1. Money rules the postmodern world, and money is an efficacious, or "performative," sign: a medium of representation that attains practical power. As we might expect, therefore, the concept of the performative sign is theoretically central to the postmodern era’s philosophy, politics, psychology, linguistics and -- a fortiori -- its economics. All of these disciplines, in their postmodern forms, privilege the performative, rather than the denotative, aspect of signs. They all assume that signs do things, and that the objective world is constructed for us via the realm of signification. In the work of such philosophers as Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler, the performative sign even acquires a vague association with political radicalism, since its power can be used to deconstruct such allegedly repressive chimeras as essence and self-identity.

2. The argument that signs are performative by nature leads to the conclusion that there is no prelinguistic or nonmaterial human subject, since subjective intention is irrelevant to the sign's efficacy. The idea that the subject is material thus takes its place alongside the notion that representation is efficacious as a central tenet of postmodern thought. It is not difficult to point to the connection between these ideas in the field of "economics." Money is an externalized representation of abstract human labor power -- that is to say, of human subjective activity, of human life. In addition to being a system of autonomous representation, then, money is the incarnation of objectified subjectivity. It is thus hardly surprising to find that the idea that the subject is material, that it is an object, is very prevalent in postmodern thought, or that materialism dominates intellectual disciplines from sociobiology to literary criticism. In the work of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, materialism even enjoys a nebulous alliance with the political Left, as it is used to tear down the supposedly tyrannical framework of Christian-Platonic idealism.

3. The allied illusions that signification is necessarily performative and that the subject is material constitute the ideology of the postmodern epoch. But this affirmative attitude to the material subject and the performative sign is historically quite recent, and a comparison with the stance adopted by pre- or early-capitalist societies towards these phenomena yields some sobering conclusions. In the current work in progress, I use the early treatments of the story of Doctor Faustus to argue that in sixteenth century Europe, performative signification and objectified subjectivity were identified with, respectively, magic and idolatry, and that these ideological illusions corresponded precisely to the age's understanding of the worldly influence of “Satan.”

4. The Faust myth emerges as part of a pan-European effort to criminalize all magic. To that end, it defines magic as the belief in the efficacy of signs, and it claims to show that such a belief of necessity involves an agreement with Satan. The sphere of representation is the Satanic version of God's natural creation,1 and to use representation to achieve objective ends (to "do things with words" in J.L. Austin's famous phrase) is to invoke Satan's power against God's. If we consider the ethical implications of this position, we may have some idea of how dramatically the postmodern world has broken with the basic moral assumptions that remain, despite everything, our ethical heritage.
5. The early modern debate over the existence of witches seems rather naive from the perspective of postmodernity. By the late seventeenth century, many educated Europeans had convinced themselves, or had been convinced, that witches and magic simply did not exist. In the twenty-first century, on the other hand, nobody doubts the existence of witches -- the only questions at issue are the nature of witchcraft and the efficacy of magic. Opinions on these matters vary geographically. Among my students in the USA are several young women who claim to practice witchcraft; they are regarded by their peers as quite normal individuals and their powers are not feared. Next to my keyboard as I write sits a dried llama fetus that I bought from a witch, in the "witches market" in La Paz, Bolivia. In Central and South America, witchcraft is perceived as a sophisticated craft and a legitimate, if slightly dubious, profession. Since the 1970's, in contrast, witchcraft has been legally prosecuted as a serious crime in much of Africa, reversing a century of colonial and neo-colonial policy which simply denied, in the face of glaring empirical evidence, that there were any such creatures as witches.

6. In the colonies, witches could be prosecuted for fraud but not for witchcraft. The colonial legal system presupposed that magic was purely illusory, and colonial churches made the elimination of belief in witchcraft -- as opposed to witchcraft itself -- a top priority; Christian and Muslim missionaries continue to follow this policy today. The European powers took it as a sacred duty to replace magical views of the world with rational ones. By the end of the twentieth century, however, this process of "enlightenment" had been subjected to such cogent philosophical and political critiques that few people would endorse it unequivocally. We are much more conscious than our forbears of the complicity between reason and magic, and many would argue that the postmodern era -- with its virtual reality, its faith in the image, its electronic money, its new age religions -- is witnessing a return to the kinds of overtly magical thinking that imperialism unsuccessfully tried to stamp out in the southern hemisphere.

7. The colonial state was generally regarded by the natives as pro-witch, partly because colonial governments suppressed the prosecution of witches, but also because imperialist values and practices were perceived as sharing much in common with witchcraft. Throughout the postcolonial world, witches and sorcerers are thought to have seized the opportunity provided by colonial rule to greatly increase and consolidate their power. Few Western observers today would regard such opinions with the amused condescension of the Victorians. Most anthropologists and sociologists of religion would now broadly endorse the view of Eric de Rosny, writing in 1981:

Due to my direct and constant involvement in Duala with victims and sometimes also with accusers [i.e. of witchcraft], I have come to see that evil sorciers do exist in flesh and blood. No doubt they are infinitely less numerous than my panicky spokesmen affirmed, but they are nonetheless all too real. They are either people who manipulate others' credulity for their own profit (sometimes even using poison); or persons who are not conscious of their own perversity. Aren't there in every society certain perverted persons who -- without even knowing it -- make their fellow men ill by draining their vital energy from them, thus depersonalizing them -- in other words, "eating" them?2

Early anthropological studies of African witchcraft often expressed surprise that the belief in magic was growing, not declining, with colonization. This unexpected flourishing of sorcery was often interpreted as an attempt to rationalize the more malign effects of the traumatic adaptation to modernity. In 1935 Audrey Richards commented that "economic and social changes have so shattered tribal institutions and moral
codes that the result of white contact is in many cases an actual increase in the dread of witchcraft".3 The
dawn of modernity seems to have brought about a similar resurgence in the fear of witchcraft in sixteenth-
century Europe.4 In Africa, this fear worsened under neocolonialism, when the rulers of nominally
independent nations clearly derived their power from nebulous, impersonal, external sources such as the
global economy or the I.M.F. Thus Jean and John Comaroff report that the elite class in Malawi "are
suspected of having struck a Faustian deal with the whites."5

8. It is worth dwelling on the use of the term "Faustian" here. Most Westerners would probably agree
that the Malawi ruling class has made a shady bargain with the former colonial rulers, in order to attain
wealth and influence at the expense of their nation. That is, most Westerners would agree that they have
"struck a Faustian deal with the whites" in a figurative sense. Africans, in contrast, would tend to argue
that they have "struck a Faustian deal with the whites" in a literal sense. The colonizing power was evil in
a metaphysical rather than merely in an economic way, and the beneficiaries of neocolonialism are
literally dealing with the devil, employing such means as ritual magic, animal sacrifice and quite possibly
anthropophagy. It is common knowledge that some members of African elites literally do engage in such
practices, and that their purpose is precisely to achieve power and riches. Surely we cannot call this a
merely figurative pact with the devil. In fact, we in the West need to question the categorical distinction we
make between "economic" exploitation and "metaphysical" evil. Such distinctions made no sense in
sixteenth century Europe any more than they do in contemporary Africa. It may be that the belief that the
power of metaphysical evil -- we might simply say "Satan" -- does not exert any influence on the material
world is the most pernicious of all superstitions.

9. There has been an enormous amount of scholarly interest in magic and witchcraft over the past
couple of decades. Such scholarship tends to focus either on early modern Europe and North America, or
on postmodern Africa and South America. The striking similarities between witchcraft discourses in, for
example, England in 1602 and Cameroon in 2002 have led to some fascinating forays into comparative
analysis, involving the interdisciplinary efforts of anthropologists and historians. The most obvious point of
comparison is the fact that both early modern Europe and postmodern Africa are societies in which
traditional beliefs and values are being forcibly displaced by contact with the global market economy.
Michael Taussig's seminal work, The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America (1980) opened the
floodgates for a wave of anthropological studies of postcolonial societies that employ witchcraft as a
conceptual vocabulary to describe the empirical and psychological effects of global capitalism. Taussig
found that the introduction of wage labor into South American peasant cultures produced a demonology
that notably recalls the obsession with the diabolical that attended the same process in early modern
Europe: "the fabled devil contract is an indictment of an economic system which forces men to barter their
souls for the destructive power of commodities."6 His account of the demonological practices of Bolivian
tin miners is reminiscent of the beliefs of their counterparts in sixteenth-century Europe. For instance,
Johann Weyer's De praestigiis daemonum (1563) reports the miners' lore regarding the demons who
labor alongside them. It is notable that Weyer, a sceptic by the standards of the age, does not deny the
existence of the demons. He departs from the miners' own beliefs only in his claim that the demons do
not perform labor:

[The demons] seem to be doing many things, while actually doing nothing at all. Others call them
"the little men of the mountains," indicating their usual stature, that of dwarves about twenty
seven inches tall. And they look like old men wearing the customary outfit of miners -- clad in a
woven shirt and with a leather hide about their loins. These spirits usually do no harm to the miners, but simply roam about in the shafts and underground passages; and although they do nothing, they seem to be busily engaged in all sorts of tasks, as though digging veins of ore, pouring the mined ore into receptacles, and turning the hoist.7

It is not hard to see, in the demonologies of twentieth-century Bolivian and sixteenth-century German miners, a mythological expression of alienated labor. Unaccustomed to translating their working hours into the objective form of a financial sum, the workers give a physical embodiment to their externalized activity. These demons, after all, are just as "real" -- and "real" in the same sense -- as the imaginary exchange value that the workers must learn to perceive in the money for which they exchange their daily lives. It is a commonplace of anthropology that zombie beliefs arose in the Caribbean and west Africa as a reaction to the slave trade, and modern demonology often reflects a similar sense that a person's labor -- that is, his activity, his life, his self -- can easily be stolen.

10. It appears that belief in and fear of magic increase rapidly when two economic factors are suddenly introduced into a society: money and wage labor. Of course, these two are really aspects of the same phenomenon -- the alienation of labor, which demands that labor be represented in the symbolic form of money. For example, Edwin Ardener recalls how a zombie cult grew up rapidly among the Bakweri of Cameroon when money was introduced into their economy in the mid-twentieth century. In 1963, he reports:

- a rumor spread that the elders had ordered that no money should be picked up from the ground, since it was being scattered as a lure to entice men to the waterside. There, "Frenchmen" would use them to work as zombies on a new deep-sea harbor, or use them to appease the water-spirits. For a number of months it was commonplace to see coins and even low-value notes lying about the streets of the capital.8

B.G. Stone mentions a lake in Bakweri country where "there is a great spirit market and spirits from all over the world are thought to meet there and barter their goods. The new Nigerian coinage and paper money were first said to have been introduced in this spirit market, and to have been distributed thence to the people."9

More recently, Peter Geschiere describes the emergence of a new type of witches who no longer eat their victims, but who transform them into a kind of zombie and put them to work on "invisible plantations." The nouveaux riches supposedly owe their success to the exploitation of these zombies' labor. People insist on the novelty of this form of witchcraft and often relate it to the arrival of the Europeans and the introduction of new luxury items. (139)

Wim van Binsbergen remarks, regarding the new zombie cults, that "the reference to earlier forms of globalisation (slave trade) is now used in order to express and contest, in a witchcraft idiom, newer forms of globalisation, such as the differential access to consumer goods and post-colonial state power."10 Van Binsbergen makes a suggestive distinction between slavery and wage labor. In slavery, the entire being of a person is alienated, so that one person becomes the property of another. The slave ceases to exist as a legally autonomous subject. In wage labor, however, only the part of a person's life which is sold as
"labor" is alienated. The person remains a legally autonomous subject, but he gives up a portion of his life -- that is, of his self -- in exchange for a symbol of that portion. This symbol, which is money, then attains a subjective power, so that it determines the lives of the people whose activity it represents. A money economy is one in which people are ruled by a fetishized representation of their own selves. Market economies are ruled by this ghostly, dead -- but supernaturally active -- power called money.

11. Demonology, like wage labor, involves projection. It involves the attribution of objective status to phenomena that are originally subjective. An economy that represents material human activity in the form of exchange value demands a very similar process of thought. In a sense, then, there is nothing surprising in the recent avalanche of studies that portray occult or magical discourses as modes of response to the introduction of a market economy. In his study of the djambe sorcery of the Maka, Geschiere notes that attempts to introduce wage labor into Maka villages regularly produce a spate of witchcraft allegations, and finds that "[n]arratives about djambe are surprisingly similar to capitalist themes. The Maka speak of witches as entrepreneurs who are always on the alert and ready to appropriate new riches and powers."11 According to the Comaroffs, "African witches become the personifications of capricious commodities, the sirens of selfish desires." (xxv) Throughout Africa, people speak interchangeably of magical "witches" and wealthy "big men" who "eat" the souls of the people:

Soul-eating is thought to be driven by an appetite for money, a hunger unleashed, as local commentators stressed, by European colonialism. And while its "seeds" are held to have been inherited in earlier times, they are now a widely circulating purchasable commodity on their own account. In fact, soul-eaters themselves become like commodities, being capable of changing their physiques into innumerable material forms; they take on a life of their own and, ultimately, threaten to devour Hausa heritage in toto. (xxv)

Pamela G. Schmoll reaches a similar conclusion from her study of the Hausa: "soul-eating seems to have become a metaphor for the search for money."12 Soul-eating powers were once thought to be inherited but according to Schmoll we are now witnessing "the commoditization of soul-eating, and now such powers can be purchased with money." (204) One can buy the required instruction and equipment to practice destructive magic on the streets of Mali and Burkino Faso. This is truly a Faustian pact, however, for "in procuring the ability to eat souls the buyer is described as being himself enslaved and, in a moral sense, destroyed." (205)

12. Magic operates on the border between the objective and the subjective; it is a way of studying the process by which objects achieve subjective power and human subjects become objectified. As Geschiere observes regarding the Cameroon: "An intriguing aspect of these representations is that they relativize the distinction between people and commodities. The famla/ekong conceptions seem to reflect a process of commodification that transforms not only goods but people into commodities."13 With the introduction of wage labor and a market economy, people and goods are turned into commodities in reality. But commodification takes place only in the mind: there is no necessary material difference between a windfall apple and an apple for sale. We are thus dealing with a phenomenon that is both real and immaterial -- both objective and subjective -- and this is precisely the kind of phenomenon that theories of magic and witchcraft are equipped to analyze. Jean and John Comaroff comment that in much of the postcolonial world -- not only in Africa, but from Haiti to India and from Brazil to Micronesia:
witchcraft is a finely calibrated gauge of the impact of global cultural and economic forces on local relations, on perceptions of money and markets, on the abstraction and alienation of "indigenous" values and meanings. Witches are modernity's prototypical malcontents. They provide disconcertingly full-bodied images of a world in which humans seem in constant danger of turning into commodities, of losing their life blood to the market and to the destructive desires it evokes.

In a world ruled by "the market," a world where the course of people's lives is dictated not by human beings but by human activity in the fetishized form of money, there would seem to be a pressing need for "a practical discourse of hidden agency," as Andrew Apter describes witchcraft.14 In the Christian societies of early modern Europe, this "hidden agency" was identified with Satan. Christian demonology is alive and prospering in Africa, where it syncretizes comfortably with traditional devil-beliefs, as Birgit Meyer has shown in her study of Pentecostalism in Ghana:

For Pentecostalists commodities become fetishes because the Devil appropriated them before they appeared in the market (or at the time when they are exposed in shops). Through the supposedly innocent act of buying, the consumer is linked with Satan. Entering into a relationship with the diabolic, owners lose their own will and identity, their spirits and bodies are reduced to signs which refer to, and even "glorify," the power of the Devil. Consumption thus threatens to turn people into powerless signs -- metonyms of the Satanic -- and in order to prevent this, one has to be aware of the fetish-aspect of commodities and prevent them from conquering one's spirit. What is interesting here is the close association of Satan with the global market as the source and target of desire.15

Furthermore, today's economic and political power is won by the control of people's minds. The most powerful political and economic organizations in the world devote most of their resources to honing and developing their ability to influence the purchasing decisions of consumers and the voting decisions of electors. In this context it is hardly surprising that people should become aware of an external power entering into their minds and attempting to manipulate their behavior. In the West, Marxists and their descendants might call this power "money," but money itself is merely a representation of financial value, which is only an idea and has no material or physical existence. Alternatively, we might, following Foucault, simply call it "power," but Foucauldian power has no center or essence; it is dispersed among an infinity of agents and, although manifested in material practice, it really exists only in our minds. "Money" and "power" are phantasms, superstitions: they do things, but they do not exist. It may be that witchcraft -- which is the postcolonial southern hemisphere's way of discussing the contemporary nature and exercise of power -- actually provides a more appropriate discourse for the postmodern condition than Western thought, which is still hampered by obsolete binary divisions between presence and absence, being and non-being, matter and spirit.

13. Is it, for instance, literally true that a determinate portion of the life of someone who works for a wage is exchanged for money? Most rational people could probably assent to this proposition. Is it also literally true that money, despite having a purely imaginary existence, is the dominant power in the world? Again, few would deny this. The argument that the world is ruled by alienated labor is entirely rational, and literally true. Does this mean that there are sinister "Frenchmen" who drug and kidnap Africans and force them to work as zombies on "ghost plantations"? For a very long time, during the slave trade, this
was literally true (and we should not forget that the slave trade is by no means over). But in general, perhaps, the theory of zombie labor is true today only in a symbolic sense. However, the system of money and wage labor asserts, and is indeed based upon, the belief in the objective reality and the practical efficacy, of the symbolic. Could it be that the reason "enlightenment" is always so concerned to eliminate magical beliefs from the world -- a process beginning in sixteenth-century Europe and continuing in twenty-first century Africa -- is that it is itself a magical system that desires neither rivals nor critics able to understand it on its own terms?

14. Geschiere describes "[t]he ease with which witchcraft discourses in Africa incorporate the money economy, new power relations, and consumer goods’ as a ‘paradox,’”16 because he sees in the tenacity of witchcraft an anomalous resistance to the cultural homogenization that otherwise characterizes global society. But the Western world too is ruled by icons, charms and fetishes. Its inhabitants are frequently confused as to the boundaries between fantasy and reality, their leisure time is spent in the contemplation of images, they speak easily of the "cult of celebrity," they dedicate their economic lives to the accumulation of the token they call "money," they often understand their identities in relation to the goods they consume. None of these tendencies is more superstitious than witchcraft discourse. It may be, contra Geschiere, that the postcolonial world's growing preoccupation with witches represents not a reaction against cultural homogenization but a particularly instructive instance of it.

III

15. Before beginning our analysis of the Faust myth, we should first understand the logic connecting a belief in the efficacious sign with Satanism. Its most lucid expression is found in Aquinas's Summa contra gentiles. Aquinas argues that ceremonial magicians are not, as they claim to be, pious or at worst disinterested scientists, but servants of the devil:

For in the practice of their art they make use of certain significative words in order to produce certain definite effects. Now, words, in so far as they signify something, have no power except as derived from some intellect; either of the speaker, or of the person to whom they are spoken. From the intellect of the speaker, as when an intellect is of such great power that it can cause things by its mere thought, the voice serving to convey, as it were, this thought to the things that are to be produced. From the intellect of the person to whom the words are addressed, as when the hearer is induced to do some particular thing, through his intellect receiving the signification of those words. Now, it cannot be said that these significative words uttered by magicians derive efficacy from the intellect of the speaker. For since power follows essence, diversity of power indicates diversity of essential principles. Moreover, man's intellect is invariably of such a disposition that its knowledge is caused by things, rather than that it is able by its mere thought to cause things. Consequently if there be any men that are able of their own power to transform things by words expressive of their thoughts, they will belong to another species, and it would be an equivocation to call them men. . . . It follows that these effects are accomplished by an intellect to whom the discourse of the person uttering these words is addressed.17

Magical spells and incantations, says Aquinas, are performative with regard not merely to the speaker's own subjective actions (as in "I declare this bridge open") but also with regard to the objective things of the world (as in "open sesame"). The performative sign disrupts the logocentric view of language because
it does not refer to anything outside itself. It thus frees signification from the tyranny of telos and logos; a
performative sign does not mean anything: it does something. It is hardly surprising that Renaissance
Europe should have discerned a whiff of sulfur about the performative sign, for telos and logos are Biblical
terms for the Christian God. Who, asks Aquinas, is the agent who performs the actions of the magician's
performative words? It cannot be the magician himself, for human beings cannot achieve objective effects
by subjective force alone. It cannot be God, for God does not submit His will to human command, nor can
He be invoked with spells or images. It cannot be the signs themselves, for signs naturally possess no
performative power. The agent who performs the magical action can only be a spirit who does not serve
God. Despite what the magicians claim to believe, all magic is in fact performed by Satan or his
subsidiary demons, and the proof of this lies in its use of allegedly efficacious signs. I emphasize the
qualification because Aquinas does not believe that signs can be efficacious in fact. He does not even
believe that magicians truly think that signs are efficacious. They may claim that they believe this, but only
in an attempt to conceal the true nature of their art, which is the invocation of evil spirits:

matter cannot, by definite figures, be disposed to receive a certain natural effect. Therefore
magicians do not employ figures as dispositions. It remains, then, that they employ them only as
signs, for there is no third solution. But we make signs only to other intelligent beings. Therefore
the magic arts derive their efficacy from another intelligent being, to whom the magician's words
are addressed. This is also proved by the very name of character which they apply to these
figures: for a character is a sign. Whereby we are given to understand that they employ these
figures merely as signs shown to some intellectual nature.

Aquinas is convinced that signs are not autonomous; they have no meaning or effect in themselves, but
achieve their ends through being understood by an intellect. Magical signs are not directed towards God,
being noncanonical and frequently resulting in malign or selfish effects. Therefore they must be directed
to the devil, and thus all ceremonial magic is revealed as inherently Satanic in nature.

16. Furthermore, according to the tradition of Thomistic scholasticism, the manipulation of signs was
the only way in which Satan could achieve any objective effect. He was not capable of creation ex nihilo;
only God possessed that power. The devil does not operate in the realm of essence but in the that of
appearance. Jacopo Passavanti's, The Mirror of True Penitence (ca. 1350) observes that "The devil
cannot change one thing substantially into another, transforming the nature of things, or creating
something out of nothing, which is proper only to God, although he can make things appear to change." This
is also the reason why Satan can only enter into the human mind when invoked via external rites and
ceremonies: "the devil cannot know the thoughts and will of the human heart except in such a way as can
be perceived by act or sign, or by something else that manifests itself externally."20

17. During the Renaissance, this scholastic view of magic faced formidable opposition from Hermetic
neoplatonism. Magicians like Pico della Mirandola and Marsiglio Ficino contended that ritual magic could
release the hidden powers of nature without the aid of evil spirits. It is this contention that works such as
the Faust book attempt to repudiate. If any magical effects seemed to have been achieved by the
magician's own power, this could only be a trick played by the devil to lure the sorcerer into his clutches.
This argument thus furthered the cause of the centralization of evil: there could be no nonsatanic magic.
Sceptics in the witchcraft debates used this reasoning to exonerate accused witches, since the maleficia
were performed by Satan rather than the unfortunates in the dock. The prosecutorial retort was that the
witches had undeniably perpetrated at least one maleficium -- they had put their faith in the Satanic power of signs.

18. Many twentieth-century critics and historians have applauded seventeenth-century sceptics like Johann Weyer, Reginald Scot and George Gifford for denying that the accused witches were capable of the subtle conjurings, the Latin incantations or the esoteric lore which were needed to effect a pact with the devil. But many of their contemporaries thought that such men had missed the point of the witchcraft allegations. Whatever degraded rituals the supposed witches might possibly have performed (it seems doubtful that most of them performed any but this is obviously unprovable), the prosecutorial argument was that such ceremonies were not the cause but the effect of the Satanic pact. The witches' belief in the efficacy of the sign was in itself proof that her mind was given over to the devil, following the logic of Augustine's City of God: "Exterior deeds are signs of interior deeds, just as spoken words are the signs of things".21 As Johann von Kaysersberg wrote in 1508:

I say that what the witches or Unholden do is not a real thing it is merely a sign; when the devil sees the sign and hears the word, he knows what they indicate; then he performs the act, and it is the devil who does this and not [the witches]. For the devil has made a pact with certain men and has given them certain words and signs. When they make the signs and use the words, the devil will do what they want, but it is the devil who does these things. So what the witches do is only a sign, not the deed itself.22

Writing in 1529, Martin de Castagena makes it clear that signs have no natural, intrinsic efficacy, but can only become efficacious through agreement with Satan:

the devil does not respond or aid the invocations and conjurations of the necromancer by reason of any power or efficacy that the magician's art has over the devil, for there is no such science or art unless the two have made a pact. So he will be the best necromancer who best follows and complies with the devil's will, and not he who knows the most arts and formulas, as in a true science.23

Signs, according to this logic, cannot do things by nature. Where they seem to do things, as in magic, an unnatural power must therefore be at work. The source of the performativity of magical signs is thus necessarily Satanic, and therefore any magician must by definition be in league with Satan, no matter how implausible this might at first appear. This is the reasoning behind the belief, ludicrous to us but firmly held by many sensible and educated people until well into the seventeenth century, that cunning men and women regularly sojourned forth on broomsticks to participate in ritualistic orgies with the prince of darkness. They might pretend to be mere herbalists or fortune tellers, but in reality they communed with evil spirits through ceremonial media, even when they did not fully understand what they were doing. Interrogations of accused witches rarely involved good-faith attempts to determine what had actually happened. Rather, they appear designed to instruct the witch as to the true nature of his or her magical activities. Against the protestations of respectable magicians like Cornelius Agrippa and John Dee, the anti-witch campaigners insisted that it was always and inherently evil to try to achieve practical effects through the manipulation of signs. Unlike Agrippa and Dee, the historical Johann Faust was by no means respectable, and he provided the perfect vehicle with which to slander the art of magic in its entirety.
20. I do not mean to minimize the differences between the witch discourses of early modern Europe and those of today's postcolonial world. In postmodern Africa and South America, the connection of magic and the market is generally quite explicit. Postcolonial witches are assumed to have mastered both of these homologous occult forces. They tend to be identified with rich and powerful "big men," who can clearly be seen to have acquired wealth and influence by nontraditional means. It is those who profit most blatantly from the market economy who are suspected of witchcraft. In early modern Europe, however, the economic animus behind witchcraft discourse was directed against a very different kind of target. Those most often convicted of witchcraft during the Renaissance were destitute and/or mentally disturbed old women. This was by no means universally true, but on the whole witches were held to be those who had suffered most by the introduction of a money economy, the decline of traditional kinship ties and the breakdown of religiously mandated charitable obligations. As Ralph A. Austen has remarked, "European antiwitchcraft beliefs represent a moral economy of, and not opposed to, capitalism."  

21. Today's witchcraft discourse, then, associates ritual magic with the financial magic of the market, while the people convicted of witchcraft in early modern Europe were precisely those who were excluded from the market -- beggars, vagrants, the infirm. This has led some historians and anthropologists to question whether their disciplines can have very much to say to each other on the question of witchcraft. Keith Thomas's essay on "The Relevance of Social Anthropology to the Historical Study of English Witchcraft" argues that demonology was peripheral to English witchcraft discourse. He claims that the "charity denied" thesis explains "the overwhelming majority" of English witch trials. In England, the witch craze "represent[s] the breakdown of the tradition of mutual help upon which many English village communities were based" and "arose at a time when the old tradition of mutual charity was being sapped by the introduction of a national Poor Law."  

22. Thomas's claims hold good until the mid-sixteenth century, but the evidence suggests an increasing stress on the Satanic from that point on. For example, the first anti-witch act passed in England (1542) does not mention the devil; the second (1563) forbids the invocation of evil spirits, and the third (1604) makes consorting with demons a capital offence. The original Historia von Dr. Faustus, which was probably translated into English in 1588, marks an important conceptual stage in the identification of magic with Satanism. I would argue that, to the extent that England was an exception to the view of witchcraft as diabolical that prevailed on the continent, this was because many of the anxieties about the power of Satan that were projected onto ordinary witches elsewhere were directed, in the English context, toward the learned, powerful sorcerer who was personified in the figure of Faust.  

23. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the "charity denied" theory of witchcraft was a staple recourse of sceptics, who poured scorn on the idea that those accused and convicted of witchcraft possessed any genuine magical powers. Reginald Scot's Discoverie of Witchcraft (1584) describes witches as "miserable wretches" who "go from house to house, and from doore to doore for a pot full of milke, yest, drinke, pottage, or some such reliefe; without the which they could hardlie live" (4). When their requests are rejected, which "falleth out many times," these mendicants sometimes utter "cursses, and incantations" against the hard-hearted householders. In the inevitable course of events, some of the old women's enemies eventually suffer misfortune, and this becomes the basis for a formal charge of witchcraft. Scot's concern is to deny any causal relation between the old woman's curse and the neighbor's bad luck. He argues that this connection assumes an untenable link between subjective
desires and objective events. The essential delusion, shared by witch and accuser, is that subjective feelings, when sufficiently strong and appropriately mediated through the symbols of ritual magic, can be efficacious in the objective world. To bring in a guilty verdict, the prosecution must force the witch to acquiesce in this superstition. Witch trials, according to Scot, are thus little more than instruments for perpetuating the magical consciousness that they claim to be attacking:

The witch being called before a Justice, by due examination of the circumstances is driven to see hir imprecations and desires, and hir neighbors harms and losses to concurre, and as it were to take effect: and so confesseth that she (as a goddes) hath brought such things to passe. Wherein, not onelie she, but the accuser, and also the Justice are fowlie deceived and abused

(5)27

For Scot, along with Weyer, George Gifford, and other sceptics, the poverty of most accused witches was sufficient proof of their innocence. If witches genuinely possessed supernatural powers, they would surely use them to improve their miserable lot. A similar situation pertains in the postcolonial world today, where a poor or powerless witch is virtually a contradiction in terms. This is because postcolonial witchcraft discourses lack the distinction made in early modern Europe between eminent sorcerers and indigent witches. Although modern witches in Ecuador or the Côte d'Ivoire may possess vastly different amounts of skill and power, the differences between them are of degree rather than of kind. In sixteenth-century Europe, however, the witch and the sorcerer were generally thought of as members of quite distinct species.

24. The distinction rested on whether the magician was the servant or the master of the devil. As James VI of Scotland claimed in his Demonologie, "Witches are servants only, and slave to the Devil; but the Necromancers are his masters and commanders."28 Renaissance Europe witnessed a concerted effort by religious and secular authorities to associate all belief in the efficacy of the sign with Satanism. An educated sorcerer, however, might in principal be able to manipulate his pentagrams and incantations in such a way as to bend the forces of darkness to his will. Such a man might claim sufficient expertise to avoid dealing with the diabolical, or even to be doing good by bringing the infernal powers to heel. An illiterate folk magician, on the other hand, would be easy prey for Satan's wiles, and would find themselves compelled to serve him. Scot and company mocked the idea that illiterate women could command the devil, but even sceptics did not deny that black magic was successfully practiced by some sorcerers. In fact, a common sceptical gambit was to exonerate the convicted witches by blaming all magic on sorcerers who were skilled or connected enough to evade prosecution.

25. The legend of Doctor Faustus proved especially useful for this purpose. A somewhat ambiguous figure emerges from the fragmentary references we have to the historical Faust, but on one thing almost all the sources are agreed: he was an incorrigible braggart, who lost no opportunity to boast of the extent of his learning and power. He was thus an ideal candidate to represent the overweening sorcerer, and one of the main purposes of the Faust-book is to unmask such figures as ordinary witches -- that is, mere servants of Satan, and not the masterful commanders of the dark powers that they claimed to be. Faust is first mentioned in the context of the witch debate in the 1568 edition of Johann Weyer's De praestigiis daemonum. Weyer's comprehensive volume is arguably the most influential sceptical work of the sixteenth century, and the major source for English sceptics like Scot and Gifford. It employs what will become the standard tactic of focussing culpability onto a single, powerful magician, thus denying that
diabolical magic is practiced by the masses of people accused of it. Weyer accounts for attempts made by a "schoolmaster at Goslar" to charm Satan into a bottle by claiming he was "trained from the teachings of the magician Faust" (52), and revealingly declares that he will describe Faust's art to the reader only "on condition that he first pledge to me that he will not imitate him." (52) An important source of Johann Spies's original Faust-book (1587) was Augustin Lersheimer's Bedencken (1585), a witch tract that mentions Faust's pact with the devil in an attempt to excuse ordinary witches for the prevalence of magically-induced evil in the world. As John Henry Jones puts it in the Introduction to his edition of the English translation of Spies's work, "What principally fueled the public interest in Faustus during this period was the climactic intensification of the German witch craze." (4)

26. Johann Spies's Historia von Dr. Faustus was printed in Frankfurt in 1587, and immediately translated and published throughout north-west Europe. It is a polemical tract, concerned to establish certain definite propositions: that there is no such thing as benign magic, that all magic involves the fetishization of signs, that all magic is therefore Satanic and idolatrous, and that any attempt to manipulate the devil through magic is doomed to miserable failure. It is also a highly topical work, as Spies remarks in his preface: "Everywhere, at parties and social gatherings, there is great inquiry for a history of this Faustus." The documentary evidence we have concerning the historical Johann (or George) Faust offers only hints regarding the reasons for this curiosity. He is first referred to in 1507 when a rival magician, Johannes Trithem, calls him "a vagabond, a babbler and a rogue, who deserves to be thrashed so that he may not henceforth rashly venture to profess in public things so execrable and so hostile to the holy church." The objectionable comment in question is probably Faust's claim to be "the prince of necromancers." Trithem also reports that Faust was expelled from a position as schoolmaster because "he began to indulge in the most dastardly kind of lewdness with the boys." (86)

27. But our sparse evidence indicates contradictory views of Faust. In 1513, the canon of the church of St. Mary's in Gotha called Faust "a mere braggart and fool" (87), but in 1520 he was paid ten guilders by the bishop of Bamberg for a "horoscope or prognostication." (89) In 1528 he was expelled from Ingolstadt and "told to spend his penny elsewhere" (90), but the city council was sufficiently respectful of his powers that he was induced to pledge "not to take vengeance or make fools of the authorities for this order." (90) In 1532, the city of Nuremberg refused safe conduct to "Doctor Faust, the great sodomite and necromancer" (90), but in 1536 the chronicle of Waldeck reports his successful prediction of the fall of Munster, and in 1540 a leader of the Welser troops in Venezuela mentions his accurate forecast of their expedition's failure. In 1539, the city physician of Worms complained that many people have been defrauded by Faust, for "in receiving money he was not slow." (95) The final reference to him as still living dates from 1540, though he probably died the previous year.

28. These fragments are suggestive in themselves, but more remarkable is the body of stories and legends that immediately became associated with Faust's name. The story of Faust teasing a group of monks, which is present in Spies's volume, is found in a sermon published as early as 1548. There were probably songs and poems about Faust circulating in German universities by the mid-sixteenth century, a Latin manuscript of Faust legends may have existed before 1570, and Spies's Historia is based on a lost earlier Faust book written in German, the Wolfenbuttel manuscript, which was composed between 1572 and 1587.31 This version, like Spies's, assimilates stories told of other magicians to the by now familiar Faustian anecdotes. Before we meet him, then, Faust has already become a composite symbol for the magician and a synecdoche for magic in general. This role was reinforced by a series of sequels and
adaptations of the story. A versified Faust book was published in 1588, the first "Wagner book" detailing the adventures of Faust's dull-witted servant appeared in 1593, and we can date the inception of scholarly treatments of Faust to 1599, when Georg Rudolf Widman brought out an extended edition of the Historia complete with extensive commentary, learned research into previous magicians, and bilious theological invective.

29. Frank Baron's Faustus on Trial: The Origin of Johann Spies's Historia in an Age of Witch-hunting (1992) argues that the Historia is itself a witch tract. Baron records the extraordinary number of witch trials and executions taking place in southern and western Germany in the years leading up to the publication of Spies's book -- in the 1580's there were 300 executions for witchcraft in Trier alone. He records Spies's zeal to advance the Lutheran cause, notes that he published mainly religious propaganda, details his close connections with the religious and secular authorities in Frankfurt, and concludes that the Historia should be considered a semi-official proclamation concerning the true nature of witchcraft: "Spies was thus one of those who worked hand in hand with authorities to promote measures that would make the crime of the devil pact too costly to commit." (141) Faust, as Spies presents him, is a witch, and the Historia's account of his life is Faust's "retroactive trial for witchcraft" (145):

Is it bold to suggest that the story of Faustus is primarily the product of the trials for witchcraft? The anonymous author submits Faustus to a retroactive trial. The narrator took his role as a representative of the religious and secular authorities seriously, and he had no difficulty imagining what the authorities expected Faustus to have experienced and felt. (4)

Contemporaries certainly seem to have been aware of Faust's emblematic role in the construction of learned witches. When, in 1594, Dr. Dietrich Elade, a judge and the richest man in Trier, was burned for witchcraft, the local news-sheet reminded its readers that: "He is like Doctor Faustus; a great big book could be written about his magical deeds."32 According to Baron, "The Historia was believed to inspire precisely the evil diabolical deeds that it claimed to prevent" (55) -- it was banned in Strasburg, Basle and Tubingen, and in 1596 the latter city witnessed the arrest of David Leipziger for making a written offer of a pact with the devil, who he hoped would help him pay his debts. Leipziger was apparently inspired by the Historia's sequel, the "Wagner book" of 1593. As Baron shows, the deeds and thoughts attributed to Faust in Spies's text parallel the confessions forced from accused witches in rather disturbing detail. In a sinister sense, the true authors of the Historia may have been the interrogators and torturers of the witch prisons:

In an age of daily witch trials, executions, and panics, the story served a social function dictating the proper attitude toward diabolical phenomena. In this sense, torture chambers of the sixteenth century and the interrogations of persons accused of witchcraft, which produced a steady stream of confessions, set the stage for the evolution of the Faustian pact.33

It is certainly hard to read sixteenth-century accounts of witch trials without being struck by the topicality of the Historia. It addresses itself, for example, to the vexed issue of whether witches could fly.34 They regularly claimed to do so in their confessions, and much controversy was expended on whether this was literally true or only so in their imaginations. Even before the Faust book's publication, the historical Faust had been associated with attempts to attain the power of flight. Phillip Melanchthon uses one such anecdote to connect Faust to Simon Magus, another archetype of the magician in the Renaissance.
Melanchthon relates how, in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter, Simon visits Rome: "There [in the presence of Nero] Simon Magus tried to fly to heaven. . . . Faust also tried this at Venice. But he was sorely dashed to the ground."35

30. Barbara Rosen argues that the idea of witches flying may have been introduced into English witch discourse via the influence of the Faust book. The first English tract to attribute flight to witches, A Most Wicked Worke of a Wretched Witch, was published in 1592, within four years of "P.F.'s English translation of Spies.36 There are certainly notable similarities between the means of transportation chosen by Faust and those used by witches. Witches generally rode on a broomstick or an unlikely animal; Faust's students ride to Strasburg on a "holly wand," while the magician himself favors a bear, a chariot pulled by dragons, and "his swift horse Mephistopheles" (128). This latter reference recalls the Munich physician Johannes Hartlieb's Book of All Forbidden Arts (1456), which scoffs at "a great foolishness, when people think that witches with magical potions make a horse which enters their houses, and if they wish they sit upon him and ride many miles in a very short time. This horse is in reality the devil."37 Let us note at this point that, in contrast to twenty-first century ontology, belief in the devil is for Hartlieb the opposite of superstition, and indeed an antidote to it. The recognition of the "reality" of the devil is what dispels the "foolishness" of belief in supernatural transportation. The "devil" here designates simply the source of illusion, the power which can obliterate the distinction between image and reality.

V

31. The close connection between hallucinations, or false images, and Satanic idols is conceded by sceptics like Weyer. This is a significant concession, for it implies that witches are idolaters and therefore criminal heretics, but Weyer argues that the ignorant women on trial are not the perpetrators but the victims of idolatry. In his support he cites Lactantius's Divinae institutiones: "The demons. are the ones who have taught men to make images and likenesses. They often produce prodigies so that men may be astounded and may lend their belief to mere likenesses of divine power." (11-12) He also gives a Christian inflection to Aristotle's account of hallucinations in On Sleep and Wakefulness:

the imagination is a sort of treasure-house for the forms received through the senses. Therefore demons are able to move the humors and spirits of sensations both interior and exterior and thus bring certain forms and appearances to the sense-organs as though the objects themselves were truly presenting themselves to us from without, whether in sleep or wakefulness. (103)

In Weyer's interpretation, Aristotle's "demons" merge into the Christian "Devil": "And by causing them to imagine that they see present before them the things which he has imposed upon them, the Devil so maddens the persons whom he uses for these ministries that they totally lose their own control of themselves; like people enslaved, they ponder and gaze upon those things which the demon presents." (105) As his opponents quickly pointed out, this rather undercuts Weyer's later contention that "[Witches] revere and cherish one teacher only, their imagination, which is corrupted by the various imaginings introduced by an unclean spirit." (133) The witch-finders would argue that the true object of the witch's reverence is not "their imagination" but the all-too real "unclean spirit" to whom they have ceded control over that faculty. The devil cannot enter a human mind unless he is invited, and his choice of acolyte is not arbitrary but results from the individual's own predisposition, as Augustine pointed out: "Spirits who wish to deceive someone devise appropriate signs for each individual to match those in which they see him caught up through his speculations and the conventions he accepts."38
32. Like the witch tracts, the Historia debates the issue of whether Faust's fantastic journeys took place in reality or in imagination, concluding that the more outlandish destinations are visited in only in the magician's fancy: "But mark how the devil blinded him and made him believe that he carried him into hell, for he carried him into the air, where Faustus fell into a sound sleep, as if he had sat in a warm water or bath." (120) The English translation finds it necessary to further emphasize Faust's belief in the reality of the illusions to which he has been subjected: "When he awaked, he was amazed, like a man that had been in a dark dungeon, musing with himself if it were true or false that he had seen hell, or whether he was blinded or not: but he rather persuaded himself that he had been there than otherwise, because he had seen such wonderful things" (122, italics designate additions by the English translator). P.F. repeatedly uses the word "blinded" to refer to the mistaking of an image for reality, as when Faust prepares a pseudo-feast for some nobles in an imaginary castle. After their illusory repast, however, "to their thinking they had neither eaten nor drunk, so were they blinded the whilst that they were in the castle" (157).

33. What happens, ethically speaking, in our minds or souls when we are so "blinded" as to mistake a sign for a referent, an image for reality? The witch-craze reflects the Renaissance period's assumption that this mistake is Satanic in nature. In countless treatises of the period we find the question of whether or not the witches have literally committed maleficia blithely dismissed as an irrelevance. Johann von Kaysersberg's Die Emeis (1508) asks whether witches can truly fly, and reaches what to us may be a puzzling verdict: "when they go thus hither and yon, do they really travel, or do they remain? Or are they there in spirit? I say that they do travel hither and yon, but that they also remain where they are, because they dream that they travel, since the devil can create an impression in the human mind. . . ."39 The most notorious of all witch-finders' manuals, Kramer and Sprenger's Malleus Maleficarum (1487) airily remarks that witches "can transport themselves from place to place through the air, either in body or in imagination."40 Incomprehensibly from the viewpoint of modern law, it does not appear to matter which. Pico della Mirandola's Strix (1523), which is based on actual witch trials witnessed by Pico in Bologna, confirms the prevalence of this attitude:

Apistius: Why do you think that sometimes they are transported bodily and sometimes only imagine that they are?
Dicaste: Sometimes it happens through a deception of the demon and sometimes by the choice of the witches. I remember that Henry and James [Kramer and Sprenger, the authors of the Malleus Maleficarum], German theologians, wrote about a certain witch who made the voyage now by one means, now by another, just as she pleased, that is, sometimes flying bodily, and at other times flying only in her imagination. It doesn't matter to us whether they go in the body or the spirit, on foot or on horseback. But to have renounced the faith to which they have sworn, scorned the sacraments and the Christian faith, to have adored the demon and committed many crimes, which is why we interrogate them. This is condemned. . . .41

One of the earliest witch tracts to be printed in English, the Huguenot Lambert Daneau's De veneficiis (1575, orig. 1564) also uses dialogue to register the importance of the debate regarding the veridical status of the black sabbath: "Theophilus: Don't you believe, Anthony, that sorcerers meet together and are bodily present at their devillish conventicles and synagogues? Anthony: Only mentally and under the illusions of the devil. Theophilus: I don't deny that this is a matter of great controversy. . . ."42 Such
passages attempt to explain why accused witches frequently confessed to such manifest impossibilities as flying on cats to the North Pole, there to feast on infants and perform analingus on the devil. The Faust book suggests that, although they are not literally true, such absurd confessions nevertheless offer irrefutable proof of demonic possession, and so of witchcraft.

34. Post-enlightenment commentators on the witch-craze were often disconcerted by what they saw as the childlike credulity of the prosecutors. How could rational people believe in flying broomsticks? But to ask this question is to miss the essential point of the witch-trials. The mass prosecution of witches only becomes possible at the historical moment when the distinction between imagination and reality disappears. It did not matter whether or not witches "really" indulged in demonic orgies, and the trials almost never involve forensic evidence either proving or denying such activities. What mattered was whether or not the witch believed such things had taken place, and this was the question that the pre-trial investigations were designed to determine. A witch's belief in her ability to fly, or in any other instance of the efficacy of magic, was in itself proof of an agreement with Satan.

35. Although many witches confessed to flying, this stretched the credulity of all but the most fanatical prosecutors. Surely the devil had somehow convinced them that they could fly, but this could not possibly be objectively true, despite the fact of the witches' subjective beliefs. During the course of the witch-craze, however, the distinction between objective and subjective events is elided, and many authorities reached the conclusion that it simply did not matter whether the witches' nocturnal excursions took place in the objective or the subjective realm -- both kinds of flight were equally "real," and equally indicative of a diabolical pact. Martin de Castanega's Tratado muy sotil y bien fundado (1529) follows this pattern of reasoning:

Some really go to faraway places by the devil's aid; others, carried away out of their senses as in a heavy sleep, have diabolical revelations of remote and occult -- and often false -- things. These latter are deceived by the devil, yet take pleasure and delight in those things as if their bodies were really there. All disciples, whether of the first or second kind, have an explicit and express pact with the devil and he with them. . . .43

This attitude involves a more sophisticated process of reasoning than it has usually been credited with. Imagine that a village cunning man looks into bird entrails to see the future, or that a rejected beggar-woman seeks revenge by burning an image of her enemy. Perhaps such acts can never be efficacious. But what really happens when such rituals are conducted? For the witch-hunters, the significant event has taken place within the witch's mind. She has committed the grievous epistemological sin of putting her faith in the sign, and this in itself constitutes a deal with the devil. It is true that prosecutors did try to establish that the accused had indeed harmed people, but it was generally not necessary to prove this to secure a conviction -- it was only necessary that the witch confess to believing that she could do things with signs. The clinching argument of the sceptics, which eventually made witch trials impossible, was that by placing such cosmic importance on the hermeneutical attitudes of basically harmless and confused people, the prosecutorial attitude itself betrayed a superstitious fear of the performative sign.

36. The Historia collects tales that were first told of various sorcerers, including the historical Faust, but also Roger Bacon, Paracelsus and Agrippa. Two internationally famous magicians with unsavory reputations for necromancy, John Dee and Giordano Bruno, were both in Saxony in 1586, the year before
the Historia's publication. It seems that the book's propagandist mission is to establish that the magic practiced by such learned men is Satanic, and therefore falls under the category of witchcraft. That is to say, the Faust book argues that all magic is witchcraft, whether the witch inhabits the court or the hedgerow. It is possible, then, that we have an explanation for the discrepancy between twenty-first century theories of witchcraft as the tool of the rich and powerful and the sixteenth-century conception of witchcraft as the last weapon of the desperate. In early modern Europe, the role of the magical "big man" was not played by the kind of people we are accustomed to think of as witches, but by sorcerers like Johann Faust.

VI

37. An early anecdote about Faust, originally found in the mid-sixteenth-century Reichmann-Wambach chronicle, though known to us from a later source, shows him loudly proclaiming his command over demonic labor. As usual it takes place in a tavern, where Faust

knocks with a knife on the table. Soon someone enters and says: "Sir, what do you wish?" Faust asks "How quick are you?" The other answers: "As an arrow." "No," says Dr. Faust, "you shall not serve me. Go back to where you came from." Then he knocks again and when another servant enters and asks the same question, he says: "How quick are you?" "As the wind," says he. "That is something," says Dr. Faust, but sends him out again too. But when he knocked a third time, another entered and, when he was asked the same question, said he was as quick as the thoughts of man. "Good," said Dr. Faust, "you'll do."45

The essential claim of the sorcerer is the ability to appropriate and direct supernatural labor. In the Renaissance this claim was also espoused by pious neoplatonists like Pico della Mirandola, who distinguishes between weak magicians who serve Satan and powerful sorcerers who can command him: "For just as that first form of magic makes man a slave and a pawn of evil powers, so the second form makes him their ruler and lord."46

38. The author of the Historia wants to carry the point that the magician's power over the devil is illusory, that Faust is in fact Mephistopheles' servant and not his master. The description of superstition as enslavement by idols is ancient. Augustine's On Christian Teaching, for example, declares that "When free people go to see such an astrologer, they pay money for the privilege of coming away as slaves of Mars or Venus. . . ."47 At the beginning of Spies's book, Faust blasphemously misreads Scripture to prove that his "servant" is more powerful than Emperor or Pope: "and repeated certain words out of Saint Paul to the Ephesians to make his argument good: The Prince of this world is upon earth and under heaven." (138) Once Faust's prideful certainty of his dominance over the devil has been established, the author sets systematically about demolishing it. As Mephistopheles informs his victim, he himself is but a servant of Lucifer: "Faustus, thou shalt understand, that with us it is even as well a kingdom, as with you on earth: yea we have our rulers and servants, as I my selfe am one." (139) In an explicit attack on the concept of "white" magic, he says that devils have never helped anyone unless they promise to be "ours" (95), and he repeatedly reminds the increasingly wretched magician that "thou art mine" (108). Faust himself sums up the situation acutely, complaining to Mephistopheles about the reversal of their roles: "I have taken thee unto me as a servant to do me service and thy service will be very dear unto me, yet I cannot have any diligence of thee further than thou list thyself, neither doest thou in any thing as it becometh thee." (116)
39. This is another issue where the Historia intervenes in the topical debates concerning witchcraft. One of George Gifford's characters asks his interlocutor to "tell me, whether do you thinke that the witch or the divell is the servant; which of them commaundeth, and which obeyeth?" (26) This was literally a burning question, for on it depended whether or not the witch was legally culpable for the harm she was accused of doing. Gifford's respondents have different opinions on the matter. "Daniel," the more naive of them, decides that "the witch is the vassall of the divell, and not he her servant; he is lord and commaundeth, and she is his drudge and obeyeth." (27) "M.B.," a wiser figure, offers a more subtle theory, which explains the Faustian delusion of power over the devil: "Yea, although he is lord, yet he is content to serve her turne, and the witches confesse, they call them forth and send them, and they hire them to hurt such in their bodies, and in their cattell" (27). Satan is undoubtedly "lord" over the witches, but he gives them the false impression that he is available for "hire." Like Faust, the witches foolishly believe that they have purchased the labor-power of Satan by an act of contractual exchange, but the deal is fraudulent, and it is impossible for human beings truly to exercise control over spiritual powers. The witches, and we must consider Faust among them, do Satan's work and not vice versa.

40. The declared purpose of true magic was to control spirits, not to be controlled by them, and the ritual magicians of the "Faustian" school scorned Satan and all his works (although as Butler observes, the Fausti Hollenzwang (1540) does provide "documentary evidence that at least one diabolic work existed amongst the many pious, orthodox and utilitarian rituals of the Faustian school." (205)) The Historia argues that this purpose is unattainable, and in this sense there is no such thing as "true" magic, only Satanic and heretical delusion. The author specifically describes Faust's art as "heresy" (101), but the precise sense in which the term is used may elude the modern reader. Faust does not, at first, appear to follow any particular doctrine or dogma such as we associate with heretical thought -- he is not a Cathar, a Bogomil, an antinomian, a Papist or an anabaptist. He is a witch and, unlike the people of the sixteenth century, we do not usually think of witchcraft as an ideology or system of thought. In fact, however, the Faust-book endows its antihero with a clear and consistent world-view, which we might profitably study. In doing so, we may find that we are all witches now.

41. Today we are quite familiar with the concept of virtual reality, whereby images seem to displace their referents. The early modern debate over witchcraft operates within a similar discursive field. As we have seen, the issue of whether witches could fly provided the paradigmatic example. The Historia makes it clear that Faust literally flies through the heavens, but it also uses flying as a metaphor for the antihero's vaulting imagination: "taking to him the wings of an Eagle, he thought to flie over the whole world, and to know the secrets of heaven and earth; for his Speculation was so wonderfull, being expert in using his Vocabula, Figures, Characters, Conjurations, and other Ceremoniall actions, that in all haste hee put in practise to bring the Divell before him." The performative sign, as Austin and Derrida have taught us, transcends the distinction between truth and falsehood. Early modern witch-finders understood this when they disregarded the difference between literal and figurative airborne excursions. The major difficulty faced by the witch-finders was that most accused witches were obviously not trained magicians, and this is where Faust comes in. He fills a gap in the theological and legal discourses concerning witchcraft, providing the textbook example of the learned witch that was lacking from the empirical investigations of the witch hunters.
42. Another of the most highly-fraught controversies in the witch debate was whether witches had sexual intercourse with the devil, and if so, how. As with the issue of flight, the question was whether to interpret the frequent confessions of witches to sex with Satan in a figurative or a literal sense. In the Historia, Faust himself plays the role of incubus, taking the form of Mahomet and seducing the wives of the Great Turk. The Sultan "demanded of the six ladies if Mahomet had had actual copulation with them, according as earthly men have" (141), and the women attest to the physical reality of the encounter. In a passage omitted from the English translation, the ontological status of Faust/Mahomet is interrogated more closely:

The priests advised the Turk not to believe it had been Mahomet, thinking it had been a phantom. But the wives said, phantom or no, he had been very friendly with them and had shown masterly prowess whether it were once or six times a night or even more, and in sum, they were all highly satisfied, etc. This caused the emperor [i.e. the Sultan] much reflexion and put him in great perplexity. (224).

Amid the ribaldry we can discern the serious issue of whether, and in what sense, spiritual beings can take material form. This is arguably the essential question of the entire witch-craze: did Satan appear to his acolytes in physical guise, engage in sexual intercourse, or assist in airborne transportation, as writers such as Bodin and James VI argued, and as the witches generally claimed? Or did he insinuate himself into their minds, making them see illusions and believe in fantasies, as Scot and Weyer contended? The sceptics' argument drew on the dogma that the devil cannot create anything real. He could indisputably create illusions, however, so that the real issue rapidly became whether or not illusions -- images, signs, apparitions -- can have any effect on the objective world.

43. The Faust book appears to take an equivocal position on this question. The Sultan's wives swear that their enjoyment of Mahomet is literal and physical, yet we know that it is merely the image of Mahomet, which has been artificially manufactured by Faust's infernal assistants. The issue is revisited when Emperor Charles V asks Faust to conjure up Alexander the Great and his paramour. Stories about the summoning of images of the illustrious dead for the entertainment of monarchs were a staple of witchcraft discourse. Despite his concern to acquit poor and ignorant accused witches, Weyer gives credence to the story of "a wicked magician" at Emperor Maximilian's court who conjured up images of Hector, Achilles and David. (21) He emphasizes, however, that such images enjoy only a virtual reality, and also that this virtuality is evil in origin: "nor do souls once separated from the body and settled in their prescribe abodes return when summoned (as the pagans believe). It is rather the case that demons manifest themselves in the assumed form of those souls." (60) Even in Biblical times, according to Weyer, "The Pythian woman of Endor raised not Samuel, but a devil-spector in the image of Samuel." (52)

44. In the Historia, Faust tells the Emperor that he cannot raise departed human spirits, but that the devils (of whom he believes himself commander) can replicate their external form perfectly: "Your Majesty shall know that their dead bodies are not able substantially to be brought before you, but such spirits as have seen Alexander and his paramour alive, shall appear unto you in manner and form as they both lived in their most flourishing time" (148). Later, Faust entertains his students by producing an image of Helen of Troy. As with Alexander, the audience is forbidden to speak with the apparition (162) because, as Faust indicates, she is not Helen in a literal but merely in a figural sense. Once they have grasped this fact, the students' lust for Helen evaporates: "She looked round about her with a rolling hawks eye, a
smiling and wanton countenance, which near-hand inflamed the hearts of the students but that they persuaded themselves she was a spirit, wherefore such fantasies passed lightly away with them" (163).

45. This reaction might seem odd to us. Would the arousal of a group of modern youths be so readily dissipated by the revelation that the object of their lust was not a woman of flesh and blood but a hologram, or an image on a screen? Faust's students seem not to be sexually tempted by simulacra, whereas one only has to look around to see that twenty-first century men and women are perfectly capable of finding erotic stimulation in mere images. P.F. tries to clear up a possible discrepancy on this subject when he substitutes real women for the succubae conjured up by Mephistopheles for Faust's delectation in the German edition. It is true that Faust enjoys the favors of Helen, whom he knows to be a "spirit," but P.F. indicates that he has forgotten this fact when he believes that he has impregnated her, and qualifies this by noting that Helen was only pregnant "to his [i.e. Faustus's] seeming." The German text laments the fact that "men fall in love with harlots," but P.F. stresses Helen's unreality by inserting "nay, even with furies." (163) By this stage, apparently, Faust's sensibility has degenerated to the point where the distinction between image and reality no longer holds.

46. The students' response to learning that "Helen" is merely an image directs them away from thoughts of literal reproduction and towards thoughts of symbolic reproduction. They desire to make an image of the image: "the students requested of him to let them see her again the next day, for that they would bring with them a painter and so take her counterfeit, which he denied, affirming that he could not always raise up her spirit, but only at certain times." (163) Faust placates them with the promise of an image at one further remove from reality, and he evidently contrives to deprive them of even that satisfaction: "'Yet,' said he, 'I will give you her counterfeit, which shall always be as good to you as if you yourselves should see the drawing thereof,' which they received according to his promise, but soon lost it again." (163) What the students take to be "Helen" is itself a counterfeit; they wish to make a counterfeit of that counterfeit, but even this degree of solidity eludes them. We have here a succession of empty images with no objective referent. The sexual union of Faust and Helen, which Faust knows to be illusory but which he enjoys as if it were real, is the mythical expression of a profound truth: Enlightenment ends, both logically and historically, in hyper-reality.

Notes

1 As Martin Luther puts it, "Money is the word of the devil, through which he creates everything in the world, just as God creates through the true word." Cited in Marc Shell, Money, Language and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economics from the Medieval to the Modern Era (Johns Hopkins UP: Baltimore, 1993), 84n1.
4 As Keith Thomas remarks, "In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries England was still a pre-industrial society, and many of its essential features closely resembled those of the 'under-developed areas' of today." Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-century England (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1971), 3.


10 Wim van Binsbergen, "Witchcraft in modern Africa as virtualised boundary conditions of the kinship order."


13 The Modernity of Witchcraft, 257n31.


16 The Modernity of Witchcraft, 8.


18 Cit. Kors and Peters, 94.


21 Cited by Nicolau Eymeric, Directorium inquisitorium (1376), quoted in Kors and Peters, 124.


23 Cit. Kors and Peters, 276.

24 For a discussion of the notion of a "homology" between financial and other forms of signification, see David Hawkes, Idols of the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature, 1580-1680 (Palgrave: New York, 2001), 17-25.


27 See also Alan Macfarlane, "Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex" in Douglas (1970), 81-99. Macfarlane cites the Elizabethan preacher Francis Trigge: "we may see how experience, and the very confessions of witches, agree that the merciful lenders and givers are preserved of God, and unmerciful and covetous Nabals are vexed and troubled of Satan." (92-3) Macfarlane agrees with Thomas regarding
the determining influence of "charity denied" and the Elizabethan poor law on sixteenth-century witch beliefs in England.

30 Philip Mason Palmer and Robert Pattison More (eds.), The Sources of the Faust Tradition: from Simon Magus to Lessing (Oxford UP: New York, 1936), 83. Unless otherwise specified, further references to the historical Faust will be cited from this edition.
31 See Robert Petsch, Das Volksbuch vom Dr. Faust (1911).
32 Cit. Frank Baron, Faustus on Trial: The Origin of Johann Spies's Historia in an Age of Witch-hunting (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992), 59.
33 Cit. Baron, 3.
34 On the importance of this issue see Levack, 40.
36 Cit. Marion Gibson, Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches (Routledge, NY, 1999), 204.
37 Cit. Kors and Peters, 170.
38 Cit. Kors and Peters, 45.
40 Cit. Kors and Peters, 190.
41 Cit. Kors and Peters, 243.
42 Cit. Kors and Peters, 272.
43 Cit. Kors and Peters, 278.
44 See Jones's Introduction to The English Faust-book, 5-6.
45 From the mid-seventeenth century Chronica von Thuringen und der Stadt Erfurth of Zacharias Hogel, which is based on the Reichmann-Wambech chronicle of a hundred years earlier. Cited in Palmer and More, 108.
47 Cit. Kors and Peters, 45.