this age Astrology to a fit method".²⁰⁸ From this we may infer that simply to adopt the name of a well-known astrologer was not sufficient for an effective piracy, rather the individuals behind the Lele edition replicated the whole 'package' of Lilly's almanac 'brand'; the way it looked, the way it was written, the focus of the writer, and so on.

However, Lilly's name was also appropriated without the use of his face or a wider visual brand, for instance in the works published soon after his death elaborating on his past predictions.²⁰⁹ These featured his name prominently (as "that late Famous Astrologer" or "our late Famous *English* Astrologer"), but not other common identifying elements of Lilly's works, for instance his self-description as a "student in Astrologie". His name also appears to have been useful in verbal contexts. Edmund Bower wrote in 1653 that Anne Bodenham claimed to have studied magic under Dr John Lambe, and to have boasted that she "could do more than master *Lilly* or any one whatsoever"; just like the infamous Dr Lambe, the then-living and active Lilly was an emblem of magical skill for

²⁰⁶ "MACOCK, John," *British Book Trade Index*, accessed Oct 29, 2024, <http://bbti.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/details/?traderid=101457>

²⁰⁷ W. Lele (pseud), *An English Ephemeris or General and Monethly Predictions for 1650* (London, 1650); *English Short Title Catalogue*, R209010, accessed Jun 7, 2021, <http://estc.bl.uk/R209010>

²⁰⁸ Lele, *An English Ephemeris*, N.P. "To all my loving friends Students in Astrology".

²⁰⁹ Anonymous, *The great and wonderful predictions of that late famous astrologer Mr. Lilly; and Mr. Partridg and Mr. Coley, concerning this present year 1683* (London, 1683); Anonymous, *A very strange prediction of liberty of conscience, foretold (in the year 1652.) and published by our late famous English astrologer VVilliam Lilly, tho then not vulgerly understood, and was therefore the less taken notice of, tho presaging things of great weight and worth, such as the things following may be* (London, 1688).

Bodenham (or for Bower).²¹⁰ Similarly, in 1680 Anne Kingsbury, a cunning woman in Bridgwater, Somerset, claimed when questioned that she had learned to seek treasure with dowsing rods from Lilly – given that Lilly reported having used such a method in his *Life*, it seems likely Kingsbury either really had learned from him or knew that he had been associated with such practices in the past.²¹¹ While the Lele piracy imitated as closely as possible Lilly's own work, it appears his name did carry enough weight on its own that people could trade on it in print and perhaps in verbal contexts also.

Conclusions

William Lilly's work in print displays a keen concern for self-representation, managing the use of his name and face and consistently emphasising certain key elements he wished to associate therewith. He was keenly aware of the criticisms levelled at him and his discipline and presented himself as not only the opposite but the antidote to the 'bad' astrologers that figured so prominently in these attacks. He cast himself as a skilled astrologer with keen judgement and accurate predictions; as a morally upright practitioner who was pious, virtuous, honest, and thus trustworthy; and, in conversation to some degree with the astrologers and magicians who had come before him, as a man committed to the restoration of English astrology from its regrettable state of "obloquie". All of these elements taken together can be seen to form a coherent identity that operated as a kind of 'brand', uniting Lilly's name and face in print to the ideal qualities and restorative mission that he espoused in his work.

Considering this reputation as a brand, or at least as 'brand-like', opens up some useful ways of thinking about astrological and magical reputations and how they functioned. In particular, seeing Lilly's brand as a bundle of admirable (and, of course, marketable) qualities highlights the usefulness of famous names like Lilly's for other practitioners who could co-opt and appropriate them with or without the individual's knowledge or consent. While astrologers making extensive use of print to construct and circulate their reputations are the practitioners who can most readily be seen to have 'brands', as a concept this might prove useful to the study of other magical practitioners. Stories of John Lambe's immoral conduct, along with his impressive feats of magic, might contribute to a kind of brand accessible to his clients as well as to those who appropriated his name whether to make a moral example of him or, like Anne Bodenham, to lay claim to his feared but seemingly persuasive reputation. Of course, such a brand would differ significantly from Lilly's which, guided and carefully tended as it was by a prolific and politically well-connected author, sought to claim more of a high ground.

²¹⁰ Bower, *Doctor Lamb revived*, 8.

²¹¹ Davies, *Popular Magic*, 20; 75-76.

Lilly's many correspondents recognised his 'brand' and interacted with it in a number of ways, frequently engaging Lilly on his own terms by praising him for the qualities he represented himself as embodying, and positioning themselves as well-wishers to astrology or allies in Lilly's stated mission of restoration. This correspondence also engaged with Lilly's reputation in other ways; for some, this brush with 'celebrity' was to a degree self-fashioning, and they were keen to see 'their' reported phenomena join the ranks of those discussed by Lilly in print. Others sought more concrete benefits from sharing in Lilly's fame, whether astrological judgements and advice, or valuable patronage and favours that Lilly's status and connections empowered him to offer.

Conclusion

This study of cunning folk, conjurers, astrologers, and other magical practitioners has demonstrated the complexity and diversity of magical reputations in seventeenth-century English society. By combining insights drawn from a range of sources, this thesis has reconstructed some of the ways in which reputations were made and propagated, how they were challenged, and how they differed in scale. By understanding the reputations of magical practitioners, we can more easily place them in the social, cultural, and even economic context of their world.

The first half of the thesis focused on archival sources to analyse the reputations of (primarily) less famous magical practitioners as they were captured in the practitioners' interactions with institutions. In Chapter 1, records from the Somerset quarter sessions showed how magical reputations could interact with secular law in the period, as well as providing a non-London-centric perspective on the practices of cunning folk, astrologers, and others in villages and towns. These cases demonstrated the agency of both practitioners and clients in their interactions and how a local reputation or the lack of one could influence a practitioner's ways of working. Like other kinds of service, rural areas were served sometimes locally but also by town-based practitioners, and people travelled similar distances to consult magical practitioners as to consult doctors or visit markets. Chapter 2 focused on the records of the College of Physicians of London, and the magical healers who formed a part of the city's complex and diverse medical marketplace. Magical healers were shown to share much with other 'irregular' healers as well as with other magical practitioners. This body of sources also illustrated the range of relationships that formed important parts of magical practitioners' reputations. In both of these chapters, it emerged that authorities – whether secular courts of law or the College of Physicians – were not necessarily aligned with practitioners and their clients in terms of their understandings of what was credible, persuasive, licit, or acceptable when it came to magic.

The second half of the thesis used case studies of uncommonly famous magical practitioners to study their reputations in more depth, considering the qualities and significance of these 'large scale' reputations. The first of these case studies, in Chapter 3, was of John Lambe, the notorious conjurer, whose 'bad' reputation is captured primarily in hostile printed texts and, like the practitioners of the first two chapters, in the documentation of those who questioned or prosecuted him. While the symbolic uses of Lambe's reputation form an important part of the picture, studying Lambe as a magical practitioner alongside the others treated in this thesis is also productive. Lambe's association with 'strange sights' and ability to provoke wonder highlights an important aspect of magical practice and the practitioner-client relationship, while the tension between Lambe's apparent infamy and his

broad appeal highlights the complexities of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ reputations for magic. Chapter 4 turned to the reputation of William Lilly. One of the most prominent astrologers and almanac-writers of the period (if not *the* most prominent), Lilly’s capacity for self-representation was far greater than most magical practitioners, and provides some significant contrasts to Lambe’s notoriety. The extent to which his reputation was cultivated and marketed positions it as a kind of brand, and Lilly as a kind of early celebrity, inviting further discussion of the different *kinds* of fame available to magical practitioners and others. In both of these case studies, the ways in which the names of magical practitioners could be separated from the individuals themselves, serving as symbols, bywords, and reputational props, also become clear.

By applying thorough qualitative analysis to these diverse magical practitioners, the thesis has reconstructed several key elements of magical reputations. Stanmore argues that magic, as an “everyday phenomenon” must be understood as such – as a part of the societies in which it was so ubiquitous rather than as a peculiar area of concern only to itself.¹ This thesis has aimed to take up this call in a specific direction, grounding the business of magic in a society understood to revolve in large part around reputation. Historians of magic have worked around the edges of magical reputations in several ways – for instance, Davies suggests that for some cunning folk, the prestige and sense of power that magic could provide was a major draw, while for others, the “aura of power” enabled them to disregard social convention.² But considering these observations in terms of a broader study of reputation provides further context and nuance – for instance, a practitioner could be both notorious and prestigious, like John Lambe, while a carefully cultivated aura of power like John Mortemer’s could meet its limitations when it came to be perceived as dangerous or as fraudulent.

But as Ankarloo, Clark, and Monter suggest, while studying magic in early modern history helps us to understand magic, the inverse is also true; examining the reputations of magical practitioners in this way offers valuable nuance to our understanding of reputation. With so much of the scholarship on reputation and credit following Muldrew, Shepard, and others in emphasising the economic and its relationship to the social, the broader conception of reputation suggested by this magic-centric study expands on the place of reputation in seventeenth-century life.³ Thinking about the perceived qualities of magical practitioners, the ways in which their reputations were circulated or clients were drawn to them, the differences and similarities between more and less famous people engaged in similar

¹ Tabitha Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure: Service Magic in England from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 2.

² Owen Davies, *Popular Magic: Cunning-folk in English History* (London: Hambledon, 2007), 85.

³ Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).; Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2015.

activities, and different kinds of fame they might acquire all contribute to a more detailed understanding of how reputations worked in seventeenth-century England.

This concluding chapter will move on to examining some of the various threads covered by the thesis, identifying several important observations that recur across the four chapters. These interconnected observations, taken together, serve to improve our understanding of the workings and significance of magical reputations and in so doing better position magical practitioners in their proper context.

Good and Bad Reputations

The actual content of magical reputations – the qualities with which practitioners were associated, was highly diverse, but it is possible to identify what made a ‘good’ or a ‘bad’ practitioner from across this range of sources. More than any other practitioner covered by this thesis, William Lilly had the means to represent himself as a ‘good’ practitioner, fashioning an image of himself as an ideal astrologer. As established in Chapter 4, this ideal figure was honest and trustworthy, patriotic and religious, and delivered reliable judgements through accurate astrological calculations. Less publicly (in correspondence, conversations, and his autobiography that remained unfinished at the time of his death) he also boasted of his ability to bring about unusual and impressive magical results – summoning the queen of the fairies or calming angry spirits on a treasure-seeking expedition. Most of the other practitioners who appear in these sources had much less opportunity to ‘sell’ themselves as ‘good’ astrologers, but many of these characteristics can still be seen. The perceived ability to perform magical feats was, naturally, important to many practitioners – some, like John Mortemer of Somerset, boasted of their supernatural capabilities (he told Katherine Sawcer he could “make her follow hime where he listed”, for instance), and many people went to John Lambe in the hopes they would see “some strange sights from him”. What made a ‘bad’ practitioner can also be inferred – the witnesses against James Leverett represented him as avaricious, lecherous, and blasphemous, and the same traits were attached to the conjurer and ‘male witch’ John Lambe. The witnesses against John Mortemer suggested that whatever else he could do or claimed to do, he was a dangerous man who had poisoned Philippa Austin for a fee. Many of these negative traits are the same ones identified by Apps and Gow, Gaskill, and Kent as characteristic of male witches – possibly because many of the individuals used as case studies were magical practitioners before they were accused of malefic witchcraft.⁴ Cunning folk and other magical practitioners could also be dangerous to reputations; if

⁴ Lara Apps and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).; Malcolm Gaskill “Masculinity and Witchcraft in Seventeenth-Century England” in *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Alison Rowlands (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009).; Elizabeth Kent, “Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680”, *History Workshop Journal* (60) 2005, 69-92.

their judgements were deemed trustworthy by their communities, by passing judgement on matters like theft, they potentially had the power to cast suspicion on their neighbours or absolve them of it. That at least was the hope of Judith Hobbs, Susan Baker, and Joan Wight, who all turned to magical practitioners in the hopes of clearing their names, and the concern of those like John Robins who had been defamed as criminals based on the words of cunning folk.

Crucially, however, 'good' and 'bad' magical reputations were not necessarily mutually exclusive, or at least having a 'bad' reputation in some respects did not bar the holder from success as a practitioner. Mortemer made his ominous boast to Sawcer while still working as a surgeon and cunning man in the village. Lambe was tried for witchcraft and rape, as well as being seen to be more broadly strange and wicked, but nonetheless he seemingly thrived as a practitioner, charging high fees and attracting numerous clients including those of considerable status. While Lilly had a project in mind – the 'restoration' of astrology – and was working actively to present his own self-image, for many practitioners the moral high ground to which Lilly sought to lay claim was either unattainable or unnecessary. For some practitioners, infamy was not just a surmountable obstacle but a potential asset. For Lambe at least, some of the sinister aspects of his reputation may have contributed to his appeal – people wished to be entertained or awed by what he showed them, and the element of danger that came with his association with witches and devils may have added a certain excitement to this dynamic.

Perhaps the most common complaint against practitioners in these sources was failure to achieve results. Clients were, by and large, results-focused when it came to magic – they approached practitioners with a problem and sought a solution, holding expectations about what would or could be delivered. If those expectations were not met, they were displeased and, in many cases, had recourse to the quarter sessions or, in London, to the College of Physicians. Partly, this may reflect the sources used; other kinds of grievance might have been aired in different settings (for instance, much immoral conduct was the preserve of the ecclesiastical courts, with magical practitioners and their clients on the list of immoral actors asked after in many articles of ecclesiastical visitation). But it also gives an indication of the dynamic of engaging a magical practitioner. Stanmore highlights the degree to which magic was treated as 'everyday', a service and tool for which people had many uses.⁵ For many of the clients who raised grievances in these sources, commissioning service magic was like commissioning any other service – they had expectations of the practitioner and were willing to hold their work to their standards. When, for instance, Jasper Bale failed to recover his clients' lost goods (or, perhaps, to reimburse them as some other practitioners did in such cases) he breached the

⁵ Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, 10.

agreement his clients felt they had reached, and was deemed by them to be not incompetent but dishonest. In a world of reputation, the failure to deliver on what was (implicitly or explicitly) promised was a practical results-focused consideration, but not one without an attached moral judgement.

Truth and Trust

One quality that appears repeatedly in early modern assessments of reputation, not only for magic but in all areas, is that of truthfulness or honesty as a prerequisite for trust. It is perhaps understandable that one person's reputation for telling the truth would play an important role in another person's judgement as to their trustworthiness, but it is important to recognise how important claims about honesty and dishonesty were when it came to magical practitioners. Many of the clients who pursued practitioners at law or complained about them before the College of Physicians did so because they felt the practitioner in question had failed to make good on a promise. Much of Lilly's ideal astrologer figure centred on plain dealing and accurate predictions, and he reserved some of his harshest criticisms for fellow practitioners who wilfully misled their clients with false predictions. Criticisms of practitioners in general and of specific individuals like John Lambe often emphasised cozening or deception, even when it sat alongside other accusations of ignorance or diabolic witchcraft. Given Shapin's analysis of the social elements of a reputation for truthfulness, and their importance for the growing acceptance of experimental philosophy in the period, a comparison between the seventeenth-century and earlier and later periods might prove illuminating.⁶ With the decriminalisation of magic *as* magic in 1735, in the eyes of the law practitioners became not witches or conjurors but fraudsters – the extent to which this reflected or did not reflect attitudes towards practitioners as individuals or as a group might contribute to our understanding of the shifts in public discourse about magic as a whole.

Dealing with Authorities

When magical practitioners faced the scrutiny of bodies of authority – secular courts, the College of Physicians, or others – their reputations were contested and challenged. Often there was a perceptible gap between the terms and categories employed by institutions and those employed by magical practitioners and their clients. In the case of the College of Physicians in particular – an institution characterised by anxieties about the legitimacy of its monopoly on health – the various means by which practitioners established and sought to defend their reputations held little weight. In the eyes of the College, they could be either an irregular practitioner violating the College's privileges by

⁶ Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

practising physic, or essentially outside the College's interest. Whether they were a 'good' or 'bad' practitioner, what they said about their magic, and what others thought about them was often irrelevant. While as Pelling demonstrates they might receive better or worse treatment based on their attitude towards the college or other factors (like age or poverty), the magical activities of practitioners were largely irrelevant; they were not regular physicians in the College's mould and so were liable to be deemed ignorant at best.⁷ At the quarter sessions, most of the practitioners stood accused of dishonest dealings, with one or two suspected of doing more material harm; much as the College's institutional priorities shaped its view of magical practitioners, so the content of the law, the concerns of the Justices, and the complaints of those who brought forth cases shaped the focus of the courts. This, perhaps, came closer to judging the practitioners' reputations in their own terms – to appear to be a university-educated physician was likely *not* a goal shared by most London magical healers, but to be accounted an honest and trustworthy practitioner was doubtless important for many.

Ultimately, these brushes with authority did not necessarily have a great impact on the practitioners or their reputations. Edward Banbury swore in his first appearance before the sessions to leave off the practice of astrology, a promise evidently not kept as he appeared again four years later under very similar circumstances. Simon Forman was pursued doggedly by the College of Physicians, but consistently flouted their authority and maintained his thriving magical-medical practice. John Lambe was actually imprisoned for several years, having been found guilty of multiple felonies, and nonetheless continued to practice as a conjurer even while imprisoned. Interactions with authority were sites in which the reputations of magical practitioners were contested, but magical reputations may, to a large degree, have been outside of the grasp of these authorities – even a 'good' practitioner was, given the laws against most forms of magic, outside the official bounds of acceptability, and it seems evident that practitioners were judged by their clients (and judged themselves) according to criteria having little to do with the statutes or the position of institutions like the College. This is not to say that magical practitioners did not have cause to take their brushes with authority seriously. Many were aware of danger when it presented itself, and many adopted strategies that included defining or re-defining themselves in the ways most likely to protect them. But the practitioners could be and were popular and successful in spite of the judgement of physicians or Justices of the Peace.

Interconnected Reputations

We have also seen that other people could be important elements of a magical reputation – that the names of clients, collaborators, and patrons could all help to constitute the name of a practitioner.

⁷ Margaret Pelling, *Medical conflicts in early modern London: patronage, physicians, and irregular practitioners, 1550-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 311.

Clients of practitioners could recommend them to others, even accompanying their neighbours to the consultation as in the case of the Pitminster villagers discussing and visiting Jasper Bale – Richard Waterman contributed to the spread of Bale’s reputation by introducing him to Jane Scadden as a man who could help her find her lost wool. Clients could also contribute to a practitioner’s reputation in more abstract ways; the College of Physicians was aware when irregular practitioners had tended to well-known clients and took them into account – likely others knew as well. Such clients could also serve as patrons, offering concrete benefits to practitioners as well as contributing to their reputations. Practitioners’ reputations could also involve other practitioners. Some claimed lineage from famous predecessors – the cunning woman Anne Bodenham claimed to have studied under Lambe, and compared herself favourably to Lilly; Lilly represented himself as “the English Merlin” and drew connections between himself and famous practitioners like Simon Forman and Richard Napier. Such connections were also used in attacks on and critiques of practitioners – with Lambe’s ill-repute well established and well-remembered, John Vicars was able to attack Lilly as his ‘brother’.⁸ Practitioners’ reputations might also be tied to those of contemporaries with whom they worked. Ann Fathers told the College that her irregular practice had been done “at Savery’s direction” in the apparent expectation that his prominence as a medical practitioner would bolster her credentials. Lambe’s collaboration with Matthias Evans gave the latter the ability (and the motive) to denounce him before the College, providing a list of his clients, his fees, and his unfavourable statements about the physicians. Meanwhile Evans had also secured a lucrative position on retainer for Frances Shute thanks to the recommendations of his fellow practitioner Frodsham, further indicating his willingness to partner with others in the conduct of his trade. All reputations are inherently relational – they consist of what is believed and said about a person by others – but it is important to recognise that magical practitioners were not isolated individuals and their reputations for magic did not exist independently of or outside of society. They interacted with others in different ways and were known to have done so – even known *for* doing so in some cases. The reputations of such practitioners were then not only ‘about’ the practitioners themselves, a consideration often absent from treatments of reputation.

The Media of Reputations

Centring the reputations of magical practitioners has also provided insights into the use of different media by those practitioners. Unsurprisingly, word of mouth was an important vector for reputations in the seventeenth century. People like Jasper Bale’s clients in Somerset discussed their dealings with magical practitioners in the village and on the road, while Thomas Crosfield and his companions shared

⁸ John Vicars, *Against William Li-Lie (alias) Lillie that most audacious atheistical rayling Rabsheca, that impious witch or wizzard, and most abhominable sorcerer, or star-gazer of London, and all his odious almanacks, and others* (London, 1652).

the rumours of John Lambe's execution which prompted a conversation about the reality of spirits. But practitioners also made use of paper aids to their reputations, both in manuscript and print. Bale's paper tickets, given to his clients at consultations to summarise his judgements, served as props for these discussions - objects that could be retained and shown to others as part of these face-to-face discussions. The bills written up by medical practitioners (not only magical ones) embodied their expertise and reputation, as items that could be kept and commodified, as well as rendering material the relationship between the practitioner who wrote the bills and the apothecaries who prepared them. While a sizeable literature on tickets, doctors' bills, and other paper ephemera exists, the significance of these for some magical reputations has been neglected. The legal position of magic meant that most practitioners did not have easy access to the medium of print, but this did not mean that printed texts had no impact on their reputations. John Lambe never published anything in print, but was the subject of pamphlets and ballads that shaped his 'notorious' reputation. Astrologers, practising as they did a legal discipline, had far more access to print, and the booming market for almanacs in this period speaks to the effectiveness of their use of the medium. The most successful almanac makers, like Lilly, were able to make deft use of print – as well as manuscript and word of mouth – to control their own self-representation at a scale not possible for most magical practitioners. Here more than in other areas the media of reputations have been discussed, with influential works like Capp's discussing at some length the importance of famous names for almanac sales.⁹ Lilly's use of print was a major – perhaps the most important – factor in his ability to create a coherent 'brand' that combined a perceived moral high ground with contemporary politics, persuasive writing, consistent style, and a reputation for accuracy and reliability. More broadly, the civil war era boom in popular print has been connected to the popularity of astrology in the period, and Lilly's successful use of the medium to construct and 'sell' his reputation points to the importance of the reputation of practitioners to the reputation of the discipline as a whole.

Orality, manuscript, and print should of course not be considered as mutually exclusive categories. Historians of communications, news, and media have demonstrated how in this period the spoken, scribed, and printed word significantly overlapped, feeding into, influencing, and reinforcing each other, and this study of magical reputations has highlighted this in many cases.¹⁰ Information, including the knowledge and rumours that made up reputations, could move between different media as it spread across time and space, with paper tickets supporting discussed at chance meetings, spoken libels recorded in diaries, pamphlets and ballads discussed, sung, and written about, and printed

⁹ Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the popular press: English almanacs, 1500-1800* (London: Faber, 1979), 66.

¹⁰ See for instance Lena Liapi, "'The Talke of the Towne': News, Crime and the Public Sphere in Seventeenth-Century London," *Cultural and Social History* 14, no. 5 (2017): 549-564; Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

almanacs bolstering face-to-face consultations. In some cases, access to and use of specific media could shape reputations; William Lilly's ability to write about himself in print, publicising his name and face along with consistent self-directed messaging about his personal and professional qualities doubtless contributed to his ability to build a consistent and recognisable reputation.

Other media also contributed to magical reputations alongside these broad categories. Images, for example, were an important part of many printed works of astrology, with Lilly and others prominently featuring their recognisable faces as well as their names on almanacs. The contemporary stage also served as a vehicle for magical reputations outside the control of the holders, with playwrights like Ben Jonson playing on the audience's familiarity with famous or infamous magical practitioners to make jokes and pertinent remarks. Finally, spectacle or showmanship might be considered a kind of medium for reputation; practitioners like Lambe and Abraham Savery, but also less famous individuals like John Mortemer in Somerset, were able to evoke a sense of wonder in those who consulted them, talked about them, or saw them at work, and this emotion, or the idea that the practitioner could show something 'strange' or 'wonderful' should be seen as an important part of how they drew in clients and how they came to be known.

Perhaps most importantly, ideas circulating in all these media combined to form magical reputations – Bale's tickets aided oral transmission of his reputation, while Lilly discussed his manuscript work in his printed work, as well as combining his almanac production with his work as a consulting astrologer. When people discussed or shared news of Lambe, they focused on the strange and wonderful things he was understood to have done. Not all of these media were under the control of the practitioners themselves, and their contributions to the practitioners' reputations may not have been what the individuals in question would have hoped, but certainly practitioners were aware of the influence that talk, text, and other means of transmitting ideas had on their reputations.

Scales of Reputations

The magical reputations discussed here varied greatly in their geographical and temporal extent. Broadly, they can be placed on a loose spectrum from 'less famous' to 'more famous'. Many practitioners – probably the vast majority – were most like those discussed in Chapter 1 and (most of) those discussed in Chapter 2. They were, like most people, largely anonymous beyond their own local areas, albeit perhaps better known than those of their neighbours who did not provide such services. In areas like Somerset, such practitioners drew most of their clients from within twenty or so miles – a distance that contemporaries would have considered reasonably travelable judging from the data on fairs. In London, certain areas were particularly hospitable to magical practitioners, and Londoners were able to travel across the city to seek them. The temporal reach of these reputations was also

limited. Given that most of these individuals left limited textual remains, and that the sources used to study them in this thesis deal with living individuals almost exclusively, it is hard to say with certainty that their reputations did not outlive them. But practitioners like John Mortemer and Jasper Bale in Somerset, or Simon Read and Mistress Woodhouse in London did not have the widespread and lasting fame to see their names referenced on stage, or discussed and recorded in settings that didn't involve them personally.

In London as shown by the College sources, some more famous practitioners appear. Individuals like James Leverett and Abraham Savery were not, perhaps, known nationwide, nor written about decades after their death, but the College was keenly aware of their great popularity. Astrologers like Thomas Bretnor and Nicholas Fiske, just two among the many in London, were sufficiently well-known that they could be name-dropped by Jonson as conjurers alongside the magical practitioners then associated with the Overbury Affair (Forman, Gresham, Franklin, and Savery). More famous even than these though were practitioners like John Lambe and William Lilly, whose names were known across the country and beyond, and who remained culturally relevant long after their deaths. Lambe's infamy, especially around and after his death, was in large part political – his reputation as a conjurer made him a compelling symbol of disorder and dissolution when he was discussed as “the duke's devil”. But he did live and work as a magical practitioner and had a magical reputation beyond his association with the Duke of Buckingham; he had practised in several parts of the country, and drew crowds in Worcester jail long before he first encountered Buckingham. Lilly was more famous still, doubtless due in no small part to his command of the medium of print and assiduous efforts in constructing and selling his own reputation. Lilly's reputation also had a political aspect – the parliamentary agenda of his astrology and the contemporary political relevance of his predictions brought him many admirers and detractors. But here too it would be an oversimplification to suggest he was nothing but a successful propagandist. His self-representation as the ideal astrologer was appealing and persuasive to many, and as a public persona he was deemed an influential figure for astrology as a whole. His almanacs held value to the many people who purchased them, and simply agreeing with his politics cannot account for this – he was far from the only parliamentary almanac-maker. Though his reputation centred primarily on astrology and the predictions of his printed work, he also met with querents and received correspondence from across the country and from far overseas. He was understood to be a magician in addition to an astrologer, such that Anne Bodenham could boast that with her magical books she could “do more than Lilly”, and that his detractors could disparagingly portray him alongside wizards and conjurers of history and legend.

Magical Celebrities

At the ‘more famous’ end of this spectrum, this thesis suggests that in the seventeenth century there existed a kind of ‘celebrity’ that could encompass some of the magical practitioners discussed in this thesis. These were the conjurers and astrologers whose names and deeds were widely known and widely discussed, whose faces might be known, and whose reputations carried enough currency to be referenced, co-opted, and satirised both in their lifetimes and long afterwards. John Lambe, William Lilly, and some of the magical healers discussed in Chapter 2 could be said to fit this mould. Engel’s account of (especially female) celebrity as something that “materialized through projections of idealized representations of femininity specific to particular historical moments” is particularly useful here.¹¹ While representations of magical practitioners were not “idealized” in the same sense as those of actresses, the role of narratives and ideal types in creating a ‘magical celebrity’ warrants consideration. We might even consider news (or perhaps ‘newsworthiness’) as a kind of reputation; as was shown in Chapter 3, the events of a sufficiently (in)famous practitioner’s life and death could be disseminated across the country in newsletters and recorded in diaries – to be known to have raised a storm, or even to be known to have been murdered, was in itself a kind of reputation.

Magical Reputations

These findings also highlight the need for further work in this area. The intersection of magic and reputation is a potentially rich field of enquiry with the potential for more contributions to the histories of both magic and reputation. The period covered by this thesis was a significant period for magical practitioners and their reputations, with unique opportunities in the realm of print and some features of early commercialisation reshaping the ways in which practitioners could build an image. With astrology at its high-water mark and conversations about the reality of magic, witchcraft, and other supernatural phenomena just beginning to enter the intellectual mainstream, magical reputations in the early- and mid-seventeenth century were in a period of change. Expanding the chronological and geographical range of the study would help to capture regional variations and change over time and thus provide further context for these conclusions. Applying the qualitative approach of the first two chapters to other archives, and expanding on the in-depth case studies of the later chapters to other individuals of different levels of fame would provide further insights. In particular, additional case studies could centre women like Anne Bodenham, the fairy healer Ann Jeffries, or semi-legendary figures like Mother Shipton. Besides providing insights about more magical practitioners, comparisons here would likely highlight important gendered differences in their reputations. Finally, further

¹¹ Engel, *Fashioning Celebrity*, 2.

comparison to other kinds of people, like the doctors and chapmen discussed briefly in the first two chapters, would add context to magical reputations alongside other kinds of reputation.

The present study has, however, brought the names of more practitioners into the history of magic by making systematic use of its archival sources, and by treating these 'ordinary' practitioners alongside a few more famous figures demonstrated some of the complexities of magical reputations. Studying magical practitioners in this way not only helps to ground them in their own social, economic, and cultural contexts, but opens another avenue to thinking about those contexts. Studying the workings of magical reputations has raised questions about what people said, thought, and believed about each other and how those judgements circulated, were utilised, and outlived the individuals about whom they were made.

Abbreviations

Annals	Annals of the College of Physicians
BL	British Library
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
TNA	The National Archives

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